

## **LOST CHILD**

Matins – 30<sup>th</sup> December 2018

**Texts:** 1 Samuel 2, 18-20, 26; Psalm 184, Colossians 3, 12-17, Luke 2, 41-52.

### **Introduction**

It was a parent's worst fear, - we had taken our children with their three cousins for a jolly day playing together on the beach. There was happy chatter as we drove towards home, until someone asked, - Where's Timothy? There were only five children, when there should have been six in the back of our ancient station wagon! We turned round to follow the road back to the beach. We soon saw Timothy, aged five plodding towards us. He was pleased to see us, but there were no tears, he trusted that **he** would find **us**.

We had only missed Timothy for about ten minutes, but Joseph and Mary had not seen Jesus for three days, and then when they found him, he casually responded to their concern, by saying that he had had things to do in the great Temple at Jerusalem.

Jewish parents were expected to bring their sons to Jerusalem when they became thirteen, but Jesus was only twelve. Jesus must have been keen to make the adventurous trip to the Temple, to further his studies as a budding theological student! His parents clearly trusted him, - believing that he would be safe among his friends in the Holy City; but his young friends were three days journey from Jerusalem, accompanying their own parents.

### **Things to do**

Growing up is a difficult process, - we all had to do it. There were parents and teachers, friends and relations, and many others, - all telling us what to do as they said, - but not always to do as they did! There were many conflicting influences, but eventually we had find our own way, making our own mistakes, as we discovered who we were, and who we might become; it could be confusing and painful. However did our parents cope with us?!

Love is not a possession, it is a gift, to be given away, and then miraculously it comes back. So it is, or should be with children; they are gifts to be loved, but not to be confined. As they grow towards maturity they should be allowed to find their own ways, with parental love and care in support, - benefits to be relayed to the next generation.

However, in modern Britain, life is so much more complicated than in Jesus' day. There are now so many distractions, not least the ubiquitous 'phones, I-Pads and screens that isolate children as young as four, from the relationships and the realities of lives in society at large. Whereas, in rural Africa it takes a whole village to bring-up a child, - giving them context, support and guidance.

### **Nazareth**

So what did twelve-year-old Jesus do next? Mrs Cecil Alexander's *Once in Royal David's City* implies that he returned to Nazareth, to grow up as the eldest son of the local building contractor. He most probably learned Joseph's trade, but also that he pursued his insights into the wider world of learning, of faith and perhaps his role in Jewish society. He imbibed the Torah; he followed the cycle of Jewish observance, from Passover to Hanukah.

He would have listened to the Sadducees and Pharisees, with their differing interpretations of the Law and the Prophets. Nazareth may have been a small village, but it was near to the Decapolis, - the Greek colony of ten towns, where he may well have done some building works and learned to speak some Greek and to become aware of their democratic culture. Then there was the Roman occupation, with the multiplicity of Græco-Roman gods, with Caesar ruling the Empire as the powerful demi-god.

### **Maturity**

Jesus appears to have fully discovered his divine identity and ministry when he was baptised by his cousin John at the Jordan, followed by a period of introspection in the desert. Discovering our identity takes time, - for many it is a lifetime's journey, to learn to live with ourselves, with our neighbours and our God!

Thomas was the son of a London merchant; - he received his early education just over the hill from here, at Merton Abbey, before becoming a monk at the Monastery at Bec in Normandy. Yesterday was the Feast Day of Thomas à Becket, - when we remembered him as the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was murdered before the altar in 1170. Thomas had no doubts of his rôle and duties in serving God, - duties that transcended the arrogance and the foibles of King Henry II. Thomas had faith and he had vision, he looked to the long term, regardless of the risks to his life.

### **Conclusion**

Every New Year raises fresh challenges, - 2019 especially so, - as we stumble towards Britain's uncertain future relationship with the rest of Europe. - Europe, where in the last Century, Britain and our allies spent so much blood and treasure to defend justice and freedom, and over many centuries, we have shared so much in culture and prosperity. Pope Gregory regarded the remote islands of Britannia as part of Europe. In 601 AD, he sent Augustine, who was very reluctant to leave Rome to go to Canterbury to spread the Gospels to the Angles; - as part of the World-wide heritage of the boy who overstayed his visit to Jerusalem, - the City of his destiny.

Let us pray, - let us **resolve** to follow the faith of Augustine, - with the spirit and the courage of Thomas, as we and especially so many young people face the many challenges of the coming year. We wish you all a fulfilling and faith full 2019.

May we all go with peace and gentleness. Amen.

Words ~ 930