

This week is so different than last. The hustle and bustle is over, and now it is almost too quiet. Gifts are no longer surprises and many returns have been made. Slowly we are sliding back into our normal routines. This is the time when we wonder if we spent too much and why the holiday spirit has already starting to disappear. Loved ones are already asking others, "Why are you acting like this after all I have done for you?"

Today's Gospel has an interesting and similar tension between Jesus and his earthly parents. The family had finished the Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It was quite like the efforts families spend to drive to another state for Christmas with the family "back home." Passover had ended and Mary and Joseph were already on the road to head back to normal daily routines. But Jesus, unknown to them, wasn't with them.

Passover was the annual celebration that remember God's deliverance of slaves out of Egypt. It was a celebration of the fact that God's children are saved by grace. But for three days, Jesus was "lost from his parents." Mary and Joseph likely assumed he was traveling home with cousins and uncles and aunts, but he wasn't ready to move on ... it was as if he was following a different "father." This episode is an important reminder for us not to forget the joy of the celebration we have just experienced in Christmas.

There are all sorts of lessons we might take from this moment, but one of the most important is the realization that Jesus was already focused on a life that would not be normal. Rather than being irresponsible to Mary and Joseph, this seems to emphasize that the voice of his heavenly father was a voice that Jesus could not ignore.

For now, let's get back to you and to me. How are we doing? What has happened to the gifts that we opened and the ones that we gave? And do we realize that Christmas gifts are only symbolic of the real gifts that God has lovingly given? Mary and Joseph were the first parents to understand that life was changed by Jesus' birth. Their life would be different than they ever could have imagined, and this moment gave them a clue that the priorities of the earthly Jesus would march to the beat of a different drummer.

As parents this is always a difficult lesson for us, to learn that as our children grow into adults, they are born to fulfill their purpose and goal and not ours. Parents who want to vicariously live through their children always risk opening themselves to disappointment or stunting their children's' growth. In the same way, we are reminded today that life is about our "heavenly Father's business" not ours ... and rather than head away from Christmas on the same road we have always traveled, we are called to keep the celebration alive.

We are ready to make resolutions about the coming year, but if we learn anything from the choices of Jesus, we first confess that it is God alone who changes who we are and how we are seen. And how we choose to live, and what we resolve to do, reveals what we think of the gift of the manger and the empty tomb.

This brief insight into the adolescent Jesus is a parable about how we grow into faith. Some might just see parents missing a child for three days and wonder what was in his mind, or how his earthly parents didn't understand, but that misses the point!

Think about this. This is the only story we have about Jesus' earthly life, until the day he showed up for his baptism. But he would conclude his earthly ministry with the same themes as this story from the temple. He was crucified during the annual Passover event and for three days he was lost (not in the temple but in a tomb.) And why is that important other than for us to remember that Christmas leads to Easter and that is our heavenly Father's true business on our behalf!

So, why are you acting the way you act? Remember that Christmas gifts and trees and bright decorations celebrate Light of the world. That was all about genuine love and joy and excitement, and without the trimmings and customs, easy to be lulled by darkness of world. But now it is time to grow up and each year we remember that we are called to grow up! We are called to consider why we are acting the way we are!

In Colossians 3, Paul gives a powerful image for how we might keep Christmas alive, and act as if we really understand why that birth was so important. Paul talks about "putting on Christ" in the same way someone puts on a suit or dress for a special occasion.

I love to use this text at weddings, where everyone is dressed to the max, and we are surrounded by gowns and tuxedos and flowers. Aht a great reminder that such a wedding celebration here ion worship, also celebrates our union with Christ! That, after all, is the only reason we have a wedding in a church!

In the same way, today we are reminded of Passover and Christmas, and how Jesus fulfills all that anticipation and joy with a commitment to his true and only earthly mission. Mary and Joseph, the earthly parents of Jesus were caught by surprise ... but not for long. We too are often surprised in a different way when we realize how quickly we forget why we celebrated Christmas in the first place and leave Jesus behind!

Remember, Mary and Joseph asked the maturing Jesus, "Why are you acting like this?" And if we too have left Jesus and the manger and packed the "light of the world" away as we take down trees and decorations that is God's question to us as well.

"Why ARE you acting like this?" And our answers show how well we understand the question. If we have already "put on the garments of the world ... the answer isn't pretty." ON the other hand, if we are about our Father's business and have put on the clothing of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and servant love" as our ongoing gifts to the world, then we have put on the appropriate work clothes for our discipleship!

Sometimes we dress up (like Halloween) to pretend to be what you aren't. At other times, like weddings we want to make sure everyone knows an event is special. The joy of Christmas is that God has dressed himself like one of us – what a surprise! And that gift is so that we might be able to dress for a new role in our grown-up lives of faith. We are sinners who have been sainted and losers who have been given life and hope!

Wouldn't it be great if someone asks you tomorrow, "Why are you acting like this?" Not because you are into a typical worldly routine, but because you can't quit celebrating the greatest gift that has ever been given. Why not act as if every day is Christmas -- for it always is! That is what it means to be "about or heavenly Father's business."

[TWSeeber]