

**Christmas 1**  
**27/12/2009**

**Mark the Evangelist**

**1 Samuel 2:18 – 20, 26**  
**Psalm 148**  
**Colossians 3:12 - 17**  
**Luke 2:41 - 52**

### **Jesus lost and found**

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The Sunday after Christmas seems a bit like Low Sunday. After the heady magnificence of John's Gospel read at Christmas, in which the first chapter functions like an overture to a great symphony laying out themes that are repeated, enlarged and ornamented in the work that follows, we turn to the homely stories of Luke. We have to retune if we want to understand, but don't be mistaken, Luke's infancy narratives are his overture and the notes he strikes in it sound again in his Gospel.

The story of little boy lost is only found in Luke, although there are references to this and more in the extra biblical material. It is easy to identify with Mary and Joseph's anxiety over the loss, and commentators are drawn to the sharpness of the exchange between Jesus and Mary. As we know it probably inspired the line in "The Life of Brian:" "he's not the Messiah, he's just a naughty little boy!"

We know Mary and Joseph were law-abiding people. That is why Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and everything to this point shows they practiced their faith within the continuing traditions of Israel. They had Jesus circumcised, presented him at the Temple, and it was during their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem to attend the Passover festival that he went missing. Years later, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, we know he was familiar with the Passover, and he was no stranger to the city.

This time he is a little boy lost. Luke is fond of the theme of lost and found, and the joy at the recovery of something cherished is connected with Luke's artistry on the subject of salvation. He tells stories of coins that are lost and found, and stray sheep that are recovered. Prodigal sons are lost declared dead, found and declared alive. To move between being lost and found is to experience death and life. This is true for the loser, as well as the lost. The boy Jesus was lost to his parents in Jerusalem, and found "after three days". Death, life and salvation are alluded to here – and Luke intends to make a connection between this and the events of another Passover, years later.

The finding of Jesus probably brought joy to his parents, but the text concentrates on their anxiety and hostility at his lack of proper respect. The irony is this is the first time he speaks in the Gospel and his words are to be weighed carefully: “Why are you searching for me? Did you not know I must be about my Father’s business?” What he says is dismissive of their concern and their parental relationship. There is a sense of the imperative in the wording and if the translation read as some suggest: “it is necessary to be about my Father’s business”, we would notice an allusion to another conversation on the road to Emmaus. The risen Christ says to the two: “*..how foolish you are and slow to believe, was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer...* [Lk24:26]. He is speaking to two people, perhaps a man and a woman, who are slow to understand, and he is teaching them something which is hard to grasp about the nature of the Messiah.

John wrote: *he came to his own people and his own did not receive him*. Luke shows even those closest to Jesus did not comprehend the meaning of his life. Although Luke says Jesus later went home with his parents and “was obedient to them” his first words sound a note that is repeated in his teachings on discipleship: “*Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself, cannot be my disciple*”. [Lk 14:26] Ironically, when Mary and Joseph found Jesus in Jerusalem, they thought they were losing their son to scholarly religious discourse. What was really happening was they were losing him to God. Although they found him in Jerusalem he became lost to them in an entirely new way, and perhaps Mary began to feel the edge of the sword that would later pass through her soul.

The text suggests that later Mary did understand. She kept things in her heart and pondered them. These words are echoed on Easter morning. The women who came to the tomb “remembered [Jesus’] words”[Lk 24:8]. What they discovered, as did the two on the road to Emmaus, was that Jesus, lost to them during Passover three days previously in Jerusalem, was found again. And even though the meaning of this was hard to understand, Easter morning became the source of abounding joy for all. Three days after the worst imaginable outcome they came in search of Jesus to discover something almost impossible to compute. He had come in search of them. And he invited them to live an entirely new life in which he would be present to them, to the end of the age.

A little boy lost at Christmas would be a sad thing. But his lost-ness was a step on the way towards God’s great work of finding us, and embracing us with a gift of inestimable value: the gift of life. Thanks be to God.

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