



WEEKLY GOSPEL REFLECTION



The Holy Family of Jesus Mary and Joseph

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The law required all Jews to go to Jerusalem for the three feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. Luke (2:41-52) depicts the Holy Family as pious and observant of the law and thus went to the temple each year.

Jesus is twelve, one year younger than the age at which he will reach official manhood. He is still a boy but is about to become a man. This whole passage is a kind of bridge between the story of his mortal birth and his divine mission.

In today's culture, it seems almost unthinkable that Joseph and Mary would leave the city without knowing where Jesus was. But in those days, a larger extended family would travel to Jerusalem, so it was not unreasonable to assume that Jesus was with the group. When he is discovered missing, they return to Jerusalem searching. Every parent can empathize with their panic and fear. When they find him, he is sitting as a student in the midst of the teachers, who are amazed at his understanding.

The interaction between Jesus and his parents is presented in very human terms. Mary and Joseph are stunned that he would stay behind without telling them, and Mary rebukes him, as any mother would. The answer Jesus gives marks a turning point. It looks forward to his future ministry and marks a shift from calling Joseph his father to speaking of God as his Father.

Mary and Joseph do not understand, in spite of their experience of his miraculous conception and birth. This suggests a traditional upbringing for Jesus from his birth until this moment and an unexceptional family life within the cultural norms of the day. But the temple event set in motion within Jesus a spiritual and physical dawning of understand of his special relationship to God the Father and his mission, to be fully realized at his baptism by John.

The final verses speak of normal family life and normal human development. Jesus grows and matures gradually under the guidance of Joseph and Mary, to whom he was obedient.

In reflecting on this passage, consider the human nature of the Holy Family, living a culturally normal life within their community. Think of this in the context of the *kenosis* written about by St Paul to the Philippians 2:1-8, "...complete my joy by being of the same mind [as Jesus], who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, so [in kenosis] he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient..."

Kenosis for Jesus was the *emptying* of his divine memory to becoming human.

Consider in your reflection that Jesus likewise teaches us to relinquish our mortal memory to become *divinized*, taking on within our heart the Sacred Heart of Jesus and his mercy. "Take, Lord, all my liberty, my memory, my understanding..."
(see Ignatian *Suscipe Prayer*)

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A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

Now every year the parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.

Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him,
*"Child, why have you treated us like this?
Look, your father and I have been searching for you
in great anxiety."*

He said to them,

*"Why were you searching for me?
Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house!"*

But they did not understand what he said to them.

Then Jesus went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

The Gospel of the Lord

