

## The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Devotional Reading: Psalm 27  
Background Scripture: Luke 2:41–52

Luke 2:41–52

**41** Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

**42** And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

**43** And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.

**44** But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.

**45** And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

**46** And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

**47** And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

**48** And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

**49** And he said unto them, how is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?

**50** And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.

**51** And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

**52** And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

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### Key Text

*He said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?—Luke 2:49*

## Sacred Altars and Holy Offerings

### Unit 2: Jesus and the Temple

Lessons 6–9

## Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List key features of Passover observances.
2. Compare and contrast expectations of a typical 12-year-old boy of the time with this account from Jesus' youth.
3. Write a note to a young person to encourage that person in his or her spiritual journey.

## Lesson Outline

### Introduction

- A. In Jerusalem, "Alone"
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Jesus Went Missing (Luke 2:41–45)

- A. Observing Passover (vv. 41–42)
- B. Starting Home (v. 43)
- C. Searching for the Boy (vv. 44–45)

#### II. Jesus Was Found (Luke 2:46–50)

- A. Surprising Discovery (vv. 46–47)  
*In God's Place*  
*Astonished*
- B. Anxious Question (v. 48)
- C. Mysterious Answer (vv. 49–50)

#### III. Jesus Went Home (Luke 2:51–52)

- A. His Obedience (v. 51)
- B. His Growth (v. 52)

### Conclusion

- A. Finding Jesus Again
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## How to Say It

Deuteronomy *Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.*

diasporadee *-as-puh-ruh.*

Emmanuel *E-man-you-el.*

Galatians *Guh-lay-shunz.*

Herod *Hair-ud.*

Mishnah *Mish-nuh.*

## **Introduction**

### **A. In Jerusalem, “Alone”**

The movie *Home Alone* has become a Christmastime classic. First released in 1990, the movie tells the story of 8-year-old Kevin McCallister, who is left behind in his family’s suburban home while the rest of his family departs on an overseas Christmas vacation. The family departs without noticing his absence, leaving Kevin home alone. Two clueless burglars, Harry and Marv, break into the home, but Kevin outwits them and holds them off until the family returns on Christmas Day.

In a memorable scene, as the family is on a plane flying over the Atlantic Ocean, Kevin’s mother finally realizes that her son is not on board the plane. She nearly jumps out of her seat with a horrified cry, “KEVIN!”

In today’s Scripture, Mary and Joseph seemed to have “lost” their 12-year-old son, Jesus. How would Mary respond to the realization that she had lost her son? Would she cry, “JESUS!” in panicked realization, or would she have a different response?

### **B. Lesson Context**

Luke is the only New Testament author who records a story of Jesus’ youth. This fact suits Luke’s intention to document Jesus’ life and ministry, which he had researched “from the very first” (Luke 1:3).

Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1–20) includes a description of an angelic announcement to shepherds and their resulting search for the newborn Jesus. Luke tells us that “Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart” (2:19). Thus, she might have been Luke’s source of information regarding the events of Jesus’ childhood. Luke summarized that as Jesus grew, “the grace of God was upon him” (2:40).

Mary and Joseph made yearly trips to the Jerusalem. This practice was expected by the Law of Moses (Exodus 23:17; 34:23; Deuteronomy 16:16) but perhaps not universally followed in their day. They initially took Jesus to “present him to the Lord” as their firstborn son and to offer a sacrifice for purification (Luke 2:22–24; compare Leviticus 12:1–8).

As an adult, Jesus prepared to celebrate Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread with His disciples in the vicinity of Jerusalem (Luke 22:7–8), He continued to make the journeys to Jerusalem as He had done for so many years with His mother and father.

## **I. Jesus Went Missing** **(Luke 2:41–45)**

### **A. Observing Passover (vv. 41–42)**

**41. Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.**

Earlier verses of this chapter highlight the obedience that characterized the lives of Jesus' *parents*. They traveled to Bethlehem in obedience to the emperor's decree (Luke 2:1–5). Then, they followed the requirements of the Law of Moses (see Leviticus 12:1–4) regarding Jesus' circumcision (Luke 2:21) and the offering of purification after childbirth (2:22–24).

*Passover* is the *feast* that commemorates Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt (Exodus 12:1–3; Deuteronomy 16:1–8). It is one of the three feasts that all Jewish men were required to travel *to Jerusalem* to observe (Exodus 23:14–17; Deuteronomy 16:16). Those Jews living far away from Jerusalem—in the scattering of people called the *diaspora*—would not be able to journey to Jerusalem three times each year.

Joseph, Mary, and Jesus had been living in Nazareth (Luke 2:39), a town located about 70 miles north of Jerusalem. The family's journey to Jerusalem might have been upwards of 90 miles if they had traveled through the Jordan Valley to avoid Samaritan territory.

