

# THE BOY JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

## BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:41–52

## A VERSE TO REMEMBER

[Jesus] said to them,  
“Why were you  
searching for me?  
Did you not know  
that I must be in  
my Father’s house?”  
(Luke 2:49)

### Daily Bible Readings

<b>M</b>	June 30	Ps. 27	Living in God’s Presence
<b>T</b>	July 1	1 John 2:20–28	Anointed by the Holy One
<b>W</b>	July 2	Deut. 16:1–10	Remember Israel’s Redemption
<b>Th</b>	July 3	Deut. 16:11–17	Rejoice before the Lord
<b>F</b>	July 4	Ps. 114	Judah Has Become God’s Sanctuary
<b>Sa</b>	July 5	John 10:22–30, 34–38	The Father and I Are One

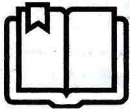
## STEPPING INTO THE WORD

**W**ith this lesson we make a transition into the New Testament, beginning with stories highlighting Jesus’ relationship to worship in his Jewish heritage. Our Scripture reading includes the only story from the gospels that mentions the years between Jesus’ infancy and his baptism as an adult by John. Given the way Luke tells the story of Jesus and the early church (the same author wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts), it is not surprising that the one story he includes about Jesus’ childhood/early adolescence should revolve around the temple in Jerusalem. Reverence for the temple and the Torah features prominently in both books. In the story immediately preceding today’s reading, Mary and Joseph present Jesus at the temple after his circumcision. While recounting the story, the author reminds us *five times* that the family was fulfilling the requirements of the Jewish law. After his temptation in the wilderness Jesus shows up in Nazareth where, on the Sabbath, he goes to the synagogue, as was his custom (Luke 4:16). Likewise in Acts, when Paul arrives in a given city on his journeys, the first thing he does is attend Sabbath worship in the local synagogue, often

taking the opportunity to spread the word about Jesus (Acts 9:20; 13:5, 13; 14:1; 17:2). The author of Luke and Acts frequently emphasized the continuity between the Jesus movement and its Jewish roots in this way.

This continuity shows up in the echoes we can perceive between our story for today's lesson and the Old Testament narrative of the prophet Samuel's childhood presentation to God for service in the tabernacle (1 Sam. 1–2). The author of Luke-Acts loves to emphasize the “Jewishness” of the gospel by dropping allusions to the Old Testament like this one into his telling of the story of Jesus.

*God of the covenant with Israel and the gospel of Jesus Christ, we thank you that the roots of our faith lie in both. Amen.*



## SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:41–52

**2:41** Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. <sup>42</sup>And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. <sup>43</sup>When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents were unaware of this. <sup>44</sup>Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup>When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. <sup>46</sup>After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup>And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup>When his parents saw him they were astonished, and his mother said to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you.” <sup>49</sup>He said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” <sup>50</sup>But they did not understand what he said to them. <sup>51</sup>Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them, and his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

<sup>52</sup>And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favor.

*Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.*



## PRAYER, WORSHIP, AND JESUS' MINISTRY

**W**hen the twelve-year-old Jesus sequestered himself with the teachers of the Torah in the temple, he was establishing a pattern that would persist throughout his ministry. The gospels show that he often spent concentrated periods of time in individual or group prayer and study. These were followed by periods of intense activity: preaching, teaching, healing, controversies with the Pharisees and other leaders, and the like. Here are a few examples of that pattern:

Set apart time	Public time
Preparation and temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4:1–13)	Announcement of his ministry in Nazareth (Luke 4:14–20)
Prayer on the mountain; call of the twelve disciples (Luke 6:12–16)	Preaching, teaching, and healing on the “level place” (Luke 6:17–19)
Dismissing the crowds in order to pray alone on the mountain (Matt. 14:23)	Healing the sick in Gennesaret (Matt. 14:34–36)
Praying on the mountain with Peter, James and John; the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28–36)	Healing the boy with a demon in the midst of a great crowd (Luke 9:37–43)

This alternating rhythm in Jesus' life between public ministry and time apart for worship was first brought to my attention by a Trappist monk. I was in seminary taking a church history class about Christianity in the Middle Ages. A Trappist monastery not far from the seminary ran a small retreat center for its monks. Our class went to talk to one of the monks staying there. One particular monk knew what we were thinking, and told us so. “Because you're Protestant pastors-in-training, you might wonder why folks like me don't get out into the world and work to make it better. But remember, in the gospels Jesus spends a lot of time in the wilderness, praying for the world before returning to it to minister. We do the former; you do the latter. Maybe between the two of us we make one good follower of Jesus.”




