

EPIPHANY 1
ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
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NOT TAKEN FOR GRANTED
(Luke 2:41-52)

Grace and peace be multiplied to in the knowledge of God and of Christ Jesus our Savior. Amen.

In the event from Jesus' life we consider today, we're confronted with the reality that a good share of the irritations and anxieties that we endure throughout the good life that our God gives us comes simply by treating His Word as something rather ordinary and common. Ironically, while the remedy to all of these irritations and anxieties is found in taking them to Him who is the Word, that is, our Lord Jesus Christ, in doing so He will never treat us as we have treated Him. He doesn't take us for granted. Instead, He shows Himself to be laser focused on our salvation by being laser focused on the business of His heavenly Father. We witness this supreme focus exercised on our behalf in the account relayed to us in Luke 2:41-52:

(ESV) Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. (42) And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. (43) And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, (44) but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, (45) and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.

(46) After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. (47) And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. (48) And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." (49) And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (50) And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. (51) And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. (52) And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

This particular event from Jesus' ministry allows us to get a different view of Mary than the one we get from the nativity scene. Here's she's not the meek and mild virgin mother of Jesus, but the stressed and somewhat irritated mother of a twelve-year old boy, and probably a few others by now. Her source of anxiety in this short narrative comes down to a rather common stressor for parents: she lost her child. Except, this was no ordinary child; this was the sinless Son of God, perfect in every way. If Jesus was lost, the finger of blame could only point in one direction – toward Joseph and Mary.

In examining the cause for this distressing situation, we come across this phrase: *supposing Him to be in the group, they went a day's journey.* In other words, they took Jesus for granted. He'd always been where He was supposed to

be before, they had no reason to suppose otherwise. So without any more thought about where Jesus was, they traveled a whole day before actually bothering to look for Him. That's when they discovered that He wasn't there. He wasn't with the group traveling back to Nazareth at all. No one had even seen Him that day. You can imagine both the irritation and the anxiety that would captivate your own heart.

Whether they started back for Jerusalem that night or the next morning we aren't told. One thing is for certain, it must have been a rough night. I imagine that they probably said all the same things that parents do these days: That Boy knows better than to wander off! ... I should have kept a closer eye on Him! ... He's going to get it when I get my hands on Him! ... God, please watch over our Son and let Him be safe! ... Why would He do such a thing?

That last one was essentially the question that popped out of Mary's mouth when, on the third day, they found Jesus sitting in the temple, listening to and asking questions of the teachers. "Son, why have You treated us so? Behold, Your father and I have been searching for you in great distress" – another way of saying "with irritation and anxiety." I would have you notice that her words come across more as an accusation without any specific charge... basically, she said, "Jesus, it's all Your fault that Your father and I are so stressed out with elevated blood pressure."

This doesn't at all seem to be the Mary that we've come to know, does it? In chapter one of Luke she's all bow the

head in meekness, saying, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord; let it be to me as you have spoken.” Now in chapter two she storms into the temple crying, “Jesus, that wasn’t a nice thing to do to us at all.” Why? Why this sudden change in demeanor and attitude? Well, understand first of all, that one chapter is actually more than twelve years of time, which is plenty of time, as you know full well, for one’s attitude to go from humility and meekness to irritation and anger. But it’s not just an issue of time. If you examine Mary’s words you will see that the change in attitude actually originates from within her, which shouldn’t be too shocking, then, to comprehend what’s going on when we see this attitude shift in ourselves or, as is also often the case, one that we see in our children.

This journey into exasperation begins with the perilous habit of taking God’s Word for granted, and thus also taking Jesus Himself for granted. This trap is much easier to fall into than we imagine. All we have to do is do what Mary and Joseph did – make all kinds of assumptions about Jesus. We can assume, for example, that because Jesus understands how limited our time is, that He is just fine with us fitting in a few minutes here and there, when we can, to read and meditate on His Word. We can assume that Jesus, knowing our weaknesses better than we do, will stand beside us as we give into various temptations, so that He is there to pick up the pieces as we continue walking on our way. We can assume, as so many do these days, that Jesus loves us just the way we are and that He would never call us to correct anything about our personalities, our

habits, or our pursuits. We can assume that Jesus will continue sitting right next to us on the couch or on our beds while we stream in through digital waves whatever filth happens to come to us through our cultures influence on the television, music, or literature. Keep making these assumptions often enough and you will find yourself precisely in the same predicament that Mary and Joseph did – they lost Jesus!

