

Christmas 2 Jan 2 2011

Jeremiah 31.7-14

Psalm 84

Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-19a

Luke 2:41-52

May the words of my mouth and the secret meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and redeemer. AMEN

You may have heard. A baby was born. Lots of excitement. Lots of visitors. Lots of presents.

Oh, he was so cute. All smiles. Even as a tiny baby.. every visitor got a smile.

Did you guess.. he was born almost 2000 years ago. And we still celebrate.. we still visit the place of his birth. Sometimes even after all this time, we still bring gifts.

Don't we all love a new baby?

Don't we all ohh and ahh ...

Don't we all smile and congratulate the parents?

Don't we all want to have a cuddle, a smile.

We Christians love the story of the baby Jesus. We love the carols, and sing them as often.. those that tell of Mary and the Baby Jesus, the angels, and the shepherds.

We might even remember the stories of Jesus as a Jewish male child being taken to the temple when he was 8 days old to be dedicated as holy to the Lord, and the responses of Simeon and Anna to this special child.

But we certainly remember the stories of the wise men, following the star, and bringing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And Yes, there will be a gathering on Wednesday when the Sunday School participants of St. John's will act out the story of the coming of the wise men, with readings and carols. You all come and enjoy once more the story of Jesus and the visitors from the east, bringing Gold, Frankincense and myrrh.

And don't we all at one time or another comment about how fast they will grow up? And maybe even wish they would stay little, cute, and helpless, depending upon us just a little longer?

But today, let us expand our focus. We do not have many stories of Jesus as he grew up. Maybe he was just an ordinary child, traveling to Egypt to escape the King's anger, coming back to Nazareth when it was safe. Maybe like many children, he ran and played

with other children, spent time in the shop with his father, and as Luke says in vs. 40 'The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and the favor of God was upon him.' But he grew up.. no longer that precious baby in a manger.

And with all of those stories about this child, of course we would expect him to be very special; angels announcing his birth, shepherds rushing to see and worship; wise man noticing and following a very special star... and two very religious people commenting on how they now had seen God's promise come true.

So are we surprised that we read the story of his visit to the temple at age 12, when he was so interested he stayed behind to listen, to ask questions, and even give answers that made the teachers sit up and take notice?

But he created a problem for his parents...as children and young people will. He did not go with the crowd headed home. Two days Mary and Joseph searched for him.

His response.. “Did you not know I would be in my father’s house?” reminds me of my son, lost in a mall, who went out to the car. I thought it was the best place to be.. you eventually come here. The clear thinking of the young mind.

Jesus the youth had a mind that challenged his elders.

But, you know, it is not just the child Jesus who can challenge us, and teach us. I remember a 5 year old, who listened to his older siblings discussing the commandment to love. Each sibling tried to out do the other by asking should we love....

I do not remember all the categories mentioned.. but they would have included some one who hits you, some one who steals from you, your enemies... the list went on and on until the question was asked, ‘Should we love satan?’ Yes, pipes up the 5 year old. When asked why.. he said ‘Well God wants us to love every body.’ Stop, Consider, Wisdom of a child.

And a seven year old, when asked why his Christmas tree picture had a light covering of purple over the page.. “ That’s to show that God is everywhere.” Wisdom of a child.

I remember a 6 yr old who put out his hands at the altar rail “I’m hungry”.(asking spiritual food and/or for total acceptance in the community). and hearing about the child who returned from the altar rail and complained to his mom “Pop-pop (his visiting grandfather) didn’t give me any Jesus.” The childrens understanding of the God mysteries.

Do we listen to the children in our lives?
Do we recognize the depth of their understanding of mysteries we struggle with, study, argue about. Do we listen to their questions and concerns?

I recall a 10 year old asking several church leaders if his mother, recently deceased, would go to heaven even if she really didn't believe in God? "Does God really care about my mother, and me? If God did not love her enough to prepare a place for her in heaven, he didn't want to go there either.

Do we acknowledge that answers we give may affect a life decision?

Children of all ages challenge us to think outside our box.. just as Jesus challenged the teachers of the temple.

Do we listen?

Do we pay attention to our youth when games they play, undermine their self esteem? Do we find ways to counter-act the destructive actions? Do we treat them with respect and dignity as we have promised in our baptismal covenant? Do we honor their questions and their struggles?

Or do we hold to the statement... 'Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me!'"

Hear those children and youth who are bullied, teased, called names, taunted on face book and by text. Words hurt! How many hurt so badly they decide the only way to make the pain stop is to commit suicide? Did we pay attention?

Like some of you, I get pictures and stories on email.

One went something like this...A young executive was driving in a neighborhood, a little fast, but watching out for children who might dart out between parked cars.

All the sudden he hears a crash, and realizes his car has been hit.. with a brick!

Angry, he stops, grabs the kid and yells..

What do you think your doing.. that's a new car and it will cost a lot to fix it.

Please, mister, please begged the boy. I didn't know what else to do since no one paid any attention and I am desperate.

My brother fell out of his wheel chair and I can't get him back up.

Children of all ages cry out for help. They cry out for protection. They cry out for respect. They cry out for love.

When I found my son, I hugged him and told him he had a good idea.

I expect Mary and Joseph hugged Jesus and let him know that loved him.

Let us enjoy the rest of Christmas, but never forget that the beautiful charming innocent baby in the manger grew up, challenged his elders and worried his parents.

But yet, he was Love incarnate.

We just sang:

Love came down at Christmas
Love all lovely, love divine
Love was born at Christmas
Star and angels gave the sign.

Love shall be our token.. (our sign our signal)
Love be YOURS and Love be MINE

Love to God and neighbor.. even the ones
who give us problems..
Love for plea and gift and sign.

Let us resolve to LOVE this year.

A young and successful executive was traveling down a neighborhood street, going a bit too fast in his new Jaguar. He was watching for kids darting out from between parked cars and slowed down when he thought he saw something. As his car passed, no children appeared, instead, a brick smashed into the Jaguar's side door. He slammed on the brakes and spun the Jaguar back to the spot from where the brick had been thrown.

He jumped out of the car, grabbed some kid and pushed him up against a parked car, shouting, "What was that all about and who are you? Just what the heck are you doing?" Building up a head of steam, he went on. "That's a new car and that brick you threw is going to cost a lot of money. Why did you do it?"

"Please, mister, please, I'm sorry. I didn't know what else to do!" pleaded the youngster. "I threw the brick because no

one else would stop."

I wonder if the response Mary and Joseph heard when they found Jesus in the temple "Did you not know that I must be in my father's house".. hit them like a brick. Did they suddenly recall the stories we tell of his birth? Did they resolve to listen more carefully to their son?

Tears were dripping down the boy's chin as he pointed around the parked car. "It's my brother," he said. "He rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair and I can't lift him up." Sobbing, the boy asked the executive, "Would you please help me get him back into his wheelchair? He's hurt and he's too heavy for me."

Have we missed hearing a desperate plea for help, because we are too busy, too self absorbed.

Moved beyond words, the driver tried to swallow the rapidly swelling lump in his throat. He lifted the young man back into the wheelchair and took out his handkerchief and wiped the scrapes and cuts, checking to see that everything was going to be okay.

"Thank you, sir. And God bless you," the grateful child said to him. The man then watched the little boy push his brother to the sidewalk toward their home. It was a long walk back to his Jaguar... a long, slow walk. He never did repair the side door. He kept the dent to remind him not to go through life so fast that someone has to throw a brick at you to get your attention.

Today our gospel tells of a boy listening, and asking questions.

Children and young people still listen, and ask questions.

Let us resolve to pay attention, knowing that each one is a child of God.