

Who Is This Child?

What does it mean to grow in the ways of God? Ancient traditions live when they provide paths to explore and places to encourage searching by young and old. Jesus grows by listening and asking questions of wise ones. We cannot help but wonder who, and whose, this child is. Such wonder treasures every experience that brings growth toward God.

Focus Scripture: Luke 2:41–52

Luke is the only gospel that tells a story set in Jesus' childhood. The pilgrimage made by Jesus' family to Jerusalem for Passover clearly describes Jesus as formed within the faith and traditions of Judaism. This is an important affirmation throughout Luke's gospel. Jesus will teach in synagogues. Jesus will observe Passover in Jerusalem as an adult. Thus, this episode at the temple sets the stage for critical episodes in Jesus' ministry.

Luke notes that Jesus was twelve years old. The age of thirteen in later Jewish tradition was when children took on the discipline of Judaism for themselves. This ritual became known as *bar mitzvah* for boys and *bat mitzvah* for girls. It is unclear whether this practice was in place at Luke's time. What is clear is that, for the first time in the gospel of Luke, Jesus speaks and acts on his own. Up to this point, the question "who is this child?" has been answered by angels, Mary, Elizabeth, shepherds, and Simeon and Anna. Jesus now gives an indication to his response to this query when he says, "did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" This exchange sets the stage for Luke's accounts of Jesus' baptism (3:21–22), the beginning of his public ministry, and preaching in his hometown synagogue (4:14–30).

Jesus interacts with two groups of adults – the elders and his parents – entrusting himself into the traditions they represent. He listens to and asks questions of the elders. He responds with obedience to his parents' request. Yet, it also seems that Jesus brings something new to those traditions in his words and presence. As a result, the adults respond with amazement or astonishment, suggesting recognition that this child bears watching in the most positive of ways. Mary's "treasuring"

of these things points in that direction. Because of the description of this "treasuring," we might wonder, as do some scholars, if Mary was the source of this story, as well as the infancy narrative, where Luke indicates Mary "treasured" the shepherds' words (2:19).

Jesus "increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine favour." Growth in wisdom and faith are themes common to our lives as well. Indeed, the whole story invites our empathy. We can identify with anxious parents. We can relate to youthful wanderings. Yet there is also mystery. The phrase translated as "in my Father's house" can also be translated as "in my Father's affairs" or "among those belonging to my Father." Where will such affairs and such a sense of belonging lead Jesus? We wonder where such belonging may lead us.

The additional readings seem to speak with Luke about growth and wonder. **1 Samuel 2:18–20, 26** affirms the growth of the child Samuel in terms quite close to those used in Luke to speak of Jesus. Like Jesus, Samuel's calling is yet to be fully revealed. **Psalm 148** wondrously invokes all of creation to sing God's praise. **Colossians 3:12–17** describes spiritual growth in terms of how Christians live in relationship with others. Wisdom is not simply what is known, but also what is practiced.

• • • • •

Two days ago Christians celebrated Jesus' birth. Now we are invited to treasure stories of Jesus' growth and seeking, wondering about who this child is to us. What wondering do these passages stir in you? In what ways does Jesus' attentiveness to the traditions of his faith inform how you and your church grow through your traditions? How might you bring growth to those traditions?



December 27, 2009

Focus Scripture

Luke 2:41–52

Additional Scriptures

1 Samuel 2:18–20, 26

Psalm 148

Colossians 3:12–17

We seek you, Jesus. Open our eyes and minds, our ears and hearts, to your presence among us in infancy's wonder, in childhood's growth, in youthful searching, and in adulthood's stature. Guide our seeking, that it may lead to wisdom's source and path. Amen.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

For many children, the part of the story that captures their attention is that Mary and Joseph didn't miss Jesus for a whole day and then spent three days looking for him. To children today, being missing for at least four days is a horrible thought. So be prepared to talk about how people would have travelled to and from Jerusalem in large groups. The three days that Jesus spent in the temple is a bit harder to explain, but remind them that Jesus was in a safe place.

