

## **Luke 2: 41 to 52 Visit to Jerusalem**

I wonder what sort of Christmas you had? If it was anything like ours here in the Orr family household it was probably different from how you imagined it being when plans were being made. And if I think back to the previous Christmas I am sure I would have laughed at the person who told me I would be sitting outside in our garden, socially distanced from loved ones because more than eight people were not allowed inside the house on Christmas Day. Christmas – an annual event – but Christmas 2020 was a bit different!

I am sure when Mary and Joseph had been planning their annual trip for the Feast of the Passover it felt like any other year. The passage tells us it was their custom to go up to the Feast – year after year after year. Just like we celebrate Christmas each year. So travelling from Nazareth to Jerusalem with Jesus and his brothers and sisters - and no doubt many friends and neighbours - they would have been looking forward to the big celebration, the food and the festivities. The trip took a few days so there

Would be plenty of opportunity to catch up with cousins and aunts and uncles and grandparents.

Now, everything seems to go as planned until they are on the way back. Any parent can identify with that rising panic as the realisation that a child has been lost begins to dawn. But it's OK isn't it? - Jesus is probably with his cousins somewhere in the huge caravan of pilgrims on its way back to Nazareth. But after searching it was clear that he wasn't. So Mary and Joseph return to Jerusalem - and search – and search – and search – THREE days of searching – THREE days of worry, three days of anxiety, three days of wondering and perhaps even fearing the worst.

Until - they find him – in the Temple of all places – a twelve year old sitting in the temple discussing with all the most learned Rabbis in Jerusalem. Mum and Dad were astonished. And I like to think that they took him aside rather than confronted him in front of the religious leaders

who a few minutes earlier had themselves been amazed at his understanding.

Son, why have you treated us this way? Your father and I have been at our wits end. We've been looking everywhere for you, for three days? Three days you've been gone. Three days of anxiety.

**And then**, we have the first recorded words of Jesus "Why are you looking for me? Didn't you know that I had to be in my Father's house?" Ouch, that must have stung Mary - and Joseph perhaps even more so. They could not understand what was going on. They could not comprehend what he was saying. BUT - and this to me is the real pearl in the passage today – but - His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

‘His mother **treasured** all these things in her **heart**’. She didn't dismiss the things that she couldn't understand, she didn't try to make her version of the story count or try to tell Jesus that he was wrong. Instead, the gospel writer tells us

us that she **treasured** these things in her heart? But what exactly were these things or these matters that she treasured even though she didn't understand them at the time? By looking at this I think we can learn something from Mary about how we deal with things that happen to us during this pandemic which has broken into our routines and daily lives turning them upside down.

This was not the first time we come across Mary treasuring something when strange things happened, when God seems to break through in unexpected ways – and we are helped along by Luke, the writer of this passage because he uses a different word to alert us to when these ***things or matters*** have significance – and that word is **rhema**.

- Remember when Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel who tells her nothing is impossible with God – in the original Greek the word is **rhema** - no *rhema* – no thing or matter is impossible with God – and Mary responds – may it be done according to your **rhema** -

**may it be done according to this** special God given word, according to this special matter

- Mary after the visit of the shepherds pondered all these things, these matters – these rhema – in her heart
- Simeon, in the same temple in which Mary and Joseph are now standing with Jesus –had declared that he could now go in peace knowing that God's rhema – God's promise, God's special thing – had come to pass as he took the child Jesus in his arms
- And so twelve years later, we find Mary again encountering something strange and different – something special breaking into her everyday thoughts and activities – and she treasures ***them –in her heart.*** The same word is used again - she treasures these special word - this 'rhema' - She stores them up, she values them, she knows there is significance in them – ***even if she doesn't understand the meaning at this point.***

And I was thinking about how, I too, from a young age, have been taught to treasure the Word of God – especially those times when we sense God speaking to us in a special way. I am sure many of us have been taught this treasuring.

But I have come to realise that treasuring is not the same as understanding ... Mary had already done lots of ‘treasuring’ and does it not come of something of a surprise - that despite all the previous revelations she does not understand when Jesus says ‘Did you not know that I had to be in my Father’s house?’

This spirit-filled utterance, this rhema, confused her at the time, may even have hurt her - these first spoken words that we have of Jesus - shifting the focus from earthly father to Heavenly father – from flesh to Spirit. From the immediate things to the eternal.

But - although Mary did not understand what Jesus said – this rhema - about being in His Father's house - she knew there was something in it and she was in the ***habit - of***

***treasuring, of storing, of pondering the patterns in life*** and not just what she learnt from the Holy Scriptures.

I think this is the sort of treasuring that is being spoken of in today's hymn

*Come living God when least expected...*

*let our minds be sharp to read you in sight or sound or printed page, and let us greet you in our neighbours, in ardent youth or mellow age*

God's rhema, God's special word that speaks to us personally, individually, in our specific circumstances is to be found in everyday occurrences – yes, even in the midst of a pandemic. Then - as the hymn goes on to say

*Through our gloom your Son will meet us, as vivid truth and living word, exploding doubt and disillusion, to scatter hope and joy abroad*

So, it is in the **treasuring**, the pondering, the meditating, the putting time aside to chew over these special God given

moments that the possibility of **understanding** what God is doing becomes a possibility. This is what helps me through times of confusion or frustration or anxiety – or even hurt - treasuring those special God revelations that come from time to time in everyday life - even though I don't always understand them at the time.

***Mary treasured all these things in her heart – may we too learn to treasure the things of God in our hearts.***

## ***Prayer***

Loving Father, who knows us each of us by name,

Who guards and watches over us, who by your Holy Spirit strengthens and encourages us on life's journey

We are so glad we can meet together to give you thanks and praise and honour and to listen to your word – your word which is not silenced but speaks into our lives, into our confusion, into our frustration, our sorrow, into this time of pandemic. Help us to trust you, to keep listening for your still small voice of comfort, to be alert to the times when you try and break into our anxious and disrupted lives with words of truth and peace and joy.

Forgive us when we close our eyes and muffle our ears to your presence. Be with us when doubt threatens to overcome trust, when anxiety threatens to overwhelm our peace, when hopelessness takes away our joy. In the name of Jesus your Son we pray and continue with the words He taught us:

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And Forgive us our debts  
as we forgive our debtors.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.