**42. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.**

At *twelve years old*, Jesus was nearly the age when Jewish boys were expected to become aware of their spiritual duties. Second-century-AD records, such as the Mishnah, state that the age of 13 is when a Jewish boy is considered an adult and, therefore, must follow the requirements of the law. At this age, a bar mitzvah ceremony occurs. However, the customs of the ceremony were recorded after Jesus' time. Before reaching that age of maturity, it would also have been customary for Jewish boys to attend *the feast* in Jerusalem.

Because *Jerusalem* is perched at a high elevation, approximately 2,500 feet above sea level, travelers always *went up* in elevation to visit the city (compare Psalm 24:3).

#### **What Do You Think?**

What part of a holiday celebration do you find brings a family together?

#### **Digging Deeper**

What steps will you take to welcome God more fully into your family's observance of holidays such as Christmas and Easter?

### **B. Starting Home (v. 43)**

**43. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.**

The celebration of Passover is immediately followed by the seven-day-long Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:5–6). Although the feast is technically distinct from Passover, the two are right next to each other on the calendar. Thus, it is natural to see them as one and the same event: a singular event lasting eight *days*.

Those who traveled some distance to Jerusalem for Passover, like Mary and Joseph, often journeyed in large groups as an extended family or clan. The group could pool resources for the trip, and a sizeable assembly helped protect travelers from would-be robbers. While traveling as a group, Mary and Joseph would easily have assumed that if Jesus was not with them, He was with other members of their caravan, including extended family and neighbors.

Jesus *tarried behind in Jerusalem* rather than join His parents and the other travelers in the return journey to Nazareth following the observances. Luke does not say whether Jesus

accidentally missed the group's departure or He made a deliberate choice to remain in Jerusalem. Regardless, the significance of Luke's account is that Jesus was not with His parents as they left the city.

### C. Searching for the Boy (v. 44–45)

**44. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance.**

To go *a day's journey* on foot means that Mary and Joseph might have covered some 15 to 20 miles back to Nazareth before realizing that Jesus was not among their *company* of travelers. Perhaps it was when the group paused to rest or to share a meal that Mary and Joseph *sought him* from among the group of travelers consisting of their family and friends (*kinsfolk and acquaintance*). While no other family members are mentioned in this instance, Jesus is elsewhere said to have had brothers and sisters (Matthew 13:55–56; Luke 8:19; etc.). It could be the case that, as the family's eldest child, Jesus was given more freedom than His younger siblings.

#### **What Do You Think?**

How can you help share the responsibility of caring for the children of your relatives and friends?

#### **Digging Deeper**

What steps can your congregation take to support parents who are in crisis?

**45. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.**

If the discovery occurred in the evening—a fair assumption from the fact that they had completed a day's journey (Luke 2:44, above)—they would have been forced to set out toward *Jerusalem* the following morning.

## II. Jesus Was Found

(Luke 2:46–50)

### A. Surprising Discovery (vv. 46–47)

**46. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.**

By one estimate, *three days* includes the parents' departure from Jerusalem. Therefore, the order of events is as follows: a day to journey away from Jerusalem, a day to return, and a third day to search the city and temple.

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus estimated that more than two-and-a-half million people visited Jerusalem during the week of Passover, 10 times the amount of people as usual. Even after the eight days of celebration concluded, many people would remain in the city before returning home.

At the center of all this activity was Jesus *in the temple*. The temple courts covered more than 25 acres after they were expanded by Herod the Great (reigned 37–4 BC). Finding the boy Jesus among the crowds would have been an insurmountable challenge.

The title *doctors* applied to those who were teachers and experts of the Law of Moses. The same underlying word in ancient Greek, translated as “Master,” is used to refer to Jesus when He taught in the temple later in life (Luke 20:21).

His *sitting* at the feet of the doctors reflects the posture of a student (compare Luke 10:39). Further, the 12-year-old Jesus was an active learner, *hearing* and *asking them questions*. The text does not say the topics of study, but experts in the law possessed authority when teaching in the temple.

#### **What Do You Think?**

How can your congregation provide learning opportunities for children interested in spiritual things?

#### **Digging Deeper**

How might the directives mentioned in Deuteronomy 6:4–9 help inform your congregation’s efforts in this regard?

### **In God’s Place**

In the midst of life’s busyness, it takes a lot of effort for me to slow down, study God’s Word, and be attentive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Some days are easier than others. My work obligations, household chores, and phone-use habits often keep me busy and distracted from spiritual matters. I’m always looking for another work assignment, a new project around the house, or the next phone application to divert my attention.