**Which of the rhythms of Jesus' life and ministry does your congregation lean toward?**

## WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE SILENCES?

**L**uke 2:41–52 contains the only story we have about the period between Jesus' birth and his ministry as an adult. Well, the only story in the Bible, that is. Other early Christian books that are not in New Testament canon, usually because they were written much later and/or promoted an unhelpful theological agenda, contain stories about the child Jesus. Often, they show him performing flashy displays of power, like fashioning birds out of mud and transforming them into feather and bone so as to watch them fly away. Such accounts demonstrate the powerful curiosity engendered by the canonical gospels' silence regarding the early years of Jesus' lifetime. What was he doing then?

Simply put, we don't know. This is a feature, not a bug, of Scripture. Whether they were compiled and edited over the course of decades or even centuries—as some books of the Old Testament seem to have been—or were the work of a single author at a specific moment in time, as appears to be the case with the letters of Paul, the books of the Bible as we have them today are the result of careful and deliberate intention. They say what their authors and editors meant them to say. They shine a light on aspects of the story to which we should be paying attention. For the most part, what they leave out is a call to focus on what they put in.

A first rule of reading the Bible is to listen to the silences, not for the purpose of filling them in with fruitless speculation, but to discern what is important in the story. Does the Bible leave out almost everything about Jesus' childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood? This tells us to just go with “the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him” (Luke 2:40) and look for the curtain to come up on Jesus and John the Baptist at the Jordan. Other helpful points to remember when reading a biblical story include looking for the character(s) in whom we should see ourselves. Hint: they are not always or even usually wearing the white hats. We are to notice the characters who occupy the margins of the story, asking who or what put them in the margins. Hint: it is usually not what the good religious folks thought they had done. Most especially, we try to figure out where God is moving and acting in the story. Hint: be prepared to be surprised.

 **What biblical story do you want to know more about than the passage reveals? Why?**



## STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

**I**t is difficult to following Jesus' example of a life spent both praying for the world and serving the world. Almost everyone I know—myself included—is better at or more comfortable with one than the other. An entire subgenre of religious publishing devotes itself to helping people discern their particular spiritual gifts and focus on them. Important as this is, work done with the hands (witness, mission, advocacy) and work done with the knees (prayer, study, contemplation) seem both to have been on Jesus' to-do list. Here are some thoughts for making both a part of our lives:

First, recognize that the dichotomy between the two is false. Both the desert fathers and mothers whom we met in an earlier lesson and the Trappist monk we encountered on page 33 would remind us that praying for the world *is* serving the world. We lift the world up to God in prayer, not to remind God about all the bad stuff going on, but to align our hearts with God's heart when it comes to this hurting world. Because we are connected as children of God, to pray for *someone* is to commit ourselves to be part of the answer to prayer for *anyone*.

Second, if the customary ways of praying for and serving the world aren't speaking to us, we should find or create a new one. Bible study not working for you, but you like reading fiction? Start a book club in your church. When you read a novel together, ask yourselves where you see God in the world the novel creates and how it gives you ideas for where to go looking for God in our world, too. Do you have a concern for a particular need or issue in your neighborhood? Start a ministry and see what God does with it. In the congregation to which I belong, dozens of us participate in prison ministry, serving as mentors, pen pals, worship leaders, Bible study teachers, Christmas gift deliverers, and more. It all started when one person began on his own to visit one of the local prisons, and then invited the rest of us to join him.

Finally, we can simply be awake to the problems and needs around us, and take opportunities, however small, for prayer and service to make them better. Can we do enough? Of course not, because that is neither within our capacity nor our job description. Can we do something that matters? With God's help, yes.



**What is your most preferred form of service to the world? When did you learn this about yourself?**

## SCRIPTURE NOTES

*The following notes from the Uniform Series provide additional information about today's Scripture.*

1. Luke 2:41–52 highlights Jesus's wisdom (v. 47; cf. vv. 40, 52), his ability to interpret the law (vv. 46–47), and his mission and identity (v. 49).
2. Disciples would sit at the feet of teachers, both listening and asking questions. Young men could enter this phase in their teens. Contrary to popular belief, Jesus is not here depicted as teaching the elders, but learning and engaging their questions.
3. People traveled in large groups for companionship and security on the journey. It is not surprising that Mary and Joseph did not worry about Jesus on the first day's travel home. After a day spent in returning to Jerusalem, they found him in the temple, a set of courtyards and buildings used not only for offering sacrifices but also for religious teaching and discussions (cf. Acts 5:25).
4. Jesus was raised from the dead after "three days," and so it was that, from the very earliest days of the church, Christians made a quick inference from any use of "three days" to an image of "resurrection." Luke, writing to a post-resurrection audience, would realize that Jesus's words would now be heard in the light of his resurrection that was not yet in view to the original audience of Jesus.