

Michael J. Mathey
Christmas II
January 4, 2026
Text: Luke 2:40 - 52
Title: Lost and Found

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Sally and her 5 year-old daughter, Anna, were having a typical day during Christmas vacation. With no school, mom decided that today would be a good day to go to the mall to return some of the Christmas presents that didn't fit quite right. Mom got the items together that had to be returned, and they climbed into the car for the drive to the mall.

Sally pulled into the parking lot and drove around a little bit for a decent parking spot, and when she finally parked the car in front of the Kohl's main entrance the two climbed out for their afternoon of returns and shopping. The first thing to be done was to return a jacket to Kohl's that Sally had been given by her husband. It was a nice jacket, but a little small. And that meant she just had to do an easy exchange of one size for another.

Afterwards, Anna got to play and burn some energy in the fun zone while Sally watched and chatted with a couple of other parents, and then they went to the food court and had some pizza for lunch. Everything was going fine until Sally took Anna into Macy's. The two went to the customer service counter to return a couple of more items that Sally had, and then they went to look for some replacement things.

Sally was looking at some shirts for her husband, and when she turned around to ask Anna how she liked one shirt the little girl wasn't where Sally thought she'd be. Mom looked around a little bit, but still didn't see the little girl anywhere nearby. With a sigh of exasperation, Sally started looking around the store a little further away from where she was at, but she still didn't see her little girl or even a coat the same color as the one that Anna had on.

She was starting to get concerned now. She hung up the shirt that she was still carrying around, and started to look for her a little more earnestly. She checked inside all of the nearby clothing racks in case Anna was playing hide and seek, but there was no sign of her. She looked down the aisles in the immediate vicinity to see if she had just decided to look at something without asking, but she didn't see her in any of those. She started to call her name a little louder, but there was no answer. Where was her little girl!?

As she looked around more and more urgently, she stopped some employees to ask for help. They immediately followed their procedure of placing security by the exits, and joined in the search for Anna. Finally, someone spotted the little girl crying and wandering around in a large stock room in the back of the store. She had gone to the bathroom without telling her mother, and made a wrong turn when she came out and no one was there to see her going into the back. Sally ran to meet up with her. When the relieved mother finally saw her daughter, she hugged her with tears in her eyes, and then said, "If you ever do that again I'll ground you for a month!"

Nothing makes a parent more anxious than not being able to find their child. All sorts of thoughts run through your mind as you search for them. Nothing else matters until he or she is found and returned safely to the arms that first held them when they were born. When that child is finally found, the emotions flood through you in an unstoppable wave of relief, joy, and yes, even anger, and the longer the child is missing, the stronger those emotions are.

If you've ever had this happen to you, then you might have some understanding of Mary and Joseph's concern for the twelve year-old Jesus. For festivals at the temple in Jerusalem, it was common for families to travel in large groups with other relatives for safety and companionship. It wouldn't have been unusual for them to miss Jesus in a group that large.

They probably assumed that He was with His cousins somewhere, and at first they wouldn't have worried. They were a full day's journey away from the city when they noticed that He wasn't with them, and that means that it took a full day to go back to Jerusalem. When they finally returned to the city after that extra day's travel, it took them another three days to find Him, for a total of what had to be four frantic, panic-filled days without their child. They must have looked everywhere and asked everyone if He had been seen, but He didn't seem to be anywhere.

Finally, imagine the incredible sense of relief when they found Him in the temple, but that relief was most likely accompanied by a sense of anger and confusion at the same time. Here they had been searching all over the city for Him, and where was He? He was in the temple talking with the rabbis, and amazing them with the level of Scriptural understanding that He already had at the age of twelve! Then, when Mary and Joseph asked Jesus why He had treated them that way, His response was, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

The question is basically rhetorical. Obviously they didn't know that Jesus was supposed to be in His Father's house or they would have gone straight there to find Him. They thought that He was lost, but they didn't know that He was right where He was supposed to be. In truth, they were the ones who were lost, and they didn't even know it. They were lost in their sin, and they were putting their own understanding of the way that things were supposed to be over the way that God wanted them to be. Jesus knew that He belonged in the temple, which was His Father's house, His true home. It was the way that God wanted things to be even if sin kept His mother and step-father from knowing it.

Just like Mary and Joseph, each one of us is lost in sin, and like them we oftentimes don't even know it. We convince ourselves that Jesus is supposed to fit into our understanding, but in

reality He's not subject to that. God's way of doing things is perfect apart from the way that we may want it to be. He does not lower Himself to do things according to our will no matter how much we might convince ourselves that He does or that He should.

Our sinful nature would rather not have anything to do with God. It works to convince us that we're in charge, and that we don't need Him at all. And that keeps us from even acknowledging that the Father is present in His own house. Even though Mary and Joseph knew the circumstances of Jesus' conception and birth, they were surprised to find Him in the temple that He called His Father's House because their sin kept them from truly knowing God as their Father. Without Jesus, God is only known as a Righteous Judge who will only deal with us by His Law, and that Law condemns us for our sins. In front of His Holy Perfection, we deserve nothing else. We are completely Lost.

But Jesus was never lost, which is the ironic truth of this reading. Mary and Joseph search for Him as though He's missing, but the reality is that He's not lost at all. He's just being found in His proper place for the first time, the temple of His Father. As they search for their lost son, they don't even realize that they are the ones who need to be found by the One that they're looking for. Without Jesus coming to search for us, we'd all be lost without any hope.

Thankfully, He did come to find us. Jesus was born on Christmas morning so that He could ultimately seek out sinners who were lost to their own corrupted nature. He came to find each of us, and without Him we would be completely without hope. But in Him and His cross we have all of the hope that we need. We are found by Him, and as He finds us, He invites us to join Him in His Father's house.

Let me repeat that, He finds us. That's the way that salvation has always worked. When Adam and Eve heard the Lord God in the garden after they had eaten the forbidden fruit, they hid

from Him, and the Lord God looked for them and found them. In the same way, our sin separates us from God, and we are hopelessly lost from Him. We want nothing to do with Him, but God comes to find us anyway. And He goes so far to find us that He even suffers the cross.

Today, He still seeks you out. He comes to find you even now through His Word which the Spirit works through. He comes to find you today through the Sacrament of the Altar where Christ comes to each of you through the bread and wine joined to His body and blood. He comes to you to make you His own child through the waters of Holy Baptism. In all of these ways He comes to find you each and every time you are lost to your sins, and once you've repented of them, you can be found once again in your Father's House.

As Jesus was in the temple He was both lost and found. Mary and Joseph believed Him to be lost, but He had actually been found by the teachers in His Father's house. We too are both lost and found. We are lost to our sinful nature, but we are found by the work of the Father's Son, who has come into this world to seek us out and to make us His own children once again. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.