

## THE HOLY FAMILY [C]

1 Samuel 1:20 - 22, 24 - 28

1 John 3:1 - 2, 21 - 24

Luke 2:41-52

After Mass on January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany, we'll dismantle the crib and, in effect liturgically speaking, that's officially the end of the Christmas.

But, if you happened to visit Rome after that date you'd still find cribs in all the churches, because the Roman tradition is that Christmas doesn't end until February 2, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple.

Several hundred years before Jesus was born, the Prophet Malachi made a promise:

"Suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple." Mal. 3: 1

That promise came true when Joseph, and Mary took Jesus to the Temple

40 days after His birth to present Him - to give Him - to the Lord God to serve Him all the days of His life.

The Saviour had come to His Father's home, but in an entirely unexpected way; being carried as a helpless baby who was dependant on a human father and mother.

Christmas is all about giving.

It begins with the Father giving us His One and Only Son to be born of the Virgin.

Then, on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, the Church commemorates that 40<sup>th</sup>. day after His birth when Mary, and Joseph symbolically give Jesus back to His Father, in the Father's House.

A holy exchange of the most precious gift of all; Jesus the Saviour...

Perhaps in that sense the Roman tradition reflects more fully the truth about Christmas?

In our first reading, the words of Hannah, the mother of Samuel as she gives her first-born son to the Lord: "I asked the Lord to give me this boy, and he has granted my request. Now I am giving him to the Lord, and he will belong to the Lord his whole life."

1 Sam. 1: 27 - 28 echo through the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple.

And yet the Feast of the Epiphany, when the Christmas season officially ends, is also about giving.

The Lord God, through the tangible manifestation of a star, calls the Wise Men from the East.

They come when Jesus has grown up a little, and is maybe around one to two years old, and: "They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him." Mt. 2: 11

There, they are given the gift of faith in this little child who is God in the flesh.

They give Him their precious gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

But they also give Him the most precious gift of all as they worship Him.

They give Him their lives.

And so, in today's Gospel, we come to the time when Jesus is 12 years old, and again in the Temple - His Father's House.

Once again we encounter the gift of giving, which is the essence of Christmas; and we also encounter Epiphany once more.

Because the whole thrust of Christmas is the unveiling - the epiphany - of the presence of the One and Only Son of God in the world.

His birth at Bethlehem; the Wise Men seeing Him when He was a toddler, and the Rabbis in the Temple discussing Scripture with Him when He was twelve, are all part of that same revelation.

In Christmas cards, and art, the Holy Family - Joseph, Mary, and Jesus - are shown as the perfect family, which they are because Jesus is at its heart.

Very different to us in one sense; yet just the same in another because, just like us, they were real people, living real lives, in a real and dangerous world.

All of which is brought into sharp relief in today's Gospel.

The finding of Jesus in the Temple is not just the story of a boy, and the hurt He causes His father and mother by staying behind in Jerusalem.

It's actually Luke, in his unique and subtle way, preparing us for the Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus.

The three days Joseph, and Mary spend looking for Jesus in Jerusalem, points us towards that future event, which will also happen in Jerusalem.

Those of you who are parents can easily imagine what frantic emotions Mary, and Joseph must have gone through when they thought Jesus was lost.

What we need to do is get behind the bald statement in the Gospel that: "Three days later they finally discovered him in the Temple" Lk. 2: 46

so that we can understand its connection with the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, and to reflect on its spiritual significance for us.

The first day is like the devastation Mary, and the Disciples feel when Jesus is Crucified. The second day spent looking for Jesus is like the day He spends in the tomb, when they know He's dead but can't quite take it in.

So it is when the twelve-year-old Jesus' parents know He's missing, but can't quite believe it's happened to them.

On the third day they find Jesus in the Temple. And they're so relieved and full of joy, but not fully comprehending what's going on.

Just as on that day, some years later, when Jesus rises from the dead.

I think when Mary, and Joseph eventually find Jesus in the Temple they then realise the full implication of what giving Him back to His Father meant when they presented Him in the Temple 12 years before.

He's not theirs. He belongs to the Father for the salvation of the world.

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his One and Only Son." Jn. 3: 16

Luke emphasises that the Holy Family had gone up to Jerusalem at the Passover to remind us that Jesus is the Lamb of God, the lamb of sacrifice, who takes away our sin.

Jesus is found in the Jerusalem Temple because it's His Father's House. After all, where else would He be? It's His home.

Jesus, the visible, and glorious presence of the living God, is found in His Father's House talking to the religious experts about the Scriptures, the Old Testament, which all point to Him.

He's come to take His rightful place there because, through His Death and Resurrection, those daily animal sacrifices that took place in the Temple to wash away human sin, will no longer be needed.

He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world in His body, on the Cross.

At the age of 12, in the Temple, Jesus resolutely set His face towards Calvary for us.

So that, through his Death and Resurrection, He can take each one of to His Father's House, and make it our home because: "We have an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands." 2 Cor. 5: 2

Let's resolve that as we journey through life we'll accept from Jesus the greatest gift of all - friendship with Him: and with Mary, the Mother of the Lord, let us always treasure Him in our hearts. See Lk. 2: 51