However, when I put away distractions and spend time studying Scripture, I find the presence of God. In the pages of Scripture, I discover the God who revealed himself through Jesus Christ. In the pages of Scripture, I come to know a Savior who loves and cares for me. I find rest and hope when I read in Scripture what Jesus has done for me.

Even as a boy, Jesus prioritized going to the temple, the place where Scripture was studied and discussed. Jesus’ actions as a boy show us how we might give our attention to spiritual matters. God’s children spend time with their Heavenly Father and learn about following Jesus through reading and studying the Bible. How have you prioritized reading and studying the Bible this week? How will you deal with the inevitable distractions that might prevent you from doing so?

—J. K.

#### **47. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.**

Jesus showed remarkable spiritual and intellectual wisdom for someone so young (compare Luke 2:52). The crowd was *astonished*, both at *his understanding*—intelligence and discernment—and the *answers* He gave to inquiries. Even though He was only a boy from rural Galilee, Jesus could sit among Jewish rabbis. Even as a boy, Jesus generated a strong response from an audience. As an adult, Jesus’ teaching was noted for its “power,” leaving audiences “astonished” (4:32).

### **Astonished**

My family member was facing health complications, and there we were in the doctor's office, just waiting for the report. My heart was anxious, and I felt like my stomach was turning itself into knots. I had cried out to the Lord that the first words on the doctor's lips would be, "I have good news!"

The doctor opened the door and, to my astonishment, gave us the good news I had prayed to receive. In that moment, I knew that God had heard my prayer. It would be easy to move on from that day, to return to our family life as "normal." It would have been easy to let my astonishment fade into the background of a busy life. Sometimes, I tend to go about my affairs as if God hadn't performed a miracle and hadn't answered my prayer.

Everyone who witnessed Jesus' interactions with the teachers in the temple was also astonished. Maybe some of them would have the opportunity to seek this Jesus again when He was fully grown. Rather than get caught up in your busy life, consider how God has astonished you. Have you let God's work through Jesus Christ lead you to praise the gracious deeds of your Savior?

—J. K.

Visual for Lesson 6. Display this visual as you ask the following question for whole-class discussion: "Where are you looking for Jesus today?"

### B. Anxious Question (v. 48)

**48. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.**

Now, it is the parents' turn to be shocked. Their reaction was similar to but not synonymous with the reaction of the doctors in the temple: *they were amazed*. The text does not reveal why they specifically felt this way. Perhaps they were surprised that they managed to find Jesus in the temple, or maybe they were stunned that He had seemingly behaved irresponsibly.

Jesus' unconventional response in the previous verse seems to lead Mary to demonstrate some level of anxiety and fear, displayed by her question: *Why has thou thus dealt with us?* She reprimands Him for the *sorrowing* He caused her and Joseph.

The phrase *thy father* does not mean that Joseph was Jesus' biological parent; Luke is clear that Joseph was not (Luke 1:34–35). Mary refers to Joseph as Jesus' father in the earthly and adoptive sense. This phrase might also set up Luke's readers for Jesus' work regarding His Heavenly Father, described in the following verse.

### C. Mysterious Answer (vv. 49–50)

**49. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?**

This reply to Mary's question must have astonished her and Joseph, and it prefigures the wisdom that Jesus would have as an adult. Jesus' answer is difficult to translate. The expression translated *must* indicates the fulfillment of God's plan or purpose (examples: Luke 4:43; 9:22; 13:33). A pressing reality—God's plan—caused Jesus to stay behind in Jerusalem: He was *about*

His *Father's business*. While in the temple interacting with doctors, Jesus was engaged in the matters of God; He was doing something His Heavenly *Father* would have Him do.

The phrase *my Father* might have stung Joseph, who knew that Jesus was not his biological child. On the one hand, Joseph would have likely been familiar with Old Testament Scripture that refers to God as *Father* (examples: Deuteronomy 32:6; Psalm 89:26; Isaiah 64:8). But on the other hand, Joseph was aware that Jesus somehow is “Emmanuel ... God with us” (Matthew 1:23). When Joseph and Mary first took Jesus to the temple, they heard Simeon’s understanding of Jesus to be “the Lord’s Christ” (Luke 2:26). They also heard Anna’s understanding of Him to be an important part of redemption (2:36–38). But we don’t know precisely how Joseph interpreted all this, even 12 years later.

Jesus’ unique status as the Son of God continued to be a relevant consideration during His adult ministry. Twice a voice from Heaven called Jesus “my beloved Son,” once at His baptism (Luke 3:22) and once at His transfiguration (9:35). Jesus also invited His disciples to call God their “Father” (11:2). The apostle Paul would say that because the “Spirit of [God’s] Son” is within believers, we can cry out to God, “Abba, Father” (Galatians 4:6).

