

**The Clues To His Destiny**  
**Holy Family, Year C**  
**1 John 3: 1-2, 21-24 – Luke 2: 41-52**  
**27 December 2009**

For people who love biographical details and human interest stories the gospels can be a frustrating read. They focus relentlessly on only those details of Jesus life that have something to tell us about his mission and ministry. Two of the gospels don't even bother to tell us anything about his early life. Thank God for Luke without whom the creators of Christmas pageants, Christingle Services, Jesse Trees, and children and animal Christmas Services would be lost.

But it turns out that according to those well known spoil sports, the biblical critics, this interest in Jesus early life only came later in the Christian community, which is why Luke is left scrambling to come up with some material to fill in the bridging period between birth and baptism. He has done quite well to recover the details of how Jesus came to be conceived, and that heart-warming account of how he came to be born. But the only reliable material he is able to lay his hands on about what comes next is this most unusual incident from late childhood, what you might call a precocious adolescence story. Then that is it – nothing more for nearly two decades until Jesus turns up at the Jordan to be baptised.

No doubt preachers all over the Christian world today will be focusing on the lost child motif in this story, the paralysing anxiety caused to the parents by Jesus abrupt disappearance, and their astonishment at seeing him in the thick of a question and answer session with the doctors of the law. Who could doubt that Mary and Joseph have every reason to be upset at being put through one of the nightmare experiences of parenthood, but do they do well to be surprised at this intellectual sparring session they have just witnessed between their son and some local theologians? And when he justifies his staying on decision by saying that he must be about his Father's business – can that be a total surprise as an explanation of what he has been up to?

Let's remember that they have been given plenty of clues about whom they are dealing with in this remarkable child who has come to share their life together. The angel Gabriel couldn't have been clearer about the name he was to be given, and about the destiny in store for him. Elizabeth spelt it out in further detail in that canticle of praise she gave voice to when Mary came to stay with her. The Shepherds repeated to Mary and Joseph what they had just heard from the angels about the big things in store for their son. And when Jesus is presented in the Temple, Simeon and Anna give his parents a very helpful heads up about what is going to happen in the life of their boy. So Mary and Joseph have been given plenty of information by some

unforgettable people in some memorable encounters about what to expect next.

Perhaps the twelve years that followed lulled them into a forgetful sense of complacency? Perhaps the day after day rhythm of normal living in that remote northern town in Galilee gave the impression that there was time in hand before anything dramatic got under way? Or was it that like us they stopped looking for a while to the further clues as to the true destiny of the person they were sharing their life with?

In her book “the Disciplined Heart” Caroline Simon argues that human beings have a natural bent for fantasy making, particularly when it comes to the way we think life will go with people we say we love. Our imagination runs riot when we think how things will be with people we have taken a shine to. She is thinking mostly about people we fall in love with, or who we marry, but her theory works well too with our children, in whom we almost always invest a lot of emotional freight.

These imaginative projections say more about what we hope to gain out of such relationships than about the actual reality of the people we are dealing with. Such wish filled fantasies prevent us seeing the people we live with straight on – they are a counterfeit of love.

Christians are called to a different style of loving, she argues. For us the challenge is to see what God has in mind for this person to become. What their destiny is in God’s eyes – who they are supposed to be growing in to as God’s purposes unfold for them through the operation of Divine grace. If we truly love someone then we will have the insight to see something of his or her Christian destiny. We will have attended to them with sufficient clarity and empathic interest to read the clues as to what God intends for them. And what we love about them will be what God wants for them, rather than our selfish desire to bend them to our agendas. We will be very interested in where God wants to carry them to, and we will want to share that journey with them, believing also that they are interested in furthering our God intended destiny.

And this is the great service that we can render each other – to show the person we love something of God’s deep desire for them, in a way that it may be difficult for them to see about themselves. For often we are blind as to the direction that God wants our lives to go in. Human beings can be very self-deceiving. As self-knowledge grows we can come to see what Richard Niebuhr meant when he wrote, “the self we love is not the self God loves.” The outside vantage point of being seen for what we are and who we are becoming by someone who has our best interests at heart is what gets us out of this blind spot.

I have called this sermon, “the clues to his destiny.” Mary and Joseph have just had a wake up call as to who they are dealing with in their eldest child. Their memories have been jolted as to what was said about him by God’s messengers. They have come back in to focus as to the destiny of that special boy in God’s plans for his people. Now Mary and Joseph can get on with parenting him in an appropriate and useful way, in which they wont try to cling to him and hold him back from what his destiny has in store for him.

Can we do that for one another? Can we read the clues, and sense the pattern of God given developments for the people we are close to, and want that to happen for them, even if it means behaving in selfless ways at times? In a sense that is the direction that all our Christian relationships are heading in anyway:

Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

Earthly family – Church family – Heavenly family – these are the progressive steps, the ascending schools of civility that we pass through so that we are ready, willing and able to find our place and space in the most satisfying family of them all.

At present we are passing through a series of air locks, or canal locks, called earthly family – church family – then heavenly family. We are helping each other make these transitions by sensing and supporting one another’s Christian destinies, as we read the clues as to who they are going to become, and help them to make that happen.