

## SERMON PREACHED AT SJH HOLY FAMILY YEAR C 30 DECEMBER 2018

A standard sermon for today's Feast of the Holy Family might discuss the love shown by Mary and Joseph to each other and to their child Jesus, and then draw lessons for family life today. That has its difficulties: they weren't a standard family. And we can't look to today's gospel for an example of how parents should care for their children. There is some evidence that whole villages would travel in convoy to and from Jerusalem for big festivals, with women and younger children going ahead of the men. They'd rendezvous only at agreed points. Why hadn't Mary and Joseph checked one of them or a relative had the child before setting off? They would have avoided a frantic search.

But childcare issues are not S. Luke's purpose in relating this story. It's the only information we have in the New Testament about what are called 'Jesus' hidden years' – the thirty years or so between his infancy and his emergence as a wandering rabbi. It is set around the temple. That's where Luke's gospel began, with the angel Gabriel appearing to the priest Zechariah and telling him that his wife Elizabeth would bear a son. In today's gospel the temple is seen in a positive light: a place of learning and enquiry. Jesus calls it his Father's house. There is no indication that the temple is failing in its purpose, or its staff are opposed to Jesus, as there would be later in Jesus' life. Towards the end of his ministry Jesus drove out traders from the temple, he foretold its destruction, and he was arrested by chief priests, officers of the temple and elders.

The main purpose of the story is to show Jesus being aware that he is Son of God. Notice the contrast between Mary's words, "...your father and I," and Jesus' reply, referring to 'my Father'. The story is a link between the promise Gabriel made to Mary that the child she bore would be the Son of the Most High, the Son of God, and the various occasions in Jesus' adulthood when his identity is revealed. It is revealed at his baptism when the voice from heaven declares, "You are my beloved Son...". There are similar words at the transfiguration. Unclean spirits recognise Jesus as Son of God. In Luke's gospel Jesus generally calls himself the Son of Man, with the exception of a remarkable statement in the tenth chapter:

All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

Jesus' words to Mary and Joseph are his first recorded saying. They do not understand. But S. Luke tells us that Mary treasured all these things in her heart. That's what she'd done after the shepherds had left the scene of Jesus' birth twelve years previously (2.19). Her understanding

would be further tested by Jesus' response during his active ministry when he was teaching, possibly in someone's house, (8.21) and was told, "Your mother and brothers are outside and want to see you." His response was to look round and say, "My mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

This is where we can draw a parallel between the Holy Family and our own families. Separation as well as closeness is part of family life. There comes a time when the children leave home, or even if they don't physically leave, they develop their own lives. Parents, as well as children, have to grow into a new relationship. That's not automatic, and if all we had was S. Luke's gospel, we'd be unsure about how things turned out with Mary. There's a significant mention of her in S. Luke's second volume, the book of Acts, in which, after Jesus' ascension, she is with the apostles at prayer (1.14). Other women are there – probably including those who anointed Jesus' body – and Jesus' brothers. So although natural family ties had lessened over the years, Mary had grown into the spiritual family centred on her son. Her relationship to him in the redeemed community was more important than her natural motherhood. Maybe losing him years ago in Jerusalem and then finding him was a foretaste of this, though she couldn't have known it at the time. Eventually the things she treasured in her heart would make sense.

Making sense of life is surely what we all want to do. We are members of the Christian community, the Church, each of us in his or her own unique way. Like Mary, we may spend our lives in discovering the implications of what we have been told early on – that the person Jesus, who lived on earth, is the Son of God. There will be things we do not understand, but if we 'treasure them in our hearts' they will eventually make sense. 'Jesus is the Son of God' is fundamental to the message we proclaim. Implicit in this proclamation is that people should change in response to this message. God's people are a family, and families change as time goes on. We grow as we hear the word of God and do it. We grow as we search for our Lord.

Link with Samuel: grew up in temple. Progressed in wisdom – like JBap.