Jesus’ response implied that Mary and Joseph should have known or not worried about His whereabouts. This response was memorable, and it might have been the kind of phrase that Mary “kept ... in her heart” (Luke 2:51). From His earliest days of independence, Jesus was aware that His life was guided by the plan of His Heavenly Father (compare John 5:19).

**50. And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.**

Jesus’ *saying* left Mary and Joseph perplexed. Perhaps Mary recalled what the angel Gabriel announced to her regarding Jesus’ status as the “Son of the Highest” (Luke 1:32) and the “Son of God” (1:35). Mary may have wondered how He would be given “the throne of his father David” (1:32). She could not have anticipated that the angel’s words would mean that her Son would seek out the experts in law at the age of 12.

Mary and Joseph were like many of Jesus’ disciples who struggled to understand Him (examples: Luke 9:45; 18:34). The parents knew from His birth that Jesus was not an ordinary child, but even His own mother did not understand Him.

**What Do You Think?**

How do you respond when you have struggled to understand what God might be doing or trying to teach you?

**Digging Deeper**

How might Jesus’ parting words to His disciples in Matthew 28:20 guide you in times of uncertainty?

### **III. Jesus Went Home (Luke 2:51–52)**

#### **A. His Obedience (v. 51)**

**51a. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.**

Jesus’ response to Mary and Joseph might appear that He was behaving defiantly. However, the verse before us prevents that impression. The family returned to *Nazareth*, where Jesus *was subject unto them* by showing His parents respect, honor, and obedience. In Judaism, the



command to “honour thy father and thy mother” is considered so important that it is followed by the conditional phrase: “that thy days may be long upon the land” (Exodus 20:12). Honoring one’s parents meant more than only demonstrating obedience. It included the responsibility to care for them and treat them well in their old age. Jesus fulfilled this command by asking His disciple to care for His mother in His absence (John 19:26–27).

**51b. But his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.**

The fact that Mary *kept all these sayings in her heart* is consistent with her response to the shepherds’ message following Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:19). She would have days to reflect on this unique child. Perhaps her confusion turned to gratitude for her growing child, who continued to surprise her.

## **B. His Growth (v. 52)**

**52. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.**

Jesus’ growth *in wisdom and stature* demonstrates His mental, physical, and spiritual growth as the Son of God (compare Luke 2:40). The *favour* He experienced includes the winsomeness and goodwill shown to Him, including His approval *with God and man*. Jesus’ family, neighbors, and His Heavenly Father were all pleased by His work on His “Father’s business” (2:49, above). Luke’s summary of Jesus’ growth and maturity prepares readers of this Gospel for a 10-year leap in the narrative. The next chapter in the Gospel of Luke details Jesus’ baptism and the inauguration of His fulltime earthly ministry (3:1–22).

**What Do You Think?**

What steps should you take to keep spiritually formative memories alive?

**Digging Deeper**

Who can you encourage, and what steps might you take to communicate with that person this week?

## **Conclusion**

### **A. Finding Jesus Again**

The theme of “lost and found” can be found throughout Luke’s Gospel. For example, Jesus told three parables about things that were lost: a sheep (Luke 15:1–7), a coin (15:8–10), and a son (15:11–32). Jesus himself was “lost” when He was arrested and killed, but He was “found” by two men when He joined them along the Emmaus road (24:13–35). The account from today’s lesson is like that example, a time when Jesus was “lost” and then “found” in an unexpected location.

Although Jesus was considered lost to Joseph and Mary, He was not genuinely missing. Luke shows his readers that Jesus was following the will of His Father in Heaven, even when doing so was surprising or confusing to the people around Him.

This account also reveals the devotion of Jesus’ family. They brought Him to Jerusalem each year so He might learn what was expected of Him regarding following God. In return, Jesus showed respect to His earthly parents. Even though He was in the house of His Heavenly Father, Jesus obeyed Mary and Joseph and returned with them to Nazareth.

That 12-year-old boy would grow to fulfill the mission of His Heavenly Father: becoming the Savior for God's people (Luke 2:11), including those who struggle to understand His work but proclaim Him as their Savior. In this way, Luke's account becomes an example for those who seek to "find" and follow Jesus. God's people can look to Jesus to find what God is doing. When we do so, we might find ourselves headed in an entirely new direction!

### **B. Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we sometimes struggle to understand Your plan. Help us be patient with our families and neighbors, including those entering adulthood or stepping out in faith for the first time. No matter our life stage, empower us to continue growing in wisdom and favor—with You and others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

Seek to receive the approval of God and the goodwill of others.