

'A revealing childhood'

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ

When the appointed time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman. – Gal.4,4

Collect:

Almighty God, who have shed upon us the new light of your incarnate Word.

Grant that this light, enkindled in our hearts, may shine forth in our lives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

The light of Christ

*The light of Christ
has come into the world;
the light of Christ
has come into the world.*

1 All men must be born again
to see the kingdom of God;
the water and the Spirit
bring new life in God's love.
The light of Christ . . .

2 God gave up His only Son
out of love for the world,
so that all men who believe in Him
will live for ever.
The light of Christ . . .

3 The light of God has come to us
so that we might have salvation;
from the darkness of our sins
we walk into glory with Christ Jesus.
The light of Christ . . .

Words and music by Donald Fishel

Reading: **Lk.2,41-52**

Dear friends

Only 2 days ago we sang in our Christmas Eve Service the words: "Silent night, holy night! Shepherds first saw the light, heard resounding clear and long, far and near, the angel-song: 'Christ the Redeemer is here, Christ the Redeemer is here.'"

Here in the story of the 12-year old Jesus we glimpse something of the redeemer he is going to be and of his redeeming work. Of the 4 Gospel writers only Luke tells us of this episode in Jesus' life. The others relate the truth and way of our redemption through Jesus Christ in its actual development as it unfolds in the ministry of Jesus which begins with his baptism. Of course Luke

does that too, but before he comes to the particulars of Jesus' ministry he relates this event from Jesus' childhood so as to add yet more context in order to improve our chances, as far as it lies in his power, to really understand and come to know who Jesus is and what he has come to do. [In a time where truth is often treated as though it were all make-belief and a matter of personal choice, should we not appreciate the intention to ensure that none of it should be lost to us and that we should not be lost to it?] It is, then, the idea of the Christ-Redeemer and the redemption he brings that shall guide our thoughts as we ponder this passage.

Now, one of the central agents in this story is not very obvious, especially perhaps not to our times. But that says nothing about its importance, in fact it is pivotal for the redemption of humanity. I'm talking about the law. Actually, none of it would have happened if it hadn't been for the law. It's there in the occasion of the event. It is in accordance with the law that Mary and Joseph go up to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover, and the 12-year-old Jesus is there because he is now responsible before the law and sufficiently mature to be subject to it.

The thing to note here is this: that the Son of God came and was made subject to the law. That is what it meant for the Son of God to become man, to take the form of our humanity, for the Word to become flesh (Jn.1,14). Only under the law was he truly like us, only under the law was he truly in our place, only under the law was he truly where we are. That is why we hear of Jesus learning about the law and asking questions about it in the temple, and why the passage closes with the words, *'And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.'* He is spoken of here not in his divinity, but in his humanity, which he shares with us and which we therefore can share with him.

Paul captures all this clearly when he says in Gal.4,4: *'But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.'*

"To redeem those under the law" – this is what is hinted at in this childhood episode, namely that this is Jesus' office, his job.

In the words of the 12-year-old boy to his parents, *'Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house?'* he is also pointing to the way that lies before him, which will lead him to the cross and which has this "I must" about it, beginning to end. *'I had to be in my Father's house'* – why? *'Because it is my task to redeem those who are under the law.'*

But what of the law (and we are speaking of the law of God, known in our hearts and consciences, if not in our memory from our education and upbringing) and *being under it?*

In the story there is the moment of realising that *something is wrong* and of realising *what is wrong*: Jesus cannot be found among them. "Is he not with you?!" "No, he is not; I thought he was with you!" And they need to turn around in search for what they lost.

This is a story which paints in outlines almost too faint to see a very profound truth before us of the way and need of redemption: That we are under the law becomes clear in our realising that something is wrong and what is wrong: that we cannot find our humanity, that we have lost it.

It is the law of God, is it not, that points out what is wrong and opens our eyes to it. And when it does we know that we are under it, that it accuses and condemns us, that ours is a lost humanity.

Now I guess that we can all see the connexion between the accusing and condemning law and the realisation that something is wrong. But there will be, and there are, those who will point out: Look, if it wasn't for the law, this would not have happened, had they not gone to Jerusalem, they would not have lost Jesus. So, should it not be argued that there's more chance for humanity if we are less

concerned with God's law? This is indeed how many think and therefore avoid connecting the fact that something is wrong with God's law and hence with sin (the transgression of it).

