

**Homily for December 28, 2003  
Feast of the Holy Family**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28**

**1 John 3:1-2, 21-24**

**Luke 2:16-21**

## *Even in the Midst of Growing Up, Jesus Leads Us to Discover God's Will Through Our Families.*

While on the surface this story of the adolescent Jesus appears to be about him growing up, St. Luke really uses it as a pointer to the Lord's death and resurrection and how he fulfilled the will of his Father in everything he did in life.

It's not so much about Jesus the adolescent as it is about Jesus the Son of God. It was typical back in the days when this gospel was written that followers of a great leader would look back to his early years and try to find evidence of his precociousness – just how exceptional he was from his earliest days. Such a story gives a clue to the child's supernatural origin and indicates the power whereby he will eventually save his people. Such stories existed concerning the Egyptian Osiris, the Persian Cyrus, Alexander the Great, the Emperor Augustus, and the prophets Samuel and Moses.

It's a real turnaround kind of story, following upon the earlier infancy narratives of peace and tranquility. Here we are talking about the holy family, but we're confronted with the gospel of conflict...the conflict within that holy family. The child is God's son. The mother is sinless. The foster father was certainly a

holy man. Therefore, we might logically expect a scene of intense familial devotion and unity – the three working and playing together and rejoicing over being as one. Instead, we have a story of confusion, misunderstanding, hurt feelings and pain – all pointing to the cross and resurrection.

You know what happened; Jesus was 12 by then, not yet a man, but no longer a child. Leaving Jerusalem for home, Mary noticed that Jesus did not walk with her. She probably thought, “12. He considers himself to be a man, so he is walking with Joseph.” Joseph, noticing that Jesus was not walking with him, thought, “12. He is still a child. He is walking with his mother.”

It was only in the evening of that first day on their trip home that they discovered he had not been walking with them at all.

They were frightened. They rushed back to Jerusalem, and it was only at the end of the third day that they found him in the temple. Note how cleverly St. Luke alludes to “the third day” – a precursor of the day of Easter – that third day yet to come.

The text says that they were “astonished” when they saw him. I'm not sure exactly what that means. Did they leap? Did they jump up and down? Were they angry?

Mary, it seems, told him off. He looked at her with his very clear eyes and answered, "But didn't you know that I had to do my Father's will? I am ready and willing to think of you and to love you, but it is my Father, God, to whom I have to listen."

Mary did not understand. Neither did Joseph. Mary kept it all in her heart; she understood later while standing under his cross.

In the life of her son, something prevailed over all his earthly bonds. When we speak about the difficulties in our families, we have a lot to talk about: quarrels, unfaithfulness, disobedience, lack of respect, the misuse of money, and so many other things. But do we meet, in our families, the difficulty they were facing that day in Jerusalem? Do we ever ask ourselves whether we, as a family, are realistically and concretely interested in the will of the Father, in the Kingdom of God here on earth?

I wonder.

Jesus went home with them, he obeyed them. Nevertheless, everything had changed. They knew now what his first allegiance was going to be. From then on, he was doing the work of his Father first. So did Mary and Joseph. And this is how they taught us what it means to be holy.

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Jesus Leads Us to Discover God's  
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