

# The First Sunday after Christmas Day.

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## Introduction

The reading for the First Sunday after Christmas Day passes over time with ease. We hear of the annual festival attendance of Mary and Joseph, and then — in the space of a few words — twelve years have gone by.

Time speeds up: children grow; they learn to walk; to read; to think for themselves; to speak their own words to the adults in their lives; to be part of the joys of life; to be part of the misunderstandings of life. The text for today highlights something as ordinary as it can be upsetting: a family conflict.

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## Text

Luke 2:41–52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 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." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them.

Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

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## Comment

Conflict theorists define 'Conflict' differently. One basic definition could be: A conflict occurs when one person's wishes differ from those of another. Or, in plainer English: I want this; you want that — something needs to happen. Sometimes people compromise when wishes differ. Sometimes people compete, or collaborate, or accommodate. Sometimes people simply avoid the conflict. There are all kinds of responses to conflict — many of them perfectly healthy depending on the situation. Conflicts occur every day, especially amongst people who love each other. Conflicts don't have to be disagreeable — it is entirely normal that when two or more people are gathered together, two or more opinions will present themselves.

We see this in the holy family. Joseph and Mary are presented as being of one mind — they go to a festival every year. However, Jesus displays a different desire: he wishes to stay and converse. Time — which has skipped merrily by for twelve years — suddenly slows down to the count of days: one day walking home from the festival; one day walking back; three days searching. One can imagine time slowing down the parents: second by second — where is he, this child of promise?

In certain conflicts, our relationship with time can change immeasurably. And our bodies can change too: responses are flared, our emotions can be agitated, we might find ourselves without appetite, or ravenously hungry. The body inhabits the truth of conflict in a way that the mind sometimes resists.

Jesus' response — when his desperate parents eventually find him — might not have helped the situation. If a child in your care was missing for five days, and then, upon being found, responded like Jesus did, how would you react?

*"Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"*

One of the plain answers to this could simply be "No."

Everyday conflicts occur in households of people who live together — somebody likes to be on time, somebody likes to be early, somebody doesn't like to be rushed. Somebody is messy and somebody is tidy. Somebody gets up early and somebody stays out late. Somebody makes plans weeks in advance, somebody else changes plans easily, somebody else doesn't like to make plans in case something better comes along. Somebody is a bear in the morning, somebody else roars when they get tired in the evening. Years go by, morning and evening, the tenth year, the twentieth year. We settle into routines and some of those routes are interrupted by shock and conflict.

The choice of this text for the Sunday after Christmas day is a wise one: such a momentous occasion as Luke's description of the birth of Jesus. There has been displacement and shepherds and gifts and a child born in the *kataluma* of kinsfolk.

And now we hear of this family in the midst of misunderstanding. We are each strangers to each other — we do not need virgin births and angels to find ourselves existing across gulfs of understanding. And to be brought into the reality of this event is a comfort for the ordinary everyday of our lives.

Luke's line "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor" Is open to interpretation. It could simply be a way of indicating that time is, once again, about to move on, and we will next encounter Jesus almost two decades older. Or, it could be a gentle way of indicating that Jesus had some learning to do:

about wisdom, about consideration, about walking in the ways of favour with the people around him. Both of those readings yield important insights about the human condition, and about the audacity of the incarnation: somebody was born and grew and learnt and we understand this somebody to be Immanuel, God with us. He loved and was loved. He misunderstood and he caused misunderstanding. And he grew, in wisdom and years; in divine and human favour.

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## Response

Think of the everyday conflicts that you have encountered this Christmas week. Reflecting on them, how can you wrap them into the everyday of life? Sometimes you might be conflicted about your conflicts, other times nonchalant about them — are there ways you can prepare to greet the conflicts of your life with a deeper wisdom? For some that might be a calm, a spark of love or amusement. For others that might be a quiet resistance, a determination to not be undone by the things that threaten to undo us.

What is the wisdom that is beckoning you as you navigate the conflicts that are part of your everyday life?

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## Prayer

Jesus of Nazareth  
You entered the lives of two people: Mary and Joseph  
and changed them.  
Now, we gather in your name, in twos and threes,  
and where two or three are gathered  
we are sure to find differences, disagreements,  
arguments, anxieties, and tensions.  
Help us move towards each other  
with the kind of love that helps us  
move towards each other,  
the kind of forgiveness that keeps us  
loving, even beyond understanding,  
Because this is the holy glue that binds us.  
Amen.