

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air
Epiphany I
January 9, 2022
rmcneely+

And all that heard Him were astonished
At His understanding and answers.

I was a young man before the manner in which the Gospels
Had been put together finally hit me.
And with my discovery,
I decided the dusty old men who put the prayer book together
might just have known what they were doing
and it might be a good idea for me to pay some attention.
It didn't occur to me that everyone else
had made the same discovery much earlier in their lives.
I have always been grateful that I did not boast
of my new discovery
to Father Morse who was the parish priest at the time,
or to my Grandmother who helped bring me to God.

You see, after reading and hearing the Gospels for a decade or so
It finally hit me that beginning on Christmas Eve
And ending on the day of Ascension
In the first half of the Christian year
The Gospels were selected and arranged
To re-tell the story of the earthly life of Jesus
From beginning to end.

So far this ecclesiastical year we have celebrated
His birth,
his circumcision and naming,
the visit of the Magi
his escape to Egypt
and exodus to Nazareth

Today we consider the only Biblical account of His youth
In the interesting and intimate account
of one of the Holy Family's
annual Passover journeys
to the Temple in Jerusalem.

I can never read this story without recalling the words
Of Archbishop Provence, when he taught the story
In the St Thomas Bible Discussion Group
He introduced the broad outline of the journey to Jerusalem
And then he said:
How could Joseph and Mary ever explain it to God?
Uh, God: we lost your Kid.

I should first dispel the notion that Joseph and Mary were at fault
or in some way less than ideal parents in this mishap.

We need to travel back to Galilee and Judea in the time the Holy
Family:

The Passover journey to Jerusalem took place every year

At the same time of the moon

And devout Jews made the trip every year.

So there were annual re-acquaintances and reunions along the way

As more and more people joined the throng.

The men lead the way and tried to restrain their pace so as not to
be separated from the women and children by too great a distance.

The women brought up the rear with the little children

And the older kids were corralled in between.

As the journey progressed, the group swelled as more and more
people stepping in.

They numbered in the thousands.

And pretty soon it was a great distance between the front and the back of the group.

They all met up at the evening campsite to enjoy a meal
And good friendships, perhaps some singing
And story telling around the campfire.

That is when parents were often reunited with their children.

Now 12 year olds then just as 12 year olds now

Were an independent lot.

And while the kids felt they were free to do as they pleased
They were well supervised by thousands of parents

Even if they were not their own parents

And were safely guided along the way.

And so it happened on the return journey

That Jesus was not missed.

On the first or second night.

But on the third, Joseph and Mary became worried

And worked their way through the crowd looking for Jesus

All the way back to Jerusalem and the Temple.

And here is where things get interesting and where the focus of the story takes us.

I know the relief that Joseph and Mary must have felt when they found him

I once lost my precious little boy at the Napa County Fair
And when I found him eating an ice cream cone in the lap
Of a police officer at the temporary headquarters

I was relieved and elated to no end.

So here was Jesus,

This 12 year old boy
 Sitting among the elders,
 The scribes
 The scholars, the doctors, the equivalent of our Ph.Ds.
 The teachers
 And He had them spell bound.
 “Astonished” is the word that Luke uses.

It was not only his youth
 But His limited opportunity of experience
 in the backward village of Nazareth.
 His knowledge was obviously vast
 But He had no formal education
 Had not studied for years at the rabbinical school of
 Hillel or Shammai as they had.

Yet, He was their superior in knowledge and understanding.

Who was this young man?
 And how had He come to such a position of mastery?

The question hangs in the air for us to contemplate.

Jesus’ divine nature comes to mind as a possible answer.
 One of the insoluble mysteries of the Church is that Jesus
 Was fully Divine
 And fully Human
 At the same time.

The Natures were indivisible
 And completely separate, that is; not melded together

Jesus’ wisdom and knowledge as observed by
 The doctors of the Temple

Could therefore have been the product of his birth
 And His Divine Nature.
 Was it possible that He was born with all that
 And as His human nature matured
 He could express it?
 Or did He maintain close contact with His Father
 And over His first 12 years, was tutored?

 Or was God and the Holy Ghost speaking through Him
 For the three days that He held their rapt attention?

Whatever the answer, the question for us as we follow the
 Epiphany of Our Lord;
 His manifestation to the world is:
 “How does Luke’s account of these events
 Edify us and our search for Jesus?”

I can’t speak for the other Christian denominations
 But for us,
 The Anglican expression of Christianity
 We cannot get very far before there is some study to do.

Without the foundation of the
 History
 The scripture
 The liturgy
 The rich symbolism of the communion service
 Its colors
 Its gestures
 Its sounds and bells
 Its vestments
 Its statuary, even the crucifix
 Without a knowledge and understanding

We are just a silly group of mindless, irrelevant inebriates
 Bobbing up and down in the pews.
 It is the major hurdle in welcoming people to the Church.
 They arrive by the Grace of God
 They are warmly welcomed
 But they are soon lost
 When they encounter the complexity and depth
 Of Anglican thought.

Few people today,
 unfortunately and especially our youth
 are capable and willing to devote the effort it takes
 to gain the understanding and knowledge
 that makes Anglicanism so richly rewarding.

Our lives are increasingly plagued with the expectancy
 Of immediate gratification.
 In almost every facet of our lives there is an almost instant reward
 that is far greater than the effort it took to achieve it.

Just consider for a moment what it takes to gain
 the answer of almost any question,
 mathematical calculation,
 historical fact
 Cultural trivia
 or literary reference.

Isn't it common in a group of people
 when someone asks an innocent question
 And everyone dives for their phones
 In the competition to see who can get the answer first?

With the click of a few buttons, the answer is in hand.

Almost no effort for a complete reward.
 Obtained in a fraction of a minute.

Is it any wonder that people come to us with similar expectation
 And leave with a glazed over look in their eyes
 when they get an answer that takes a 10 minute explanation?
 Never to be seen or heard from again.

The Anglican expression is said to be like unto a three-legged stool
 And founded and strengthened by
 Scripture,
 Tradition and reason.

When any leg is weakened or missing
 The stool and the disciple, postulant, student or aspirant
 Who sits upon it,
 Collapses and finds him or herself on the floor.

So as Jesus demonstrated for three days with the doctors of the
 Temple
 There is much to learn
 Much to study
 A lifetime of learning in fact,
 If we are to meet Him in this or the next life.

And without that foundation and understanding in
 scripture,
 tradition
 and reason
 We cannot live our lives with much hope
 That the meeting with Our Lord
 Will be fruitful.

It is a lengthy and arduous process

We begin it here at St Thomas with Sunday School for the kids
If all goes well

 It continues with the education necessary for confirmation
It continues with the Bible Discussion Group
And is nourished every week right here
 Solid scripture reading
 Sermons steeped in doctrine and reason (at least some of the
time)
 Even the music reflects the history, theology and grace
 Of Anglican thought and practice.

Soon we will have the benefit of the James E. Provence Library
 And be able to borrow his books
 That have been carefully assembled over 30 years.
It contains the classics of Christian education:
 The fundamental building blocks of Christianity.

We meet Jesus at the altar every week
 How are we to recognize Him if we don't know Him?
 How are we to know Him
 if we don't spend the time and effort to understand?

