

**Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> December 2021**  
**The First Sunday of Christmas**

**Collect**

God in Trinity,  
eternal unity of perfect love:  
gather the nations to be one family,  
and draw us into your holy life  
through the birth of Emmanuel,  
our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

**Colossians 3:12-17**

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

**Luke 2:41-end**

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

## Sermon by John Richardson

Parents remember the moment when their children are no longer children. This usually happens in those difficult teenage years. One moment children are relatively obedient and cooperative - the next they are anything but.

There's nothing wrong with this. It's all part of the process of growing up; finding your place in the world; expressing your independence; becoming a person in your own right.

At such a time parents realise that their lives and those of their children are no longer intertwined in the way that they once were. Young people become individuals, separate people with a life of their own.

I remember when this happened with my own son. He was an ardent fan of rock music, and because he was too young, I drove him to various concerts. One of them was by the rock band Led Zeppelin, which you may never have heard of. If you have heard them you are not likely to have forgotten it.

At this particular concert the music was so loud that I was deaf for three days afterwards. And it was then that I realised that my son's life was developing into something very different from my own. Which is something of what the parents of Jesus must have experienced in the Temple and the events described in today's Gospel reading.

At the beginning of today's Gospel it is the parents of Jesus who are the centre of attention. Every year they go to the temple for the feast of the Passover. Jesus has reached the age of twelve, and this year he goes with them. But at the end of today's Gospel it is Jesus who is the centre of attention. He now has a life of his own, independent of his parents. He increases in wisdom and in years, in divine and human favour. In that short space of time he has discovered his calling and his mission in life. He has come of age. He has found his voice. His life will travel a very different path from that of his parents.

As we journey through life, there are moments when we are faced with choices. Often these choices will mean that we find ourselves having divided loyalties. Nowhere is this more evident than in our adolescence. We are torn between loyalty and obedience to our parents and what appear to be more attractive and interesting pursuits. Such things our parents may not approve of. Divided loyalties are something we all experience.

Jesus says to his parents: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Here we see Jesus beginning his break away from parental attachment. He needs to identify more intimately with his heavenly Father. If he is to fulfil his mission, this must happen.

If there is one word that tells us why all this is happening, it is that word "**must**." "I **must** be in my Father's house." The word "**must**" will now characterise the entire life of Jesus.

For Luke there is a "must-ness" about Jesus' vocation. "I **must** preach the good news." "The Son of Man **must** suffer many things." "I **must** go on my way today and tomorrow." "The Passover lamb **must** be sacrificed." For Luke that word "**must**" defines and explains the life and work of Jesus. The choice has been made. There is no other way.

The consequences of that choice will now become evident.

That word “**must**” is important. When we use it, we know that we do not have a choice. There is no other way. If what we have to do is to be done, then the word “**must**” will tell us why.

It’s significant that as soon as we have celebrated the birth of Jesus, we are given a glimpse of where his life will lead him. We are shown in today’s Gospel that for Jesus, as for us, life will be matter of choice. For Jesus, that choice is made. For us it is often a matter of divided loyalties.

Those divided loyalties may be seen most clearly in our Christian discipleship. To do what we believe God is calling us to do may lead us into situations we would rather not be in. To choose what we believe to be the way of God can lead us into conflict with other people. Others may not see things the way we see them. Our understanding of right and wrong may differ from their’s.

When I was young, my own parents had great ideas for me, but those ideas did not include the possibility that I might become a priest.

In today’s Gospel we sense the tension which arises between Jesus and his parents. Mary herself struggles to make sense of what her son is saying to her. His parents did not understand what he said to them.

Sometimes others may not understand why we say the things we say or do the things we do. The Gospel is full of situations where people fail to see what is happening or misunderstand what is being said and done. This surely is the story of the life of Jesus which will lead ultimately to his death on a cross.

But it is not simply a matter of misunderstanding. Hostility, hatred, anger, fear, resentment and much more - such things play a part in many of the situations which confront us in life. As Christians we may be confronted daily by choices. To choose one path rather than another may lead us to where we would rather not be but feel we **must** be. There are times when we feel that our discipleship is separating us from others when it should be bringing us closer together.

Our discipleship calls us to overcome hatred with love, injury with pardon, doubt with faith, despair with hope, darkness with light and sadness with joy. That’s a formidable task. Every time we feel we have achieved something towards those things, it will bring us closer not only to each other, but closer to God. So perhaps it’s not so much a matter of choice between loyalty to God and loyalty to other people. We can do both at the same time.

It was Bishop Edward King who once said:

“The nearer we can come to God, the nearer we can come together.”

Amen.