From a tiny baby in a manger to a 12-

year-old young man is quite a leap in a week. However, children observe their own growth and know how they are changing. Recognizing that Jesus grew in the same way can be a point of identification with him. Help them see that Jesus wanted to learn just as they do. Their questions are tools that help them learn about many things.

Pray that the children discover throughout their entire life that questions are what keeps their faith and imagination alive.

December 27, 2009



Materials needed

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Luke 2:41–52, and biblical background material (p. 35). What do you think Jesus asked the teachers in the temple?
- ❑ Bring *basic supply kit* (see p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 8* and *CD player*. *Seasons.mp3 Downloads* are available for purchase at www.spiritseasons.com.
- ❑ Bring songs "Spirit Come," "Oh, God Today Has a Human Face," and "May Peace Be with You" (pp. 4–5, 2–3, and 5 in *Music Section*, also #23, #6, and #24 on *Seasons Music CD*).

Gather

- ❑ Prepare worship table with *white or gold cloth*, *Christ candle*, *offering basket*, and *Bible*. Place *bookmark* at Luke in the Bible.

Engage

- ❑ Prepare to tell story on *today's resource sheet* "Questions All Around."
- ❑ For tableaux group, bring *today's resource sheet* "Questions All Around" and (optional) *costumes*.

- ❑ For art meditation group, bring *poster* "The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple," *copies of today's resource sheet* "Jesus in the Temple," and *directions*.

Respond

Gather or make the materials for the zones selected.

- ❑ **Art zone:** materials for the timeline and *resource sheet* "Luke's Orderly Account" (p. 102)
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** *copies of today's resource sheet* "My Journal Questions" and *directions*
- ❑ **Community zone:** *costumes* and *props* as needed
- ❑ **Music zone:** *song* "You Are Holy" (p. 12 in *Music Section*; also #21 on *Seasons Music CD*)
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** *writing paper*, *envelopes*, and *addresses* for church leaders

Bless

- ❑ Bring *song* "You Are Holy" (p. 12 in *Music Section*; also #21 on *Seasons Music CD*).

Who Is This Child?

Scripture

Luke 2:41–52

FOCUS To practice learning in the church as Jesus learned in the temple.

GATHER

Welcome Greet the children as they arrive and welcome any visitors. Have them place their offerings in the basket on the worship table.

Call to gather Play “Spirit Come” (pp. 4–5 in *Music Section*, also #23 on *Seasons Music CD*). Invite the children to gather at the worship table. Point out the new cloth on the worship table and the Christ candle that has replaced the Advent candles. This season, which began on Christmas Day, is the Twelve Days of Christmas. It ends on Epiphany Day.

Opening ritual

Call to worship and learn Invite the children to repeat each line of the poem about the Season of Christmas after you:

Advent was a time to wait,
Now it's time to celebrate!
Today one candle we will light
And its flame will be so bright.
“Praise to God,” we all do say,
For Christ was born on Christmas Day.

Light or help a child light the Christ candle.

Prayer Ask a child to hold the offering basket. Pray the following prayer, or one of your own:

God of hope, peace, joy, and love,
we praise you for all that you have done
for us
and come to learn about you and the Bible.
We also bring our gifts as a sign of our
praise. Amen.

Put out the candle as a sign that the Gather ritual is concluded.

Connect with the focus

Growing Whether a child is five or 12, the child has known growth. Drawing forth that knowledge is the first step into the Bible story for this session. Ask:

■ **What can you do today that you couldn't do when you were a baby?**

Allow each child to name at least one thing. There is no need to point out what the older children can do that the younger children cannot. When a variety of things have been named, tell the group that the story about Jesus is when Jesus was 12.

ENGAGE

Prepare for the Bible passage

From baby to grown-up boy Move from how the children have grown and changed since infancy to inviting them to think about how Jesus has changed. Point out that in the previous session, Jesus wasn't yet born. However, Christmas has come, the day when we mark the birth of Jesus. Given that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and in today's story is 12 years old. Ask:

■ **How do you think Jesus has grown and changed during these 12 years?**

Try to harness their creative thinking to keep them to the time when Jesus lived. Point out that

at 12, Jesus was probably considered a Jewish man.