The lesson of this section of Luke's Gospel is that, if you so choose, Jesus will allow you to wander down the path of life without Him. Here's how it goes: at first, you're fine with the path you're on because, well, you've made all those assumptions about Jesus. Next, you'll maybe start to realize that something isn't quite right, that Jesus isn't quite where you thought He would be. Then your life will start to unravel a bit because, well, Jesus isn't there to hold it together as He was before. Before you know it, you are on the path where something crucial is missing. Hopefully... HOPEFULLY ... by this point you will realize that you made a major mistake and turn around. Otherwise, you might just keep on going, growing more and more comfortable apart from Jesus, and abandon Him back in Jerusalem where He is doing His Father's business.

Now, here's where the tale takes a twist, Jesus allows Mary to throw out her accusation and with it all of her irritation and anxiety, as though He is truly the cause. But then, with all respect and humility, He asks His first question, "Why were you looking for me?" There are two ways to understand that question. The first is as a simple question

seeking knowledge, which would imply Jesus didn't know the answer. The other was to understand it, which is the only right way to understand it, since Jesus knows all things, is as a question making Mary and Joseph search their own hearts for the answer. Jesus was as much as asking, "What was it that finally made you realize that you had left Me?" His vanishing act, visible only to their eyes, served to highlight how, spiritually speaking, they had taken their eyes off Him a long while back. In other words, "It wasn't I who treated you this way, but you who treated Me in this way. I wasn't lost; you were!"

Then, not waiting on His mother to form a response, Jesus assures her that she brought her frustration and her anxiety to the right place: Didn't you know that I'd be about My Father's business? It's a lesson in divinely guided redirection, making it clear that, in the end, her frustration found its way to the very source that could untangle the mess that had built up in their hearts.

But what does Jesus mean by "My Father's business." Jesus' ceaseless activity is an intentional pursuit to draw the human soul into communion with Himself. Eventually, this ceaseless activity would take Him to a cross, but hold your horses before we go sprinting off to Golgotha. Jesus' day-to-day mission involves casting a shadow over your existence, enticing you into a divine dialogue with His life-giving Word.

Here in the temple, you witness this conversation unfolding in a miraculous fashion—a spectacle Mary and her fellow

travelers had lost sight of. A mere decade earlier, these law scholars could barely guide wise men to Bethlehem, yet today, "all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers."

One question follows another, a dance of intrigue with each response. These scholars, open to anything Jesus might pose, eagerly anticipate His every word. Contrast that with Mary, who took a good 24 hours to notice His absence, and when she finally does, there's no two-way conversation to be had.

For her to hear anything He had to say, Jesus had to be willing to endure His own mother's wrath—a sacrifice made not just for her but for all of mankind. In order for Him to endure in His suffering and death on the cross all of your unjust irritation and anxiety about how Jesus and His heavenly Father have treated you, He had first to live that perfect life of love and respect toward His earthly parents and even toward the teachers of Law who would one day bring their own accusations against Him – accusations of blasphemy, lies, rebellion, and insurrection, all worthy, from their perspective, of death on a cross.

By triumphing over death, He rose to seek you out, to quell every bit of your agitation and anxiety at your taking Him for granted with His forgiveness, and finally to immerse your soul in the life-giving truth He offers.

Picture that divine conversation when the risen Savior quells the anxiety of disciples trapped behind closed doors, entangled in confusion and fear: "Peace be unto you." In His Word and Sacraments He approaches you in the same manner, regardless of the path you've chosen to take without Him. Instead of taking His all-forgiving, ever-abiding presence for granted, rest in His gracious promise: I am with you always.

Sure, it's natural for sinners to get irritated—it's practically unavoidable. Anxiety is just as common to us since the Fall because our decisions often lead us down paths that separate us from our God. But when those emotions surge, open your mouth and take it to Him. Recognize that His business revolves around engaging a wounded soul like yours, with the promise that though you have taken Him for granted often, He never takes you for granted. And even if you lose sight of Him, He never averts His gaze from you and your eternal well-being. AMEN!