

Having Christmas on a Wednesday as we did this year means we have nearly a half week to “get over” Christmas before the next regular Sun worship service.

And so the world moved on in a week, who else but the poor old Christian church has even the slightest interest in such a tired concept as Christmas any more.

So that’s what we are on about today, sticking with the season of Christmas – the 12 days of Christmas, while everyone else has well and truly moved onto some other distraction.

Some of the commentators are a bit harsh on Mary and Joseph – a hint of indignation at the irresponsible parents who could leave Jerusalem and not know where their lad was. And then travel further without checking up on him.

I am slow in my criticism of them as I once had a sobering, if not humiliating experience of searching for my daughter. Not even that she was lost exactly; I just did not know where to look. I had gone to pick her up from a friend’s house where she had gone after school. She was about 12 - same age as Jesus and we were living in St Kilda and this house I had to pick her up from was in Brighton. My wife asked are you going to get Claire? Yeah no worries I dutifully replied, what’s the address I asked heading out the door as I had not been to this house before. Right 49 Howard St, I repeated. Halfway there; I check I can still remember the address. 94 Howard St, Brighton. No problem

Pulling up outside 94 Howard St I started to have doubts. This is the age before mobiles so I can’t ring to check. Hmm, looks the sort of house where a 12 year old girl could live. Umm it was 94 Howard St wasn’t it. Not 94 Menzies St. Oh well only one way to deal with this; so I stroll up to the door and knock. Ah excuse me, my daughter isn’t here is she? Person looks at me as if I am a weirdo. No... I don’t think so. I feel obliged to begin an explanation of why I am at the front door asking this but the person did not seem all that interested in hearing my story.

Ah at least I have got it down to no 49, but no answer at all at the door. So have they gone to a shop or a park or am I at the wrong house. I go to number 51 and knock and ask if there is a 12 year old girl living at 49. In hindsight I was probably lucky the woman there did not immediately call the police to report the middle aged guy prowling her street looking for 12 year old girls. Anyway this bizarre game of treasure hunt went on for a few more houses before someone was able to point me in the right direction of 29 Howard St.

Today's story is the only thing we know of Jesus' formative years and that has to be a disappointment for us moderns who try to understand the development of the individual through the influence of early years.

Today's story is about the young Jesus becoming separated from his parents and discovered by the frantic parents (word used to describe Mary's anguish is the same one for the torment the rich man in hades who in his lifetime ignored poor Lazarus at his front gate. (Strong stuff!)) Jesus is found in the temple, disputing, arguing, challenging, teaching even, the elders and scholars. Quite the usual thing for rabbinic discourse.

We are increasingly aware of the importance of early influences upon the individual. We would love to know for instance – how did it affect Jesus when he was first told Joseph was not really his father (who told him, how old was he?) whether Mary and Joseph ever told him the story of the flight into Egypt and all those poor little boy babies who lost their lives cos Jesus was born. I am being a tad flippant, not because those questions can't be asked, but because I don't think those sorts of questions can be asked of the gospels. They are our concerns but they were not to the forefront of Luke's purpose in including the story of Jesus in the temple.

Luke is the gospel that includes the parables of being lost and found. Lost sheep, Lost son, lost coin, and it is here... the lost Messiah. It's a tough thing losing someone; perhaps worse is to lose yourself. There is that nice interplay in today's story, although I do think we have to be careful in bringing our modern sense of the individual into today's story – but given that qualification there is this thing going on that while Mary and Joseph are hunting for Jesus all the time the boy is on about discovering and acting upon who he has discovered himself to be.

At the age of Bar Mitzvah, the coming of age and transition to adulthood, Jesus says to his parents, "You do not yet know who I am? Did you not know I would be here in the temple; in my Father's house?" The critical point being of course that Mary has just told off Jesus "Son, why have you treated us this way? Your father and I were worried sick" Jesus sets that concern aside and places in the bigger context of identity and call and vocation. Identity remains a huge issue for each of us as we grown to maturity. Jesus identifies himself largely by and in his relationship with God. What of you?

Roman Catholic Church is using this Sunday and this story (along with the flight into Egypt story) as the texts for the Feast of the Holy Family and preaching sermons on the value of Christian Family Life. That is an important thing to do but it seems to be true to this text we must in the first place acknowledge, with Jesus, a prior call over family claims.

A prior call that in many families is not resolved and leads to tension, which is certainly implicit in this story. Even at the tender age of 12

years Jesus in strong terms says the ties of blood are not finally binding for he has a calling to which he must give himself. And the implication is at times this may not be in complete harmony with family ties. We must be very careful how we say and express that and it was an excruciating issue for early Christians as they saw families divided.

Certainly today story ends in family harmony as the tension is resolved by saying Mary heard the words of Jesus and kept these things in her heart thereby becoming part of the wider and primary family of God.

Following Jesus for people in 2024/25, as it meant for people in year 46, means that even our society's most sacred institutions and practices are thrown open to the challenges of discipleship.