But let us be careful not to forfeit the redemption Christ brings by following this argument. The law did not cause Mary and Joseph to lose Jesus, if it had, guilt would rightly belong to the law. It was not the cause, but it was what? It was the occasion for the cause to seize upon!

And this is the heart of the problem that Christ the Redeemer has come to answer: The law of God provides the occasion for sin to seize upon it and do wrong; it does not cause sin, but it results in a humanity under the law, accused and condemned, lost and locked into its sin.

Mary and Joseph do the right thing. Going in search of what they lost, they turn! (think: the joy in heaven over one sinner who repents!). They find it in what Jesus calls *'the house of my Father'*, the temple, where he is because he wants what the law wants, because what he is about is fulfilling the law. *'Why were you searching for me?'* he replies to his mother when she rebukes him. And in these searching words lies the following reasoning: "I am not the one who is lost, being here in my Father's house I am not the lost one; I am not the one accused and condemned by the law, because I seek what is my Father's; and what is the law but the occasion to do my Father's will? As should be the case for all. If you knew that, truly knew that, you would have known that I must be *here*. It was always going to be here, *in my Father's house*, that you were going to find what you lost."

Dear friends, this story, like an artistic study of what will turn into a magnificent painting, indicates what is to come. Jesus will restore to all who come to him their lost humanity, redeeming their lives from sin and death, by taking from them the condemnation of the law (fulfilling and satisfying its demand by dying for the sins of the world) and through making a way for sinners to dwell in the house of God – *'to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'*, says the risen Jesus to his disciples whom he calls *my brothers* as he ascends into heaven! (Jn.20,17) – in love for his law and in fellowship with Him and all who are his.

'Did you not know, that I had to be in my Father's house?' the 12-year-old Jesus asks his parents. And should we not know, all the more so because Jesus has finished his task of our redemption, that what Jesus came to do was to return us to the love of our Father, to life with Him and in Him, to obedience to His will as His children, to give us victory over sin and death, fear and despair, to restore humanity in his image. Should we not know that that is just what he has done and that faith knows and shall see it? AMEN

Lord God, You made Your Son who knew no sin to be sin for us, a man under the law like us, to carry not his own but our condemnation, so that in him we might become Your righteousness, might receive what we have lost. You let him be taken by the sins of the world and by death, so that by his resurrection we might receive his life, and the purity of his service to You might transform ours. So in love You opened Your arms wide towards Your world in mercy and grace to bring us home to Yourself. The name of Jesus is synonymous with joy, peace, hope and love, grace, new beginning, eternal life – give it a ready welcome in our hearts where it may put to an end our fears, our unbelief, our selfish ways, and Christ may reign to the praise and glory of Your name. Amen

- time of prayer / intercession – [what concerns we have on our heart we pour out before God and seek in thanksgiving the gifts of His blessings;]
we give thanks to God, and praise His holy name, for the blessings He poured out in the coming of Christ, which are recounted at Christmas all over the world; we pray that by receiving him we may grow in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man; that His joy may come to take residence in our heart such that our mouth overflows with the telling of the good news to others; then we plead for the lost, the broken, the sick, the lonely, the abandoned, the persecuted, the suffering...; we think of the Philippines, Afghanistan, Madagascar, of places and hearts that are home to violence and hatred, persecution and oppression, extortion and exploitation;
we pray for a resolution to the migrant crisis on our borders and elsewhere, for a mitigation of the tensions between nations that might lead to war, for diplomatic efforts to bring peace to areas of conflict, for the victims of famine and of war;
we pray for our friends, brothers and sisters in Siliguri; for boldness in the church in its task to serve God, for a pure heart and renewed resolve to obey his will; for upholding the church in the witness to the love of God;
we think of the victims and the ongoing trouble of the pandemic in our country and around the world and pray for those who care for the ill and for those tasked with keeping the people safe and for faith and courage...;
we pray for the authorities and those in leadership, for respect for the rule of law, for our communities and those who serve its welfare;
we thank God for His guiding and keeping, for all the ways in which we discern his helping hand;
we pray:]

'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen

Look forward in hope to the coming of your Saviour, prepare the way for Christ your Lord; welcome him with love and faith when he comes in glory.

And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you. AMEN
