

The First Sunday after Epiphany  
9 January, Anno Domini 2022  
St. Luke 2:41-52  
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In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Family was a faithful, God-fearing family, looking forward to the promised Messiah. Every year, as the Law prescribed, at least every male in the household was to make their way to Jerusalem to observe the most important day in the Jewish calendar – the Passover. Both adults and children would make the journey to be at the temple in order to offer sacrifices in atonement for their sin and the sins of their family and to hear again of God’s faithfulness and promise of eternal salvation. And every year, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus would, according to custom, trek into the Holy City and in eager anticipation of the fulfillment of all that the prophets foretold, do everything the Lord long ago commanded Moses. I would certainly also imagine that each and every week, this same family would venture out every Sabbath to the local synagogue in order to hear the preaching of God’s Word and to pray.

It was that simple. Every Sabbath. Every year. The translators chose to use the word “custom”, but the better reading would be “according to the habit”. It wasn’t a question. It wasn’t open for discussion or debate. That is what God’s people do – they gather together in God’s house, among God’s things, with God’s people, in order to hear God’s Word. Sure it was the Law. It made the top ten – “Remember the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy.” It was a sin to not keep the Sabbath Day by attending synagogue – a sin punishable by eternal judgment. But the commandment wasn’t random. The Sabbath Day didn’t exist because God was cruel or bored. The day of rest is commanded because on the Sabbath Day God was giving out what we needed most – His mercy and forgiveness. We NEED to hear God’s Word and receive the things He offers to us only at His house and nowhere else. The Sabbath Day is given to us so that we can enter God’s rest.

Of course there was a time when we joyfully kept the Sabbath Day and found our greatest joy being the presence of our Creator. There was a time when we didn’t need the Third Commandment. Adam and Eve didn’t need to be told to go meet with God, hear His Word, sing His praise, and call upon Him in prayer. But after the Fall, the Sabbath Day was an irritation. We hated God’s Word. We saw, see, it as an impediment to what we wanted. An hour sitting at the feet of God and listening to His voice became painful and annoying, let alone a whole day devoted

to hearing God's Word. “Why should I have to? Why do I need to go hear of my sin? I don’t feel like a sinner. Why do we need to go and hear of God’s forgiveness? I already know about it. I’m forgiven. I can just worship God wherever I am and however I want.” Even the faithful had to be dragged kicking and screaming – to what? To receive God’s gifts; to offer up the lamb of atonement that served to spare us from God’s wrath; to hear again how God would be merciful to us, forgive us, and redeem us from everlasting death. Definitely something annoying. Repent. Here in your Father's house, He freely pours out all that the sinner needs to find peace and joy in this fallen and chaotic world.

So the Holy Family went, confessing their sins and receiving God’s mercy. And when all the i’s were dotted and t’s crossed, Mary and Joseph set out to go back home, “according to the habit”, back to their vocations as husband and wife, carpenter, and par....wait! Where’s God?! Now, every parent knows how easy it can be with children to overlook important details – seat-belts, school books, gloves, and yes, sometimes even the child. And if you’ve ever lost sight of your child, even for a second, you know the absolute terror that swept over Mary and Joseph when they realized how foolish they had been to assume that Jesus was among the caravan heading toward Nazareth. “Didn’t you have him?” “No. I though He was with you!” They lost Jesus, not the other way around, though Mary would try to make it Jesus’ fault. They simply assumed that no matter where they went, He would be right there with them.

Do you ever make that same assumption? Do you assume that Jesus is with you wherever you go? Do you assume that Jesus is walking right beside you as you go back to life as you really want live it? I’m not talking about Jesus’ presence with you as the Omnipresent God of the universe. In that sense, God is even with the pagans. I’m talking about our assumption that Jesus remains with us when we slither down the dark allies of sin – using our tongues like daggers against our neighbor; subjecting ourselves to whatever filth comes spewing out of the television and radio; being cavalier about trading the Body and Blood of Jesus for family time, late Saturday nights, or sporting events; when the Divine Service is little more than a habit; when we refuse to support the Gospel in our midst and around the world; when we pray only out of compulsion or not at all; when we treat our spouse a little more than someone to help around the house; when we send nasty text messages about our classmates and grumble about studying for confirmation. Jesus is not with you there. You have driven out the Holy Spirit to make way for the unclean spirit of the devil. You can’t have it both ways. He will not be with you there. Not because He has abandoned you, but because you left Him. The Lord doesn't go wherever your personal tastes, agendas, preferences,

and morals lead. Just because you want it doesn't mean it's good in the eyes of God or true. God is only where He says He will be. He determines what is good, bad, necessary, and helpful. He is not interested in what is practical, or reasonable, or modern, or popular. He is only concerned with what is true. If we go any other way, then we have left Him behind and started down the broad path that leads to destruction.

Jesus poses the same question to you that He posed to His earthly parents – “Why were you seeking me as though I was lost? Why were you looking for Me, God’s Son, any other place than God has already told you He will be? Don’t you know that it is necessary, not for Me but for you, that I am in My Father’s house, among and about My Father’s things, among and about your salvation? I am not in beautiful sunsets, or the quiet of the fields, or emotional experiences. I am not in landing a big client, scoring the winning touchdown, or even the sweet laughter of children. I am in my Father's house which is why you need to be. I promise you that you will always find me there. That is my custom, my habit - to be about my Father's business of forgiving you and raising you from the death of sin to eternal life by speaking to you and feeding you. I am the mercy seat of God. I am the priest and the sacrifice. I am the temple. I am the glory of God. I am your salvation.”

God is in His holy temple, not Solomon’s, not one built by human hands, but the temple of Jesus’ flesh. This temple is fashioned out of flesh and bones like your own. If you desire to find God, don’t go anywhere other than where the fullness of the Godhead dwells – in Jesus. And Jesus is there, right there, in His flesh and blood to save you, to comfort you, to forgive your sins. Wherever His Word is proclaimed, His Baptism is administered, and His Supper is distributed – that’s where you’ll find Him, that is where He promises in His Word to always be for you. You don’t have to look for Jesus. He has already told you where He is and invites you to approach Him and receive life and salvation.

May God lead us by His Holy Spirit to make it our custom, our habit, to be in our Father's house, among our Father's things, whenever He offers them to us - hearing His Word of truth and life, confessing our sins, and receiving the precious gift of forgiveness.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.

