

Holy Family – Luke 2:41-52

The final incident of Luke's Infancy Narrative takes place in the **temple of Jerusalem**. This is where Luke's gospel began and where it will end. It is the only gospel story about the childhood of Jesus and his family.

I often wonder where Luke got his information about Jesus' family. Maybe from Mary herself on her way to Ephesus with John the Beloved. Maybe John and Mary stopped along the way and visited Luke and Paul at one of their communities.

The gospel story is significant for its own sake and for its relationship to the rest of Luke's gospel. Since Simeon spoke his prophecy over the child and its mother, twelve years have passed. We know that in those years, the child grew to maturity, was filled with wisdom, and enjoyed God's favor. Each year, as was expected of a devout family, they would travel to Jerusalem for Passover. But when Jesus was twelve years old, the age of his Bar Mitzvah, which was the age when a Jewish boy was obliged to observe the Law, he did not return with his parents.

Today's gospel reading reminds me of my own family's journey each year to the Shrine of Our Lady of Consolation in Carey, Ohio, which was run by the Franciscans. I looked forward to this trip since it was quite a fascinating event, especially for children. Dad packed all 13 of us into our station wagon, and we headed to Carey, Ohio, usually on the 14th of August, the Eve of the Celebration of the Assumption, hoping that we could find a place to park our car at a certain home near the shrine. They let us use their toilet facilities each year. The toilets on the grounds were literally overrun by pilgrims coming from as far as New York.

I used to think that this must have been how Jerusalem was at the time of Jesus. There were people from all over, coming for the events, speaking different languages like Lebanese and Arabian and Slovenian. The event was somewhere between a festival and a religious celebration like Lourdes, where the services were not only in several languages but also in several rites, like the Maronite Rite and the Slovenian Rite. At night, the men would serenade the statue of Mary in the Basilica and the women would gather in the pews to recite the rosary and their prayers with their children.

So, what was Jesus' family like? Probably just like ours, nothing outstanding. Joseph Girzone the author of the *Joshua* series wrote an interesting chapter about Jesus' village and its neighbors. Why didn't they believe Jesus was the messiah? The author suggested because Jesus was just like the rest of them, nothing outstanding about him. A simple man who probably did repair work and odd jobs like his father Joseph. The word carpenter in his time could mean any kind of work, like fixing broken furniture or adding a new door, or just odd jobs like mending someone's stone fence.

Joseph Girzone also suggested that Jesus probably didn't go around with a pious attitude like the Pharisees in his time, with eyes always downcast, reciting prayer out loud on the street corner, in their exaggerated robes and religious garb. Jesus went around his neighborhood just like everyone else in blue jeans and tee shirt, nothing outstanding that would get attention.

Again, in the Christmas reflection from GUTD, Micah Kiel writes that "God becoming flesh is something that was so unexpected that even 'his own people did not accept him.' Only the outsider, the untrustworthy, and the poor, like his parents, seem to have recognized his true significance."

The incarnation of Jesus is not universal. Jesus was incarnate specifically among the poor, as Saint Oscar Romero pointed out. And they were the ones that eventually recognized him as the messiah, especially after his death. But they kept the memory of Jesus alive through their actions of love for the poor, the marginalized and the outcasts. They also kept Jesus' presence alive among themselves through the Eucharist, where two or three are gathered in his name, in the Word, and in the receiving of his Body and Blood.

Eventually our family headed home like the rest of the visitors from the shrine, in silence, trying to take it all in, this gathering of people celebrating the Eucharist in the different liturgical rites from the many different cultures and languages and the different ways of expressing ourselves, and calling it church. We would eventually go back to our own church, but I knew that the Church, with a capitol "C" was bigger than what our own parochial gathering could ever be.