The Bible passage

Why? What? How? Questions play an important part in this story and not just the questions Jesus asked the teachers in the temple. Invite the children to listen for times that people ask questions in the story. Then tell the story on today's resource sheet “Questions All Around,” based on Luke 2:41–52. Following the story, ask:

■ **Who asked questions in the story?**

After the children have identified various questioners in the story, move to the following activities.

Explore the story further

To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, describe the two options. Have each child choose one.

Tableaux group This group of children will arrange themselves in tableaux representing various scenes of the story. Together recall the story on today's resource sheet "Questions All Around." As the children tell it, list scenes on newsprint, such as leaving for Jerusalem, walking the long distance, going to the temple for worship, celebrating the Passover meal, Mary and Joseph looking for Jesus among the travellers, Mary and Joseph searching for Jesus in Jerusalem, Mary and Jesus finding Jesus in the temple, the family on the way to Nazareth. A tableau is a frozen in motion portrayal of one part of the story. It is like arranging a photograph. Provide costumes, if possible. Present the tableaux to the other group.

Art meditation group These children will examine the poster *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple* with the aid of today's resource

sheet "Jesus in the Temple." The children will need copies of the resource sheet, Bibles, and pencils. Display the poster and these directions:

- 1 Take a copy of "Jesus in the Temple" and a pencil.
- 2 Sit where you can look easily at the poster *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*.
- 3 Look at it for a moment before you follow the directions on "Jesus in the Temple."
- 4 When you are ready, talk about the story and the art with someone else in this group.



The Bible story and us

Play "Oh, God Today Has a Human Face" (pp. 2-3 in *Music Section*; also #6 on the *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather together. Invite the tableau group to present their tableau and the art meditation group can report on what they learned about the story from the poster art.

3 RESPOND

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Art zone: Timeline** Two more sessions focus on Jesus' life and preparation for ministry. The children can begin a timeline to review Jesus' life up to now and add scenes from the next two sessions later. Select one of the methods for displaying the events on the resource sheet "Luke's Orderly Account" (p. 102).
- **Quiet zone: Journal page** Sometimes it is helpful to sit quietly and ponder important things. This zone allows that opportunity for children as they recognize how Jesus had questions for the teachers in the temple. Provide copies of today's resource sheet "My Journal Questions," pencils, and these directions:



- 1 Take a copy of "My Journal Questions."
- 2 Imagine Jesus asking questions of the teachers in the temple. What questions do you have?
- 3 Read "My Journal Questions." Write your questions on the page.
- 4 Who can you talk to about your questions?



- **Community zone: Cooperative drama** Dramatizing the story helps the children get into the middle of it. When they are planning to present it to others, their intensity for it often increases. Talk with the leader of a youth or adult group to see if the children can present it at the end of the education time. The children can work together to refine the tableaux developed in Engage. One child can announce the title of each tableau. Simple costumes and props will be important in a presentation for others.

- **Music zone: Jesus, the holy one** For this session and the following two, the song “You Are Holy” (p. 12 in *Music Section*; also #21 on *Seasons Music CD*) will be featured. Its focus on the holiness of Jesus points to the special nature of this one sent by God. Have the children listen to it and then begin clapping softly to the rhythm. Encourage them to embody this song before they sing the words. The rhythm is as important to singing it as the words are. Concentrate on the English words in this session.
- **Outreach zone: Letters** To reinforce the idea that the children learn about their faith by asking questions, invite them to write letters to church officers or others in the congrega-



tion, including one or two of their questions. Recall with the children how Jesus spent the three days with the teachers in the temple. Ask:

■ **What questions about church or the Bible would you like to ask someone in our church?**

As you write each child’s question on newsprint, print the child’s name next to it. Provide writing paper for them to compose a letter and include their questions. They might begin by telling about learning about this story of Jesus in the temple. If several children without writing skills are in this zone, a leader or older child can help them compose a letter together. Mail or deliver the letters to various church leaders.

4

BLESS

Gather Play “Oh, God Today Has a Human Face” (pp. 2–3 in *Music Section*, also #6 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather at the worship table.

Song Sing the English words to “You Are Holy” (p. 12 in *Music Section*; also #21 on *Seasons Music CD*), led by the children in the music zone.

