

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of the Holy Family
December 30, 2018

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Today's gospel is the beloved incident known as The Finding in the Temple. When we were growing up this was the gospel at Mass on the Sunday *after* the Epiphany. If chronological sequence of events is important, the old arrangement was better. Here we are on the Sixth Day of Christmas and all of a sudden Jesus is twelve year's old. Then next Sunday, when we observe The Epiphany, we recall an event when Our Lord was still an infant or perhaps two years old!

The Finding in the Temple appears to come from an *independent source* which Saint Luke patched into his account of the early years of Jesus. We can speculate that way because information told here does not mesh with what Luke has already told us earlier. For example, it is already established St Joseph is not Our Lord's natural father. So why is he referred to here as among the *parents* of Jesus? And a few verses later Joseph is specifically called "father." In the Nativity account we are told both Our Lady and St Joseph knew by angelic revelation Jesus is God's Son. So why here do they fail to understand Our Lord when He refers to God as His Father? In countless ways Saint Luke has shown himself as a careful historian. So we can't attribute these inconsistencies to a momentary lapse in scholarship. We have to look for a different answer. The Finding in the Temple is most likely an independent remembrance of Jesus St Luke added to his own account of events at the birth and early life of Christ. And we want to know *why* it was added.

Modern literary criticism often forgets the Gospel good news begins with the Resurrection and the coming of the Holy Ghost to guide and guard the Church and lead her into all truth. The Gospel good news does not begin with a taxation in the days of Caesar Augustus! The Gospel good news is *Christ is Risen. Jesus is Lord.* And when our early Christian forbears knew Jesus is Lord they then wanted to know everything else about Him: where He came from, and what He taught and did. There is what we might call *backward development* in Christology, and this is reflected in the creation of the New Testament. From Pentecost, the Church wears *Resurrection glasses* and looks back to the Baptism of the Lord, then back further to the Conception and Birth of the Saviour, and finally even to Christ's *pre-existence*. This teaching appears in places in St Paul's letters, but it is most

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prominent and recognized in the familiar *Prologue* to the Fourth Gospel. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God.”

We can thank Saint Luke and Saint Matthew for collecting and preserving the incidents connected to the coming of Christ into the world at Christmas. Here are those events and accounts where it is revealed to Mary and Joseph, to Elizabeth and John the Baptist as well, and the shepherds and Wise Men, this child is Son of God. But the Finding of Jesus in the Temple is *different*. It centers on the *first recorded moments in Jesus’ rational life* when He could express a self-evaluation. In all of the Nativity accounts it was Jesus in His mother’s womb , or an angel, or the celestial portents, who revealed the Lord’s divinity. But in the Jerusalem Temple Jesus can and does make His Own revelation. Jesus calls God His Father, and says He must be about His Father’s business.

Here then is the answer. Do you remember the question? Why did Saint Luke patch this incident into his already beautifully-told account of Our Lord’s birth? Taken by itself the Finding in the Temple has little significance. Children get temporarily separated from their parents at *Home Depot* on a daily basis. It is not remarkable for young boys to take a deep interest in religion. Or for them not to see why things perfectly clear to them should be less obvious to the rest of us. Our Lady is not the only mother to tell others her son never again gave his parents any problems. *Yet here for the first time*, we are told of Jesus in His Own words He had complete confidence that God is His Father, and that He was completely absorbed in learning His Father’s will. Saint Luke wants us to know *right here at the outset* of the gospel that Jesus as a Child was already what the man Jesus was known to be after the Resurrection and the coming of the Holy Ghost. *Jesus is already God’s Son* speaking and acting with divine power.

So here is Jesus beginning His activity in the same Jerusalem Temple which will be the location of the culmination of His public ministry about twenty years later, (and recounted in Chapter 19). St Luke wants us to know as we read his whole gospel account that to this twelve-year old Boy in the Temple, the Sermon on the Mount is inevitable. *And so is the Cross*.