

THE EMMAUS SERIES

Holy Family, Year C

1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28

1 John 3:1-2, 21-24

Luke 2:41-52

I must be giving myself to the affairs of my Father

The Saviour has been born to us! The liturgies of the Christmas season invite us to reflect upon this basic truth of Christian faith: the eternal son has become one of us and shared our life experience. He grew up in a family; parental authority shaped his human development; at the age prescribed for Jewish youths, he attended the Passover festival with his parents; a self-reliant lad, he was presumed throughout a whole day to be somewhere else in the caravan returning from Jerusalem.

We speak of family 'bonds' and 'ties'. If they are not transformed into adult-to-adult relationships, as we grow up, these family ties can become a bondage that inhibits personal development. The story Luke hands on to us in today's gospel reminds us that, as his life choices were made, the relationship Jesus had with Mary and Joseph had to be transformed. The first reading from 1 Samuel recounts an old story of Samuel, the prophetic leader who anointed David as king. Despite similarities between this story and the story told by Luke – a family going up to Jerusalem, a child's destiny foreshadowed – there are significant differences. The Old Testament story is a legend that serves as an introduction to a collection of historical traditions in which Samuel plays a key role. If we recognise the hand of God in Samuel's young life of service in the temple, it does not come about through his own choice, but through that of his devout mother. Luke's story is closer to our common human experience – Mary has to come to terms with intimations of a decision that will lead Jesus to leave home to take up the life of a wanderer, carrying out the mission that will shape his life - and will ultimately lead to his death. She begins to know the 'sword' Simeon foretold would 'pierce her soul'.

Jesus, as the liturgy of Christmas Day has reminded us, is 'the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart', come into the world to make the Father known. He grew up as a dutiful son of his human parents; but as he 'grew in wisdom' - through his contact with the faith traditions of his people - he knew in the mysterious depths of his human experience the call to identify with the great mission that had brought him into the world: 'Why are you looking for me? Did you not know that I must give myself to my Father's affairs?' Bringing us this brief narrative, Luke intimates what lies ahead. His gospel narrative moves towards its climax when Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem to meet his fate. Ultimately, it is 'after three days' that he is restored to his disciples as their Risen Lord.

As the bonds that unite parent and child mature, they are both blessed. In the background of Luke's story, we recognise the ongoing fidelity of Mary, as she came to accept and identify with the response of her Son, as the first of all his disciples. The second reading from the first letter of John chimes in with our reflections upon the shared life of the Holy Family. In the end, the mission of Jesus was to open the way to our sharing in his risen life, sharing all things with the Father – sharing in the family life of God, as it were. The choices he made, in the freedom he shares with us, can inspire us to make our life choices, knowing that each of us has a unique place in the Father's loving plan.

John Thornhill sm