

I am an enthusiastic listener to MPR classical public radio. Through most of Advent they played Christmas music. We hadn't started singing carols here in church, since that is not our time for it. Now, however, we are in the season of Christmastide, robustly singing its noels here. But MPR has abandoned me. They, like the rest of the world, think that the season is over, and have turned their attention to the coming New Year's Eve, and a stream of Strauss Waltzes.

That's ok as far as it goes, but I'm not really ready to be done with the twelve days Christmas – we're only up to nine ladies dancing. So let me raise a seasonal question with you. Did you receive what you had expected or longed for this Christmas? It may well be easier for the children among us to say how their expectations were met or not. That may depend on how many of the hoped-for gifts are still functioning and how many are broken. For us more elderly sorts, we probably think of Christmas more in terms of how it used to be, or how we wish it could be again, nostalgic memories that haunt us with longing.

My early childhood is bright with memories of Christmas trees decked out in bubble lights and tinsel. In my elementary years much of my focus was on the Sears catalogue, my sisters and I turning the pages over and over through such delights as ovens that really bake (my sister) or sets of Lincoln Logs (me). Christmas Eve we would walk the three blocks to the church where we would sing carols and receive little rectangular boxes of hard candy.

But if we could admit to our wishes to re-experience those days of long ago for our ideal Christmas, we would probably have trouble explaining how the memories fit with today's Gospel lesson. The scripture readings I remember from the past were either about shepherds and angels, or wisemen from the east. I have absolutely no memory from the long past of ever hearing this story from Luke. Which is probably appropriate, since Jesus is not about the past, but about the future, the road toward the next and new places in our lives.

This is the problem that Mary and Joseph had in this morning's lesson. The family had gone down to Jerusalem with many or their

neighbors, as they did every year for the Passover. It was a settled tradition. Likewise, it was a tradition that families and children mixed back and forth through much of the trip down and back. So it was not until the end of the first day's journey home that the parents began in a serious way to look for their son.

But Jesus was not to be found among the whole company, and it was time to be worried. Where could this twelve-year old have gotten to? Time to go back and scour the city of Jerusalem, filled with anxiety over what terrible thing could have happened. For three days Mary and Joseph looked everywhere they could imagine, without results. Finally, they looked in the temple, and there was their son, sitting with the learned teachers of the Law, asking questions and responding to the answers, totally absorbed in the words God had given.

I'm willing to bet that Mary's tone of voice when she addressed her son was not calm. "What have you been doing here, worrying your poor parents to death, while we looked everywhere to find you? I have more gray hairs than ever before, while you seem to be pleasing yourself." But Jesus' reply was simple - "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

I doubt if his parents were helped by this. He both rejected their need to find him, and at the same time attributed the role of parent to God, not them. Well, at least they had finished their frantic search, even if they didn't really understand him. And he was obedient in that he returned home with them, living there for almost another 20 years.

All that time this matter was added to the list of things that Mary pondered in her heart. Ever since Gabriel had brought her news of God's will that she carry his son into the world, things had been a whirlwind of the unpredictable – her elderly cousin pregnant in old age, a hard journey to a place where she would have minimal shelter to give birth, shepherds coming to the stable with words from a host of angels. And now this. Whatever the hardships of pregnancy, at least when your children are newborns, you know where they are and you can carry them to where you want them to be.

Perhaps that is why Mary and Joseph had expected to find Jesus in the places where he had always been; but something new had replaced those expectations. It is no wonder if Mary's list of things to ponder was longer yet. Are we, too, willing to seek Jesus, not where we expect him to be, but going ahead of us into the future? Are we prepared to do some serious reflection on who Jesus is for us, and who he is calling us to be?

This kind of reflection is meant to take us beyond the beautiful, or cute, or engaging stories of the season with which we are so familiar. It will carry us to ministry and healing, to arrest and crucifixion, to resurrection and the kingdom. See the pain that may well come with pondering. But we desperately need this kind of deeper connection to what Jesus brings us, so that we do not remain trapped in the quicksand of our culture's constant messaging about what is important.

As Episcopal priest Rick Morley says, "The reality of Jesus is about connecting ourselves to God, and severing the connections to our own stuff, our own ego, our own ravenous appetites and desires. This is so foreign to our spiritual experience, but it is foundational to the Christian faith that Jesus taught. To reclaim this teaching without recoiling (or walking away sad) is part of our pilgrimage, walking in the footsteps of Jesus and his first followers. I know that I need to hear these words of Jesus far more, and far more deeply, than I need to hear the words of another commercial telling me that my life won't be complete without yet another 'magical and revolutionary device,' be it a phone, i-Pad, or Instant Cooker."

While we flounder through the list of possessions or experiences we might like to have, we often finish Christmastide with a bit of an empty feeling. Now we need to wrestle with Jesus saying to us, as he did to Mary and Joseph, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know I must be about my Father's business? It is your business too; you need to walk into the future with me. That is where you will find the true, great gifts of community, compassion, and the fulness of salvation. That is the road that will bring you home."

