

## **“Life After Christmas: There Really Is!”**

**Luke 2:41-52**

**1/3/10**

**We must keep Jesus close to our hearts, continue to pay attention to Him, and not ever let Him out of our sight. God is still here with us in Jesus Christ. There is life after Christmas. But is it as it was before? Or has something changed?**

It's great to be here with all of you at the start of yet another year, 2010. I pray God's peace be upon us all as we navigate our way into the days ahead.

And you know what is the greatest thing? We have reason to celebrate and rejoice all throughout the year, not just on Christmas and New Year's Eve.

After the mayhem has settled somewhat, we are left standing, looking onto what is left of all that we did this last month. After all the excitement and wrapping paper settles to the ground, after your blood sugar begins to come down to just below toxic levels, after your head stops ringing from the never-ending Christmas carols playing through the malls, what's left?

Is there life after Christmas? Yes, there is. Life continues on. For some of us that feels like a great thing—getting back to “normal”. But is it as it was before? Or has something changed?

I am fascinated with this “normal” account of Mary and Joseph as parents—parents who have misplaced their child. Any parent's worst nightmare is to discover that your child is lost. Even if for a couple seconds one of my children is out of sight when we're in a store it makes my heart jump. No doubt Mary and Joseph were just a bit worried. Not only is Jesus their Son, but they know Who else's Son He is. Imagine what would go through your head. “We've lost the Son of God!”

They are now a family. Mary and Joseph have cared for Jesus through infancy, which any parent will tell you is no small feat. And now Jesus is almost into teen-age years. We skip a lot of years here, from Jesus' birth to adolescence, but that is really the point of all this. After all the hoopla of the angels speaking to Mary and Joseph and the shepherds, after the miracle of Jesus' birth, and after protecting Jesus by running from Herod and spending some time in Egypt, they settle into a pretty normal way of life with Jesus.

*...they went up as usual for the festival.* There is some comfort in knowing that Mary and Joseph, Jesus' parents, were average folk like you and me. Every year they went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. This year is like any other. Or so they thought.

In a scary way, they realized the responsibility they were handed by God, to care for their Son who is God's Son—a responsibility but also an awesome privilege. They began to see the very special character of Jesus, His uniqueness, and what it takes to care for Him.

The astounding events surrounding Jesus' birth are now over, but life with Jesus continues on. They learned in some pretty intense ways that they had to protect Jesus. There was much they had to do to keep Jesus close to them and not allow any other outside forces or their own comfortable routine take Him away from them.

What a great image for us as we move on now from Christmas. We continue on in our days like any other, but they are not like any other days. God has blessed us with Jesus Christ, an awesome gift of His love and grace. And:

**Now that you begin to come down from all the hoopla of Christmas you must keep Jesus close to your heart—continue to pay attention to Him.**

Because there will be those forces out there that will try and take Him away from you. Herod wanted to destroy Jesus because of the threat He was to Herod's authority. So off to Egypt Jesus' family goes.

Believe me, as you get back into your "normal" lives, this new life you have with you in Jesus will not fit in easily with everything else. Other people who want to control you will not welcome Jesus' presence and the authority He now has over your life. They will try and compete for control in your life and push Jesus out. But keep Jesus close to your heart and allow Him to take you wherever you need to go to keep Him the center of your life.

Past hurts, past sins, past habits, past emotions will try and compete for your attention and keep their authority over your life. But none of that—no person or past anything can override the power of God's grace in Jesus Christ. He has dominion over it all. But we must keep Him close to our hearts.

Because there will also be those times you get distracted from His presence and "leave Him behind." *Assuming that He was in the group of travelers...* For Mary and Joseph, in that day and culture, this would not have been as strange as it may sound to us. The old saying we have heard that "it takes a village to raise a child" would have really meant something to them, because they did count on each other much more. So it would have been natural for Jesus' parents to assume that He was being taken care of by someone else as they left Jerusalem. But not so.

As you take off down the road into 2010:

**Make sure Jesus is in the car.**

You may get back into your daily schedule, as busy or stressful as it is, and assume that Jesus is still central in your life just because maybe someone in your family is looking out for Him. You assume that He is close to your heart because, well, I felt close to Him over Christmas. I'm sure He's still around here somewhere. But, in the sense that you need to stay focused on Him, you need to take Jesus with you wherever you are and in whatever you are doing. It is easy to get distracted, or perhaps simply comfortable, as we get back to life as usual, and leave Jesus behind.

Luke says, *When [Mary and Joseph] did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem to find Him.*

**If you discover that Jesus is not the central part of your life, then it is time to think about where you left Him.**

When was the last time you really felt close to Jesus? What was going on in your life? What were you doing differently than you are now? Why do you think it feels as if now He's not around?

Trace your steps. Where do you think you left Him and what do you need to do to keep Him central in your life? A great first step in doing that is simply stopping in your tracks and calling out to Jesus. Mary and Joseph started looking for Jesus right where they were. Start praying and "looking" for Jesus right where you are in your life. Do whatever you need to do to get rid of the distractions and get your focus back on Jesus.

Because you know when He is not central in your life. You may not be consciously thinking about it, but your spirit, mind, and body will let you know that something is not right.

*When His parents saw Him they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."*

If you think Peter was the first to rebuke Jesus, think again. Like a good mother, Jesus hears from her about this one! I like how Eugene Peterson phrases Mary's words to Jesus: "Young man, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been half out of our minds looking for you."

They were "in great anxiety." Yes:

**When we leave Jesus out of our lives, when we "misplace" Him among all our other priorities or assume that He is around when He is not, then the anxiety level builds.**

You know the feeling. That knot in your stomach starts to tighten. You find yourself not able to sleep as well as you were before. Your patience with your family and friends tightens up too. And you're not able to deal with everyday issues in a very productive way. Things just don't seem right.

Mary did not say "yes" only once. She had to keep saying yes to God's call. It was not merely a one-time event for Mary or for Joseph, responding to God's direction that they would welcome His Son Jesus into the world. All that was exciting and great, but it was only the beginning of a life-long commitment to Jesus. More trials would come in their life, yes. But even more trying at times is the day-in and day-out routines and struggles that they would face as a family, as normal, real people. They had to continue to say yes to God's call and keep Jesus close to their hearts.

There is life after Christmas—there really is! Yes, we get back to our "normal" routine for living, whatever that may be, and guess what? God is still here with us in Jesus Christ. Keep responding.

**Keep saying yes to God's call on your life.**

*He said to them, "Why were you searching for Me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"*

Don't you know where I am to be? Even though His parents did not understand Jesus' response to them, His words were those of assurance. There is no need to be uptight, I am right where I need to be. You ought to know that I am here.

Yes, God is right where He needs to be. He is very close by. In the words of the Apostle Paul: "Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith." "The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Amen.