

January 4, 2026
Second Sunday After Christmas

“Your Identity”

Luke 2:40-52

“‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them.”

Joseph and Mary are confused and I’m not really sure why. Both know who Jesus is. Both know how He was conceived. I realize that they understandably were freaking out when Jesus went missing in the big city for three days, but now they’ve found Him and you’d think the pieces would fall into place when Jesus speaks these words. But somehow it seems they don’t quite get who Jesus truly is.

Jesus knows who He is. I doubt that at 12 years old Jesus is fully utilizing His divinity; He has after all humbled Himself into our lowly humanity. But one thing is clear: He knows He is the Son of God and He knows His proper place to be is His Father’s house. Jesus knows His own identity. Joseph and Mary are somehow thinking along some other lines.

I hope none of us has this problem. We know Jesus of Nazareth’s identity. We state it every Sunday in our creeds. He is the Son of God, though His identity for us is wrapped up in His selfless, loving work of sacrifice, redemption and victory for us. We know He is more than the Son of God—He is our Savior and Lord.

But though we know this wonderful Gospel truth, we seem to struggle with it when it comes to our own identity.

Think about it. Suppose you’re at an awkward party where you don’t know anyone and you end up cornered with an affable person trying to make polite conversation and they say, “So tell me about yourself.” What do you say?

I’d bet that many of us would start with our occupation or career or where we go to school. We might say what part of the country we come from or mention in what part of the parish we live. We might mention our friends, relatives or maybe the person who brought us to this awkward party. Some of us might mention what sports teams we love or maybe our political affiliations. I know for a fact that lots of folks whip out pictures of kids and identify themselves as parents or grandparents.

Yet weirdly enough, our identity as a follower of Christ isn’t highlighted. If it comes up in the conversation at all, it’s usually in passing if some church activity finds its way into the discussion. I believe this is the result of a big problem we have according to our fallen nature—we let our identity be defined by the world. We just do.

Just think about it according to yourself. How do you define your success? How do you define your beauty? How do you define your goodness? How do you define your peace? I would bet that as you reach for these definitions, they are all according to how the things of the world relate to you. Success likely involves money, position or power. Beauty relies on the perception of others. Goodness is based on your dealings with the world. Peace, well that probably hinges on how well you deal with the nastiness of the world.

Of course, there’s plenty of truth in these definitions...according to the world. The problem is that we tend to let our identity rely wholeheartedly on these and these alone. But what identity absolutely trumps all of these?

I don’t even have to say it. Every one of you knows it.

“In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”

Our primary identity into eternity is redeemed child of God. Our identity is wrapped up in being chosen by God before the foundation of the world—predestined for adoption in His holy kingdom as His very offspring in Christ. Here today we celebrate that in prayer and songs of praise and thanksgiving. We gather today as the family of God in the union of faith.

Unfortunately I think we're way to quick to shelve that identity as we leave the building and comfortably fall into whatever roles we assume according to the world. Of course we still identify as Christian...just not so enthusiastically up front in our life. But you know as well as I do, if it's not up front in our life, it's not being up front in our hearts and minds.

I think Joseph and Mary fell into the familiar role of father and mother to Jesus. It wasn't wrong, of course. God Himself chose them for this. But I think they may have become so comfortable in these roles they somewhat blanked on the divine reality of the Christ dwelling right there in the midst of them day after day.

We do the same. The Gospel is ours day after day, washing away our sins and guaranteeing us resurrection from the dead and life everlasting. Yet the divine reality of Christ as our Lord and Savior gets eclipsed by the daily rigmarole and we let the world define our reality rather than Christ. The results of this are not good. At best we are robbing ourselves of the joy and peace that comes in Christ's promises of present and eternal blessings. It allows the problems, frustrations and afflictions of life to claim center stage leading to fear, sorrow and stress.

At worst it leads to idolatry in us raising up the things of this world as our source of blessing and that in which we trust for our good. We make those things that are not God into our gods, and likely count ourselves then as the masters of our own destiny in dealing with them. It's a recipe for spiritual disaster.

“Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” We need to take a page from Jesus' playbook. He's like “Duh! I'm the Son of God. Where else would I be?”

Baptized into Christ we can look in the mirror and say the same kind of thing. “Duh. I'm a child of the most high God! What else would I be?”

You know who you are. You know whose you are. You know what defines you—your Holy Baptism. Your sins stand washed away and thus you are today and every day a holy one, a saint, a predestined to live forever in glory object of Christ's love. You are His beloved possession and yes, a slave to this most gracious of Masters.

Remind yourself of this often; again and again every day. I don't think we can help ourselves from falling into the rut of defining ourselves according to the world and our roles and vocations therein. If Mary and Joseph couldn't do it after an angelic announcement, virgin birth and daily raising what had to be the most well-behaved child in all of human history, what chance do we have?

Be we can remind ourselves and repent of that often. We can again and again pause and remember that we have a blessed eternity and, be the day good or bad or just normal, it is, like this life itself, a passing moment on our way to the fullness of Christ's glory in eternal life. We can again and again take joy, comfort and hope in Christ our Lord, who reigns today in that life to which we are destined.

Don't rob yourself of this peace. Many times a day remind yourself that your identity is nothing less than the reigning and victorious ever-living Son of God, Jesus Christ your Lord.

Amen.