

Christmas 2B (1/4/09 – *The Blessed One Increases in Wisdom, Stature, & Favor*)

Historically, today's Gospel was preached during *Epiphany* – which begins with our Divine Service on *The Feast of the Epiphany of Our Lord* this Tuesday. (And if you think that's an obvious hint to come out Tuesday at 7pm to celebrate one of the oldest of the Church Festivals ... you're right!) *Epiphany* is the season that focuses on the visual display of God's glory in the human body of Jesus. Other historic Gospels for *Epiphany* include the miracle at Cana, where Jesus turned water into wine [JN 2.1-12]; the cleansing of a leper and the restoration of a centurion's servant [MT 8.1-13]; the calming of the stormy sea [MT 8.23-27]; and the *Transfiguration of our Lord* [MT 17.1-9], when Jesus' *face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as light* [MT 17.2]. In each of these Gospels, some aspect of Jesus' divine nature is displayed for you, so that you may learn and know that this Child born of Mary is indeed *the Lord's Christ* [LK 2.26].

When today's Gospel gets preached in *Epiphany*, it is preached in such a way as to display Jesus' divinity for you, just like all the other *Epiphany* Gospels. For example, Luther preached that today's Gospel shows that Jesus "is not an ordinary but an extraordinary child, as He secretly withdraws from His parents and oversteps the discipline which all children owe their parents." Stated another way, Jesus displays His divine glory – His *Epiphany* glory – in today's Gospel by staying in His Father's house. By so doing, Jesus is showing that "He was not only His mother's son, but also her Lord and God" (Luther). Jesus stays behind in Jerusalem because He is answerable to a much higher authority than that of His parents. *And He said to them, "Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house?"* [LK 2.49]

That would make a fine sermon also for today, if today's Gospel had remained a Gospel for the season of *Epiphany*. That has changed with the newer series of readings we now follow. It is not yet *Epiphany*. Today we are still in the *Christmas Season*, on the *Second Sunday after Christmas*. Today's Gospel is no longer an *Epiphany* Gospel, but it has now become for us a *Christmas* Gospel.

*Epiphany* focuses on the revelation and display of God's glory in Christ. *Christmas* does not do that. *Christmas* focuses on God the Son's entry into our human flesh. Where *Epiphany* displays for us the divine nature of the human Christ, *Christmas* calls us to marvel at the fact that the divine would even bother to come and join to the human. *Epiphany* shows us that there is much more to Jesus than usually meets the eye. *Christmas* shows us that our God went into hiding, as it were, voluntarily containing Himself in our human likeness, hiding Himself within our human flesh, subjecting and enslaving Himself **to** us – **for** us.

Today's Gospel makes for a good *Christmas* Gospel, just as it makes for a good

*Epiphany* Gospel. If this Gospel in *Epiphany* declares that Jesus is an extraordinary Child (as Luther said), this Gospel during *Christmas* points us to the extraordinary thing that this extraordinary Child has done: He subjected Himself to His parents. ***He went down with them*** [from Jerusalem] ***and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.*** [LK 2.51]

Your Lord did not submit to His parents because they were greater than He. He is greater than they. Your Lord did not submit to them just because of the *Fourth Commandment*, which requires that we honor our father and our mother. Jesus is greater even than the obligation of the commandment. Jesus submitted Himself to Mary and Joseph for one reason. And that one reason can be stated in one word: **love** – love for Joseph ... love for Mary ... love for your neighbor ... and **love also for you**. Jesus ***came to Nazareth and was submissive to them*** because **He loves you**.

**Because He loves you**, Jesus is born of the Virgin Mary.

**Because He loves you**, Jesus submitted to circumcision and to all the worship forms of the Old Testament – that is the First Table of the Law ... love toward God. And Jesus took upon Himself the First Table of the Law when He was circumcised on the eighth day ... and when Simeon and Anna met Him in the temple (as we heard last Sunday) ... when He was presented to the Lord on the fortieth day.

