

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

“I should have known.” Or *“I should have known better.”* Certainly I’ve used these phrases—I’ll bet you have, too. Perhaps your parents or teachers said them about you: *“You should have known better.”* When I’ve used the phrase, it’s usually to acknowledge that something went wrong, and likely I contributed to it even though I knew it was wrong, or maybe I didn’t stop it, even though I had enough foreknowledge to stop it. *“I should have known.”*

It’s a phrase we might use about Jesus’ parents in the Gospel: *“They should have known,”* for something does seem amiss in the Gospel.

To be sure, we hear how Mary and Joseph made a pretty big parental mistake. They left Jesus behind in Jerusalem as they headed home from the festival. You see, this pious, believing family was accustomed to going to Jerusalem every year to celebrate the Passover. And this year, Jesus having reached the age of twelve, accompanied His parents to the festival. Nothing amiss there. They were doing for Jesus what Jewish parents were called upon to do: *“You shall diligently keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and his testimonies and his statutes,”* and *“You shall teach them diligently to your children”* That’s a good example for our parents today—seek to keep the commandments; teach them to your children.

But the parental mistake came at the end of the feast; Mary and Joseph headed for home without checking to see if Jesus was in the company. Now we might think that horrible parenting according to today’s standards, but then it would not have been so unusual — not even as recently as when I was growing up. They likely would have traveled to Jerusalem in a big entourage with friends and relatives, so they wouldn’t have been worried if they didn’t see Jesus as they headed back to Nazareth. He probably was with friends and cousins. Of course, He wasn’t, and when Jesus’ mother and His guardian found out, that caused much worry for them. They raced back to Jerusalem for a frantic three-day search for their son.

Still, I don’t think I’d accuse them with the phrase, *“you should have known better,”* at least not for *“losing Jesus.”* But a three-day search? Where did they look? Was it only after they tried everywhere else that they tried looking in the temple? Shouldn’t they have known?

They found Jesus in the temple among the teachers of the Law. There He was again, the mercy seat of God Himself in the place where of old the Lord came and made Himself known. The Ark of the Covenant, lost around the time of the Babylonian captivity, was again in the temple, this time as the Immanuel, *“God with us”* in the flesh of this twelve-year-old boy. It wasn’t the first time that *“the Lord ... had come suddenly to his temple.”* He had been circumcised; He had been

presented at the temple, consecrated as firstborn Son to the Lord. *“They should have known.”*

Mary should have known, for she was told by an angelic utterance that she would bear the holy Son of God—by the Holy Spirit. She was told of Him whose kingdom would never end. Mary was told by her cousin Elizabeth that she was the mother of the Lord. And Mary believed it—*“that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”* And she sang of it: *“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”*

Joseph should have known—his wife would be with child by the Holy Spirit, he was told by the angel. He would save His people from their sins. He would be *“God with us.”*

They should have known, for they had witnessed Jesus’ miraculous birth with manger and swaddling cloths, shepherds and angels, guiding stars and royal gifts. They marveled at the wondrous words spoken of Jesus by faithful Simeon and the prophetess Anna—God’s salvation presented at the temple: a light to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel. And Mary especially treasured all the things said about her Son and pondered them in her heart. They should have known. Jesus says as much in response to her scolding, *“Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.”* *“Why were you looking for me?”* He asked. *“Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house? About the Father’s business?”*

Mary’s twelve-year-old Son, the Lord, had come again to His temple. He returned this time, not to be circumcised, not to be presented, but to be about the business of teaching God’s word and showing His understanding. He was there to question the teachers and to give answers that amazed all that saw and heard Him.

But we know the main business of the Father’s house was sacrifice—that’s what the temple was about: sacrificing lambs and goats and bulls for the sins of the people, and the time for that had not yet come. The time was not ripe for the blood of the Lamb of God to be spilt for the sins of the world—twenty more years would pass before our great High Priest would enter into the temple and sacrifice Himself as that firstborn, spotless Lamb whose blood atoned for the world’s sins. Twenty more years would have to pass before His mother’s soul would be pierced by the sword, as her Son’s hands and feet and side were pierced for her and the whole world. Though she may have wanted to forget those words of Simeon, she had been told this, and this she should have known also.

It may be difficult for us to understand how Mary and Joseph could have had such difficulty understanding what Jesus said to them. After all, they had been told by angels and men who their Son was. Jesus was the Son of God; He was the Savior of the world—their Savior and ours. They marveled and believed and rejoiced in this knowledge. How could they not know? We wonder.

But the answer is only a pinch away; it's called flesh, forgetful and disbelieving flesh, the same flesh that we have. It's best to admit it—we ourselves have our own fleshly difficulties with God's Word, don't we, even though we have more of it than Mary and Joseph had. We have also the evangelists and apostles that bear witness to all that Jesus was and is.

We have forgetful and disbelieving flesh to contend with, even though we have been given new life and the Spirit in the waters of Holy Baptism. Our disbelieving flesh tries to convince us to seek God other than where He promises in His word. We'd rather look to our selves, even though we have God's word of promise that tells us that the only way to the Father is through the Son, Jesus Christ.

Our disbelieving flesh listens to the world's word that tries to convince us that the Jesus we believe in is not real—He is but a metaphor, a figure of speech, so the liberal scholars tell us. But the Word of God tells us that He is truly God in the flesh who gave up His flesh unto death for your sins, and was raised up for your forgiveness.

Our disbelieving flesh tells us to try harder to merit eternal life; the word of God tells us that we need a mediator to bring us to God, and the only mediator between God and us is the Man Christ Jesus. The world and our disbelieving flesh say, look inside your self for salvation, but God's word tells us to look outside of our selves, to the Word proclaimed and heard and believed and confessed—it's far from an impotent Word. That Word tells us to look to the water filled with the Holy Spirit that washes away sins—it's far from plain water. It tells us to look in bread and wine that carry Jesus' body broken and His blood poured out to your mouths—it's far from ordinary bread and wine.

Yes, like Mary and Joseph, we should know where to look for Jesus—it has been taught us by apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. And indeed you do, for surely that's why you're here in the Father's house again today: to hear the words of Jesus to His mother and father—parents with forgetful and disbelieving flesh; to hear Jesus' mild rebuke to them and apply it to ourselves, that is, to repent; to be reminded where we are to seek God and His forgiveness—in the God-man Jesus; to receive life and salvation in His word, in His washing, in His flesh and blood; and with Mary, to treasure up this wondrous Good news in our hearts. For here today in the Father's house, Jesus is about His Father's business, distributing the things of the Father—forgiveness, life and salvation. Here is where you'll find Him—you know it. God grant you faithfulness as you continue to seek Him where He may be found.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.