Pray this prayer, or one of your own:

Listening God, you bring us together to learn and to ask questions.

Thank you for being with us as we learn and grow. Amen.

Blessing To each child, say, “(Child’s name), as you think about God this week, remember your questions.”



How did the children connect with the 12-year-old Jesus? When were they able to ask questions and ponder them?

Plan ways to incorporate their questions in future sessions. If they sent letters to church leaders, allow time to read them together as they arrive.

What questions do you have about the church or your faith?



Questions All Around

based on Luke 2:41–52

Emphasize the questions when they occur to help the children recognize that someone is asking a question.

It was almost time to leave for Jerusalem. Mary and Jesus were rushing to get everything ready. Joseph was cleaning up the carpenter's shop. "Is everything ready?" Joseph asked. Then they left for the long walk to the city.

As they walked from Nazareth, they met others who were headed for Jerusalem too. Going to the temple for the Festival of the Passover was exciting. Jesus was really excited because he was old enough now to begin studying the Jewish law. Questions were tumbling around in his head.

Everyone seemed excited as they walked and talked. Someone started telling the story about how their ancestors had been brought by God out of Egypt where they had been slaves. The Passover story was one Jesus had heard every year at this time. But Jesus never grew tired of hearing it.

The walking was tiring. "Anyone need to rest?" someone called out. They stopped to rest for a while, but everyone was eager to reach Jerusalem. They would worship in the temple and eat the Passover meal in the holy city. It took days to walk from Nazareth to Jerusalem. And the Passover meal and the worship were wonderful.

Now it was time to go home. Great crowds of people left the city when the Passover celebration ended. At the end of the first day of walking,

Mary and Joseph looked for Jesus. They thought Jesus was walking with others his age, but no one had seen Jesus.

"Have you seen Jesus?" they asked friends.
"Have you seen Jesus?" they asked family.
"Have you seen Jesus?" they asked everyone they saw.

No one had seen Jesus. Oh, some thought they saw Jesus, but they weren't sure.

Very worried, Mary and Joseph walked back to Jerusalem. They walked up and down the city streets. "Have you seen our son? He's twelve and probably by himself." Finally, on the third day, they went to the temple. There was Jesus, talking with the teachers at the temple. They were in a serious conversation. Jesus had questions for the teachers. The teachers also had questions for Jesus. Mary and Joseph didn't know whether to be happy or angry. Jesus was safe, but Jesus had also caused them much worry.

"Child, why have you done this? Your father and I have been worried out of our minds searching for you."

"Mother," Jesus answered, "Didn't you know that I would be here, learning about God and God's ways?"

Mary and Joseph shook their heads slowly. Would they ever understand this child of theirs?

Mary, Joseph, and Jesus left Jerusalem and walked the long trip back to Nazareth. As they walked, each one thought about the trip. But Mary treasured all these stories of Jesus in her heart. Jesus, back in Nazareth, continued to ask questions and learn about God.



Jesus in the Temple

Begin by finding Luke 4 in your Bible.
Read verses 41 and 42.

Now look at the poster *The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple*. It was painted 150 years ago, but long after invading Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem.

What do you imagine the temple looked like, based on this painting?

The people on the left side of the painting are teachers in the temple. Notice how they are dressed and what they are holding.

What can you discover about these teachers from the painting?

Now read Luke 2:43-45.

How do you think Mary and Joseph felt when they realized that Jesus was not with them?

Return to the Bible and read Luke 2:46-47. Look again at the poster, at the teachers and Jesus.

What do you think Jesus and the teachers talked about?

What questions might Jesus have asked the teachers?

What questions might the teachers have asked Jesus?

Now read Luke 2:48-50. Look more closely at Mary, Joseph, and Jesus in the painting.

How do you think Mary sounded when she spoke to Jesus?

What might Joseph be thinking?

What do you think Jesus meant by his answer to his mother?

Finish the story by reading Luke 2:51-52.



My Journal Questions

**The important thing is
not to stop questioning.**
Albert Einstein

Think about all the places you were today and the people you talked with.
What questions did you ask today?

Which questions do you still want to think about?

What question do you have for God now?

If Jesus were sitting next to you, what would you ask Jesus?