**Because He loves you**, Jesus submits to His parents – that is the Second Table of the Law. And today Jesus takes up the Second Table for you. Today's Gospel shows you Jesus gladly stepping under and entering into and obeying the *Fourth Commandment* and with it every other commandment in the Second Table ... that have to do with love toward neighbor.

Jesus does this, not because He is **bound** by these commandments, but because **you** were once bound ... gagged ... imprisoned ... and condemned by these commandments. The God Who gave the Law today makes Himself less than the Law and answerable to it. In this Gospel, the God Who created Mary and Joseph makes Himself less than Mary and Joseph by voluntarily submitting to them. That is the essence of *Christmas*.

Think of what Jesus' humble love, displayed in today's Gospel, means for you ... for the way you think about yourself ... and for the way you treat your neighbor:

**First**, this wonderful *Christmas* Gospel shows you that there is no part of your life that is beneath your God's dignity. There is no part of your life that He considers unworthy of His presence and grace. Even those lowly days of your childhood – those days you were/are instructed by your parents and answerable to

them – even those days belong to this God Who subjects Himself to His parents **for you**. This is a beneficial Gospel for all of us, but especially for you who are still children and still under your parent's domination. Dear children, learn from this Gospel to obey your parents and to be subject to them, even when they require you to do things you do not like to do, such as washing dishes or taking out garbage. Even more than that, dear children, take comfort from this Gospel while you are doing those things your parents require. Think of your Lord Jesus while you are carrying out your tasks, and thank Him that He did all of these things **before** you because He *came to Nazareth and was submissive to them*.

**Secondly**, this Gospel also gives you a good reason to treat your neighbor kindly, and to faithfully keep the *Ten Commandments* because you love your neighbor. Because Jesus died and rose again, giving you forgiveness of all your sins – and because Jesus promises you your own resurrection from the dead and live everlasting – you are now *partakers in the divine nature* [2PT 1.4]. When you were baptized, you died to sin [ROM 6:6-11] and God's *Ten Commandments* now have no condemnation for you any more. Stated another way, because you have been joined to Christ, you **have already** – and **perfectly** – kept the *Commandments* ... because Christ obligated **Himself** to keep them **for you**.

Look at what Jesus does for you today. He Who is above the *Commandments* submits Himself to them in every way. Jesus does not do this because of necessity – except by the Divine necessity of His **love toward you**. Jesus keeps the *Commandments* for His neighbor's sake – **for your sake** – and not for His own sake.

You also, then – all of us – should carefully mark and strive to keep the same *Commandments* of God ... not out of necessity but out of love. You, like Jesus, have been lifted above the *Commandments*. You are no longer bound by the Law because your Lord Jesus Christ has set you from all sin, from death, and from the power of the Law. But look at this Gospel: Jesus *went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them*. In the same way, you also submit yourself to God's *Commandments* out of love and for your neighbor's sake. This *Christmas* Gospel shows you that Jesus obeyed His parents **because He loves you**. How much more shall you obey authority ... protect your neighbor's body and life and possessions ... limit your sexual activity to marriage ... and suppress your covetous desires?

A **third** benefit of today's *Christmas* Gospel is that it displays for you a Jesus Who does **all** things **for you**. Even more than doing **for you** what you **cannot** do, Jesus in today's Gospel does **for you** the things you do not even **want** to do. What child has ever loved his mother and father with a pure, unadulterated love? Only

this Child in today's Gospel! What son or daughter has ever been able to set aside every shadow of selfishness for the sake serving another wholeheartedly and without expectation of return? Only this Son, born of Mary and subjected to Joseph! In so subjecting Himself, your Lord has begun to pave the road to your salvation. In this Gospel, the Lamb of God born to Mary shows Himself to be a lamb without blemish or defect [1PT 1.19], the perfect Sacrifice for you. The activity of Christ's obedience for your salvation begins here in His passivity to His parents.

***And He went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them.... And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. [LK 2.51-52] ALL FOR YOU!***

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]