



December 31, 2006

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Luke 2:41-52

“Beyond Christmas”

Christmas is over. At least, that’s the message that crashes down on us during this season. Although a few stores still play Christmas music through New Year’s Day, the tinsel no longer sparkles with the same promise. Stores advertise “After-Christmas” sales, the aisles filled with Christmas decorations are emptied into storage for next year, or sold at a discount. The neat displays become rumpled as bargain hunters prospect for the best items left. In our homes, the baked goodies dwindle, the wrapping paper is trashed, holiday visitors have left, and pine needles drop to the floor. Our spirits become restless, or even downcast, as we begin to wonder, “What next? Christmas is OVER, what do we do now?”

First of all, Christmas is OVER only in our secular culture, and that’s because there is no more to be gained economically by extending Christmas. All the **gift buying** is OVER. But there are really TWELVE DAYS of Christmas. The last day is Epiphany, which we’ll observe next Sunday. On Epiphany we remember the wise men who visited the Christ child. So-- we have another week of Christmas to enjoy!

But, I’ll admit, even so, we can’t help feeling some letdown. It appears it’s now time to move on.

Ok. Mary and Joseph and Jesus themselves moved on. What might that teach us about moving on? The story about Jesus in our reading from Luke today can be a model for us—a model of growth. What was next for that baby born in a stable and laid in a manger? The answers could point to what might be next for us.

What was next for this baby? First, he was raised in harmony with his community’s traditions. He was a faithful Jewish boy, living according to the demands of home, synagogue and temple. The family of Jesus is a model of Jewish

piety. At every point in Jesus' life the Law of Moses was kept. Jesus was circumcised, Mary went to the Temple after the proper time to be purified, and Jesus was dedicated. The family went every year to Jerusalem for the Passover. It was Jewish law that every adult male who lived within fifteen miles of Jerusalem must attend the Passover there. Actually, it was the hope of every Jew the world over to attend that feast in Jerusalem at least once. Even today, the Passover ritual ends in many homes with the words "Next year, in Jerusalem!"

In Jesus' time, a Jewish boy became a man when he was twelve years old. So, at twelve, Jesus went to the Passover celebration as a young adult. He was fascinated, his mind, heart and spirit enthralled. His lingering behind in the temple should not be a surprise. His desire to stay actually witnessed to the deep faith of the family and community in which he was raised.

Jesus' community had closer bonds than we are accustomed to. Did you notice Mary and Joseph traveled one whole day before they looked for him? Even then, they didn't panic right away. It was only after checking with all their relatives and friends that they realized he wasn't in the band of travelers. So they headed back to Jerusalem to look for him. They were part of a community that shared responsibility for children; they did not keep their family troubles to themselves, but involved the whole community in working through them.

"What next?" we ask, as we move beyond Christmas—and, looking at this story of Jesus, we have found two places to begin.

- 1) Live faithfully according to the teachings of your religious community. Trust that God lives, speaks and acts through them. Jesus did this.
- 2) Live in a community that shares life deeply with one another—joys, sorrows, laughter, pain, work and worship. Jesus did this.

What else came next for Jesus in this story that carries us beyond Christmas?

Jesus claimed a special relationship with God. Don't make too much of this temple scene. Commentator William Barclay cautions us, "We must not think of it as a scene where a precocious boy was dominating a crowd of his seniors. 'Hearing and asking questions' is a regular Jewish phrase for a student learning from his teachers." Jesus sat among the teachers as one just past childhood- possessing unusual understanding. At age twelve, Jesus felt stirrings of his unique mission in this world.

Though we are none of us Christ, we are all invited into a relationship with God that is unique. We are all called to grow and change in ways that would please God. We are all called to accept our own ministry and mission. What next, as we move beyond Christmas? This story suggests a step 3:

3) Listen and question. Try to learn more about God, and about your place in his creation. Debate with “elders”- read books and discuss them with others. Jesus did this.

The fourth point illustrated by this story may not be popular. But as we move beyond Christmas, and ask ourselves, “What next?” it must be seen as part of Luke’s answer.

Jesus did not go home when it was time. His parents were really upset! “Son, why have you treated us like this?” Mary demanded when they found him. They had been afraid, searching and anxious. Jesus did not apologize. He simply said, “Don’t you understand? God is the center of everything. Because of God I needed to be where I was, doing what I was doing.” Jesus told his FAMILY, **God** comes first. Even though Jesus returned home with Mary and Joseph and “was obedient to them”, the tension was real.

“What next?” as we move beyond Christmas?

4) Loyalty to God must lead us always. Put God first, even though others may not understand. Jesus did this.

Christmas isn’t QUITE over. We can celebrate another week, as we remember the visit of the wise men. BUT we will need to move beyond Christmas soon. That little baby did not remain a newborn in the manger. He grew and changed. God expects US to grow and change also.

You see, Christmas is just the BEGINNING. We are asked to FOLLOW that Jesus, to be changed and molded into HIS LIKENESS day by day, year by year. What Jesus did as a boy becoming a man can teach us about following him today. The story of Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem teaches us:

- 1) Live faithfully following the teachings of your religious community.
- 2) Love others in a community that cares for each other.
- 3) Listen and question to learn about God.
- 4) Loyalty to God must be your guide.

Christ is born! Christ is with us, as we move beyond Christmas. The road may not be easy, but it will never be boring, not if we give ourselves completely to following Jesus' way. The excitement of preparing for Christmas is over, but the excitement of the journey with Christ continues and deepens! Christmas is just the beginning--- adventure lies ahead!

Journey in faith. Christ is with you. Amen. Amen.