

A Worried Mother

Luke 2:41-52 The Message

⁴¹⁻⁴⁵ Every year Jesus' parents travelled to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up as they always did for the Feast. When it was over and they left for home, the child Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents didn't know it. Thinking he was somewhere in the company of pilgrims, they journeyed for a whole day and then began looking for him among relatives and neighbours. When they didn't find him, they went back to Jerusalem looking for him.

⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸ The next day they found him in the Temple seated among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. The teachers were all quite taken with him, impressed with the sharpness of his answers. But his parents were not impressed; they were upset and hurt.

His mother said, "Young man, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been half out of our minds looking for you."

⁴⁹⁻⁵⁰ He said, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that I had to be here, dealing with the things of my Father?" But they had no idea what he was talking about.

⁵¹⁻⁵² So he went back to Nazareth with them, and lived obediently with them. His mother held these things dearly, deep within herself. And Jesus matured, growing up in both body and spirit, blessed by both God and people.

Some background information

Travel was slow, difficult and dangerous at this time. In spite of the availability of donkeys and camels most people walked (John 7:1). Generally one could walk about 20 miles (32km) a day. Act 10:23-24 records Peter walking the 40 miles from Joppa (modern Tel Aviv) to Caesarea in 2 days. Travellers could be attacked by lions or bears, but the biggest danger was robbers (Luke 10:25-37). This made it safest to travel with others in a caravan (a large group of people - Luke 2:44). Foreigners and merchants often stayed in inns but Jews usually stayed in homes. Hospitality to travellers was an expected part of Jewish life.

The most direct route from Nazareth in Galilee to Jerusalem was through the Samaritan hill country (75 miles) and most Jews took that route, in spite of the hatred for the inhospitable Samaritans. Another way was down the Jordan River Valley through Jericho (97 miles).

At the age of 12, Jesus was considered close to adulthood; so he was probably not with Mary

and Joseph during the entire festival. Mary and Joseph would have travelled to Jerusalem with a large group of their relatives and neighbours. The women and children usually travelled at the front and the men behind to protect their party from the ambush of robbers along the roads. Jesus, because of his age could have been in either group thus leaving Mary and Joseph to assume he was with the other party.

After 3 long days Joseph and Mary finally found Jesus in the Temple. At the time of the Passover, the greatest Rabbis in the land would have come to Jerusalem to teach and discuss the truths of the scriptures amongst themselves. They were astounded by Jesus, not only by his youth but by the divine wisdom and knowledge he had.

Mary chastises Jesus for worrying his parents and they don't completely understand the answer that Jesus' gives. But Mary knows enough to say no more, instead she keeps all this in her heart and treasures it and thinks about what it can mean.

Way in to the Story

Talk about losing something you love. Have you ever lost something really valuable to you? Something you think is really precious?

In an All-age context ask if anyone has ever lost their child (even if only for a few minutes) and how that felt.

Ask the children if they have ever got lost from their parents and what that was like.

Explain that this event must have been really significant in Mary's life as it is one of the few stories about Jesus childhood that appears in Luke's gospel. Mary must have told the story to Luke when he was writing an account of Jesus life.

Jesus was away from his family for 3 days. Imagine the panic Jesus' parents must have been feeling as they journeyed back to Jerusalem to search for their missing boy.

Telling the story

Read the story from an easy to understand version of the bible e.g. The Message or use a children's story bible. There is a very good retelling of the story in "The Lion Storyteller Bible."

Half way through the story just as Mary and Joseph reach Jerusalem again you could ask the children in the congregation/ Sunday School for help to find Jesus and play the game below.

Game

You will need

6-8 cut out pictures of a Jewish boy in bible times (see template)

On the back of each image write a boy's name sticking to names that would have been common at the time. On one of the images write "Jesus". Hide all the images around the church/hall but put the Jesus image in an especially difficult to find place. Choose 2 children to be Mary and

Joseph and send them off to try and find Jesus. Tell them when they can find a picture of a boy to bring it up to the front. As the children come up the leader can say –“That’s not Jesus that’s Simeon, or that’s not Jesus that’s Matthew etc.” Choose another 2 children to be Mary and Joseph and keep going until Jesus is found.

After a lot of searching (with a few clues given if needed) someone finds Jesus and brings the image to the front. Make a bit of a fuss of the child who has found Jesus and give him/her a small reward, then send everyone back to their seats.

Say that [name child] was glad to find Jesus because he/she got a prize but imagine how Mary and Joseph felt when they eventually found the real Jesus. Let’s read the rest of the story to find out more!

Mary loved Jesus with all her heart. She knew he was more special than anyone else because he was the Messiah (or Saviour) that her people had been waiting for and talking about for hundreds of years. She had been chosen to look after and care for this special child. Jesus also loved Mary and Joseph. Even though he wanted to be with his heavenly Father in the temple he obeyed his earthly parents and came home with them to Nazareth.

Exploring the story

The Hot Seat

If doing this activity as part of an All-Age service, ask an adult to be Mary (she can be primed with the questions ahead of time) and another adult to be the interviewer. If doing as part of Sunday School, you could start with a leader as Mary and then give turns to some of the children to be either Mary or Joseph in the hot seat. The other children can come up with the questions. The idea is that the person in the hot seat must answer all the questions in character.

Invite “Mary” to come and sit on the Hot Seat (head dress or other props would add to the experience)

Example of questions

How did it take you so long to realise Jesus was missing?

(Travel in 2 groups, Jesus was old enough to be with the men, sometimes with the other boys his age, sometimes with the women and children)

What did you do when you couldn’t find Jesus?

(Asked around, checked with all the neighbours, relatives, friends of Jesus etc. Decided to retrace steps to Jerusalem)

How did you feel when you couldn't find him anywhere?

(Really worried, dangerous to travel alone, had he been attacked by bears? Beaten up by robbers?)

Where did you eventually find Jesus?

(Back in Jerusalem in the temple surrounded by the rabbis all wanting to hear what Jesus had to say)

Were you angry with Jesus for causing so much trouble?

Yes angry and upset, confused, it wasn't like Jesus to trouble us, he was so trustworthy. Puzzled by his answer as to why he had stayed behind.

Why did Jesus stay behind?

(He wanted to be about His father's business, was puzzled as to why his we wouldn't have known he was in the temple)