

The Boy Jesus in the Temple

Devotional Reading: [Psalm 27](#)

Background Scripture: [Luke 2:41–52](#)

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⁴¹ Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴ Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

⁴⁹ “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁵¹ Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to

them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.



Key Text

“Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” —**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

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- 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)
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- A. His Obedience (v. 51)
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Conclusion

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

How to Say It

Deuteronomy	Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.
diaspora	dee-as-puh-ruh.
Immanuel	lh-man-you-el.
Galatians	Guh-lay-shunz.
Herod	Hair-ud.
Mishnah	Mish-nuh.
Samaritan	Suh-mare-uh-tun.

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 beginning” ([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 treasured up 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 on

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 Festival 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. Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival 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 *festival* that commemorates Israel’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt (Exodus 12:1–3; Deuteronomy 16:1–8). It is one of the three festivals 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. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom.

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 festival* 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. After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.

The celebration of Passover is immediately followed by the seven-day-long Festival of Unleavened Bread ([Leviticus 23:5–6](#)). Although *the festival* 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 *stayed 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. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.

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 *began looking for him* from among the group of travelers consisting of *their relatives and friends*. 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. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for 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. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to 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 *teachers* applied to those who were experts of the Law of Moses. The same underlying word in ancient Greek 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 teachers reflects the posture of a student (compare [Luke 10:39](#)). Further, the 12-year-old Jesus was an active learner, *listening to them* 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. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

Jesus showed remarkable spiritual and intellectual wisdom for someone so young (compare [Luke 2:52](#)). The crowd was *amazed*, 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 "authority," leaving audiences "amazed" (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. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

Now, it is the parents’ turn to be shocked. Their reaction was similar to but not synonymous with the reaction of the teachers in the temple: *they were astonished*. 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 have you treated us like this?* She reprimands him for the anxiety he caused her and Joseph.

The phrase *your father* does not mean that Joseph was Jesus’ biologi-

cal 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. “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”

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 *I had to be* 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 had to be in his *Father’s house*. While in the temple interacting with teachers, Jesus was engaged in the matters of God; he was doing something his Heavenly Father would have him do.

The phrase *my Father’s house* 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 “Immanuel ... 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 Messiah” ([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 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 “treasured ... 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. But they did not understand what he was saying to 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 Most High” ([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

III. Jesus Went Home

(Luke 2:51–52)

A. His Obedience (v. 51)

51a. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to 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 obedient to them* by showing his parents respect and honor. In Judaism, the command to “honor your father and your mother” is considered so important that it is followed by the conditional phrase: “that you may live long in 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 Mary in his absence ([John 19:26–27](#)).

51b. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

The fact that Mary *treasured all these things 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 grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor 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 *favor* 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 full-time 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.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

Invite learners to share about what life was like when they were 12 years old. Lead a time of reminiscing by asking the following questions as conversation starters: 1–Where was your home located? 2–If you attended church, what was that like? 3–Which school did you attend? 4–How did you entertain yourself? (*Note:* You do not have to use any or all of these questions. Base follow-up questions on the conversation.) Invite learners to share stories from their childhood about a time when they were curious about spiritual matters.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Child’s Play” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing their answers with the group.

Lead into Bible study by saying, “At the age of 12, most of us were figuring out life as a kid. When we look at today’s story from the Gospel of Luke, we will see that when Jesus was only 12 years old, he deeply understood spiritual matters and astonished elders with his wisdom.”

Into the Word

Have a volunteer read aloud [Luke 2:41–45](#). Write the following questions on the board for small-group discussion: 1–Why did Jesus’ family

travel to Jerusalem every year? 2—How did the Passover commemorate God’s deliverance of the Israelites from slavery? 3—Using your “sanctified imagination,” what would a typical first-century 12-year-old boy do during the festival? After five minutes, ask a volunteer from each group to share their answers with the class.

Option. Distribute paper and pens to each group. Ask each group to write as many descriptive words or phrases as possible that describe the Passover observance. Encourage them to read [Exodus 12](#) and [Deuteronomy 16:1–7](#) as preparation.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [Luke 2:46–52](#). In the same groups as before, have the groups answer the following questions in small-group discussion: 1—What do Jesus’ actions in the temple reveal about his awareness of his mission? 2—How did those who heard Jesus in the temple react to him? 3—What emotions might Mary and Joseph have felt when they could not find Jesus? 4—What emotions might Mary and Joseph have felt after they found Jesus in the temple? 5—Using your “sanctified imagination,” how do you think Jesus’ actions differed from those of typical first-century 12-year-olds? 6—How do you think Jesus’ actions were similar to typical first-century 12-year-olds? After no more than 10 minutes of small-group discussion, reconvene the class and ask for volunteers to share their group’s responses to each question.

Option. Distribute copies of the “Jesus in the Temple” activity from the activity page. Have learners complete it individually in a minute or less before discussing the conclusions with a partner from their small group.

Ask a volunteer to read Jesus’ response to His parents in [Luke 2:49](#). Ask the class: “Why is Jesus’ response important?” Ask another volunteer to read [Luke 2:51–52](#). For whole-class discussion, ask, “How do these

verses summarize Jesus’ spiritual journey as a child?”

Into Life

Distribute a sheet of paper and a pen to each learner. Ask learners to think of a young person from their congregation or neighborhood. Invite learners to write a note to encourage that young person in his or her spiritual journey.

Challenge learners to consider delivering the letters and to be available as a source of spiritual support for each young person. End class with a prayer, asking God to encourage the young people who receive the letters.

To print the reproducible activity page, simply click the highlighted text below to create a pdf file on your hard drive. Then open the pdf file in Acrobat Reader and print.

[Activity Page \(July 6—The Boy Jesus in the Temple\)](#)
