

Epiphany 1 (10th January) 2021

10 th January Baptism of Christ Epiphany 1	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Genesis 1 vv 1-5 p3 Acts 19 vv 1-7 p115 Mark 1 vv 1-11 p1002
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OLORD, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

So, what happened after Christmas? I don't mean we ate up the leftovers, put away the decorations and went back to normal. That last thought – going back to normal – is a bit iffy this year anyway. What I mean is what happened in the life of Jesus after that first Christmas? After the wise men left, warned by an angel in a dream, Joseph took the Holy Family to Egypt in order to keep them out of Herod's way. Sometime later, we read, the angel again appeared to him in a dream to tell him that Herod was dead and that it was safe to return to the land of Israel. Warned not to go back to Bethlehem in Judaea, which was now ruled by Herod's son, Archelaus, Joseph took the family back to Nazareth, where presumably, he returned to his work as a carpenter and brought Jesus up in the same trade. There were quite a lot of other children in the household described as Jesus' brothers and sisters, though exactly what their relationship to Jesus was is debated. As Joseph is never mentioned as being alive after Jesus was twelve, the assumption is that Joseph died when Jesus was quite a young man (or boy even) and the implication of what the people of Nazareth said when Jesus began to preach in their synagogue is that Jesus Himself for a time took on the family business, possibly providing for Mary and the other children. Mark 6^{1ff}: *And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him. And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.*

The first thing we read about Jesus as a grown man is the story in today's Gospel. It is an episode which is recorded in all the four Gospels in the New Testament. It is that important, the Baptism of Christ. I'll come back to it, but first I want to talk about the only other incident recorded regarding our Lord's childhood to be found in the canonical Gospels. There are other stories in other ancient texts, but they are neither probable nor enlightening. The story I'm referring to is in at the end of chapter 2 of S Luke's Gospel, when Joseph and Mary took the twelve year old Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to keep the Passover. This is the Gospel reading for today in the Book of Common Prayer.

Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem every year for the great feast, but this was probably the first time they had taken Jesus. As the crow flies, the distance is about sixty miles, but much longer by road. A fit person with a light pack could probably do it in three days. The terrain is quite rugged, however, and Mary and Joseph travelled in a group with other members of their extended family and probably other people from Nazareth as well. The group would travel at the pace of its slowest members. They would also have been carrying what they

needed to camp on the way. So, say, they took several days over the journey. It must have been very exciting, all the more so when they arrived in the Holy City. Millions of people from all over the Eastern Mediterranean congregated in Jerusalem annually for the Passover. The city was impressively walled and included many fine buildings. Most awesome of all was the Temple. Herod was a dreadful human being but a very fine builder and he had effectively rebuilt the old Jerusalem Temple (while the daily rituals still continued) put up by the returning exiles from Babylon five hundred years previously on a much greater and more magnificent scale. For the Jewish people, there are so many wonderful historical and religious associations with Jerusalem. The annual pilgrimage must have been a wonderful experience for Joseph and Mary and all the millions of Jews who had come up to Jerusalem from Israel itself and from the Diaspora in pagan lands. Coming back to Luke's account of this year's trip, the group from Nazareth kept the Passover, eight days including the days of Unleavened Bread, packed up and set off on the long journey homeward. It was only when they stopped at the end of the first day's journey that they missed Jesus. I'm sure you can imagine how Mary & Joseph felt. Tired and terrified, they returned to Jerusalem. It was three days before they found their Son in the Temple talking with the teachers of the Law. Unsurprisingly, Mary gave Jesus a piece of her mind! And He, a twelve year old boy at the time, replied, *How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my father's business?* Or it could be translated, *Didn't you know I would be in my father's house?*

So, what do you think? Should Jesus have stayed behind in Jerusalem and gone to the Temple causing all that worry for Mary and Joseph? I suspect that a lot of people would say that He was wrong on this occasion, that He shouldn't have worried His parents, perhaps effectively disobeying them. *Honour thy father and thy mother* is one of the Ten Commandments. I would, however, be very uneasy about saying that the Son of God was wrong in anything He did or said. It is one of our fundamental beliefs as Christians that Christ was without sin. He must, surely, have had a good reason for staying in the Temple even though it caused so much stress to Mary and to the man who brought Him up.

O LORD, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, we prayed in the collect. It's very often difficult for us *both to perceive and know what things we ought to do*. I remember a churchwarden who told me how much this prayer meant to her - *that we may both perceive and know what things we ought to do*. We can't go onto the other part of the prayer if we don't: *and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same*. And surely that is our absolute desire as Christians, that we might do God's Will in our lives, *that we may both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same*. We pray for God's grace both to perceive what He wants us to do in our lives, what He wants us to do in every situation and in all the circumstances of our lives, and actually to do what we perceive to be what He wants us to. We can only know what we ought to and we can only do what we ought to do by the grace of God. And that brings me back to the Baptism story. We are baptised into Christ. We are the sons and daughters of God. The Holy Spirit is His gift to us. It is in contemplation, in prayer and Sacrament, in Christian fellowship and in prayerfully attending to the Word of God that we *both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also receive grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same*.