

# *how can this be?*

a sermon preached on

## *Christmas 1*

27 December 2015

at

### *st john's*

ANGLICAN CHURCH CAMBERWELL

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the lections: 1 Samuel 2: 18-20, 26; Psalm 148; Colossians 3: 12-17; Luke 2: 41-52

Today is the first Sunday after Christmas as well as the last Sunday for this year 2015.

In this gospel of Luke, Jesus was twelve years old. Joseph, Mary and Jesus went to the town of Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Passover at the beginning of the Jewish year. This annual visit was a custom for the family. We are not sure if this was the first trip or not for Jesus with the family to Jerusalem. The gospel of Luke simply mentioned that Jesus went with them at this time.

In this story, Joseph and Mary may have either travelled separately or may have assumed that Jesus travelled with relatives. Only at the end of the first day of travel, when all would have come together for the night did the parents realise that there was a problem. The parents returned and Jesus remained behind without their knowledge. The Gospel of Luke noted how the parents reacted to Jesus' absence. They headed back to the temple to look for him. They anxiously searched for the missing child.

We can feel the worry of Mary & Joseph, can't we? Missing their child.

Even when we have lost our pet we can be concerned, stressed, fearful, distressed, nervous or uptight. We will do almost anything we can to find our pet, let alone missing a child.

After three days of searching, Mary and Joseph finally found Jesus in the temple, sitting at the feet of the teachers. This is the only account in Luke where Jesus takes instruction from Jewish teachers. Jesus is portrayed as a boy who is eager to learn and discuss spiritual questions. Their discovery of Jesus leads the parents to complain but which at the same time they are amazed to see Jesus talking with the temple teachers.

Mary speaking on behalf of Joseph and herself wants to know why Jesus had done such an insensitive thing. Jesus' reply represents his first statement in the Gospel. He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' This statement reveals Jesus' sense of priority. The way in which Jesus asks his question is really designed to make a statement, such as "do you not know" and "you should have known where I was". The remarks are significant as Jesus' first words in the Gospel.

The story in the gospel of Luke that we have just heard is part of Joseph and Mary's faith journey.

In another story in the Bible, the angel said to Mary, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be?' The angel said, 'for nothing will be impossible with God'.

The faith journey of Mary and Joseph then continued when Joseph find out that Mary was found to be with a child from the Holy Spirit. Joseph planned to dismiss her quietly. Then the angel appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take

Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus.' When Joseph awoke from his sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife.

The faith journey of Mary and Joseph continued when Jesus was born. The Angel said, 'I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.' The angel was joined by a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God.

The faith journey of Mary and Joseph again continued when an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod.

Mary and Joseph's Faith journey continued as we read the Gospel today. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

Mary said to Jesus, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'

The faith journey for Mary and Joseph is not static. It is a journey. It is a process.

Mary and Joseph's faith journey, beginning from the pregnancy until this Gospel when Jesus was twelve years of age, has changed.

The faith journey should not be static. Our prayer book is changing. The face of the Anglican Church is changing. More and more ethnic multicultural groups are joining the Anglican Church.

Our faith journey should not be fixed. It can be confronting, for example if we find that a piece of furniture is missing in Church, it may feel like missing a child.

When an iconic part in the Church disappears, it can make people anxious. Uncomfortable. They may begin asking questions like, 'where is it now?' We may feel like a part of us is missing.

The faith journey can be overwhelming. When we were in the journey of the 'Spring Series' this year we had services differently. The chairs were set up in a circle and the altar was in the middle. The services were conducted in different locations including the Rutherford Room. It made people very surprised. Quite like Mary, we began questioning: 'Why? How can this be?'

Our faith journeys are different from one another. Our parish will have a different journey compared with other parishes. The journey of the Diocese of Melbourne will be different compared with the Diocese of Sydney.

A part of the faith journey can involve finding the Almighty. For Mary and Joseph it took three days to find Jesus. For us to find Jesus it may take months or years. It may even take our entire lives to search for him.

Our faith journey will end in four days' time for this year. We will continue in 2016. Let us make our journey be an interesting one.