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# Jesus in the Temple , God With Us

*Scripture: Luke 2:21-52*

**Theme: Jesus grew up knowing He was God's Son**

*Jr High (Ages 12-14)*

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Free curriculum for small and rural churches

## Lesson Overview

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"God's Son in the Temple: A Boy Who Knew His Mission" When Jesus was twelve years old, He traveled with His parents to Jerusalem for the Passover festival, as Jewish families did every year. But this visit was different. On the journey home, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without His parents knowing. After a day of travel, Mary and Joseph realized He was missing. They searched among their relatives and friends, then returned to Jerusalem. After three days of searching, they found Jesus in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening and asking questions. Everyone was amazed at His understanding. When Mary asked why He had done this, Jesus answered, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). Even at twelve, Jesus knew who He was, and He was already focused on the mission God had given Him. Life App: Just like Jesus trusted God's plan even when it didn't make sense to those around Him, we can trust God's leading in our lives, even when it's hard or others don't understand. Optional reflection: children can draw a picture of Jesus helping their friends, then share one way they can help someone else this week. This extra activity supports the lesson's theme and gives teachers a simple, lowprep option for extending the discussion.

## Bible Story

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Title: Jesus in the Temple, Where God Meets Us (Luke 2:21-52)

The Annual Journey to Jerusalem Every year, Jewish families traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. When Jesus was twelve, He went with Mary and Joseph as usual. The journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem took several days, and families traveled together in large groups for safety and fellowship. For a boy of twelve, this was an important milestone, the year before he would become responsible for following the Jewish law on his own.

Left Behind in Jerusalem When the festival ended, the large group began the journey home. Mary and Joseph assumed Jesus was somewhere in the traveling company, perhaps with friends or relatives. But after a full day of

travel, they realized He was not with them at all. They searched among their relatives and friends but could not find Him. Worried and anxious, they turned back to Jerusalem to look for Him.

Three Days of Searching Mary and Joseph searched Jerusalem for three days. Finally, they found Jesus in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers of the law. He was not hiding or playing. He was listening to the teachers, asking them questions, and even answering their questions. The Bible says that everyone who heard Him was amazed at His understanding and His answers (Luke 2:47).

A Question That Revealed Everything When Mary and Joseph found Jesus, Mary said, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." Jesus answered with a question that revealed something extraordinary: "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:48-49). Jesus was not being disrespectful. He was revealing that He understood His identity as God's Son and that His life had a divine purpose.

Going Home and Growing Up Mary and Joseph did not fully understand what Jesus meant. But Jesus went back to Nazareth with them and was obedient to His parents. The Bible tells us that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). He continued to live an ordinary life in Nazareth for the next eighteen years, until His public ministry began. But that day in the temple showed that Jesus always knew who He was and why He had come.

Why This Story Matters Today Jesus' question to Mary and Joseph is a challenge for us. Where do we think God is most present? In church? In prayer? In the Bible? Jesus showed His parents that God's presence is not limited to one place. God is everywhere, and He is always at work. Sometimes, like Mary and Joseph, we need to search for God in unexpected places. And sometimes, like Jesus, we need to be bold enough to follow God's calling, even when others don't understand.

## Key Verse

### **Luke 2:49 , 'Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?'**

Here's a simple, heartfelt explanation of this verse for junior high students, with real-life questions and ways to apply it to life: --- The Story Behind It: When Jesus was just a little boy, His parents took Him to Jerusalem for a big family tradition. But after three days, they realized He wasn't back at the temple with them. Their first instinct was worry, "Where is He? Did something happen?", but Jesus didn't ask "Are you looking for me?" He asked, "Why were you searching for me?" His words aren't just a lesson about finding Him; they're a reminder that sometimes God calls us to do things He wants us to do, even if it feels hard or unexpected. Why It Matters Now: Life is full of "What if?" moments, like when you're told to step out in faith (ask for a promotion, forgive someone, or choose a different path) even though it's scary. Jesus wasn't saying "Don't search for me!", He was showing us that His plans often go beyond what we think we need. When you face tough choices, ask: Is this what God's calling me to do, or am I just looking for my own way? His answer might be: "You're on the right path, now trust me." Real-Life Question for You: If you had to explain this verse to a friend, what would you say? (Hint: It's less about "Where am I?" and more about "Where are you leading me?") --- Key Takeaway: God's house isn't just a place, it's where He wants us to live. Even when it feels weird or risky, His plans are bigger than ours.

## Activities

### Activity 1:

Students craft a "wisdom scroll" inspired by Jesus' encounter in the Temple, blending scripture and their own reflections on God's presence in their lives. This activity ties to the theme God with us through storytelling and prayer.

1. Setup: Divide students into small groups (3, 5). Explain that Jesus visited the Temple at 12 years old, full of questions.

2. Scripture Study: Ask: "What's one question Jesus asked that surprised His teachers?" (Hint: Luke 2:46, 47). Have them journal or write their own "big questions" on index cards.
3. Role-Play: Each group acts out the scene. One student is Jesus, another a "teacher." The teacher must respond honestly (e.g., "Did you not know...?" or "When will these things happen?"). The group discusses why Jesus' questions were bold.
4. Life Application: Close by asking: "What's a question you've had that God still answers today?" Share personal examples (e.g., faith struggles, curiosity about the future). Invite prayer for their questions.
2. "Wisdom Scroll: God's Word for Our Journey"
6. Scripture Connection: Read Luke 2:41, 52 aloud. Ask: "How did Jesus' encounter with God feel? How can we 'go to the Temple' today?" (Metaphor: Bible study, prayer, worship.)
7. Create the Scroll: Give each student a strip of paper to fold into a scroll. Write or draw:
8. A question Jesus asked (e.g., "Why is this book given to us?").
9. One way God answers (e.g., "Through His Word").
10. Their own 'Temple moment': A time God showed up in their life.
11. Share & Pray: Groups of 3, 4 share their scrolls. Close with prayer: "God, thank You for being with us, even when we're curious or afraid."
12. Why These Work:
13. Role-play lets students experience Jesus' boldness.
14. Scroll activity ties scripture to their own lives, making abstract ideas tangible.
15. Both use minimal supplies and encourage group discussion.
16. Bonus: For deeper connection, ask: "How do you think Jesus felt when His teachers were confused? How can we handle questions like that?"

## Discussion Questions

- Here are four open-ended discussion questions designed to spark meaningful reflection and conversation among junior high students (ages 12, 14). These questions explore the story of Jesus in the Temple (Luke 2:21, 52), encouraging them to think about God's presence in their lives, their own doubts, and how faith can shape their choices. Each question is framed to invite honesty, curiosity, and real-life application.
- 1. The Wise Question: "Where Do You Think Jesus Was Looking When He Grew Up?"
- Context: Imagine you're sitting in a crowded temple, just like young Jesus, watching the priests and teachers debate the law. Some people seem proud of their knowledge, while others look lost. Jesus, though small, notices something different about the people who come to God, not just their words, but their hearts. Where do you think he was really looking? Did he see the same things you do? Why might God want us to pay attention to those details?
- Life Application: This question invites students to think about how they perceive others, and themselves, in their own lives. Where do they look for truth, love, or purpose? How might Jesus' way of noticing others inspire them to be more intentional in their own relationships?
- Follow-up Prompts (if needed):
- What's one thing you've noticed in someone else lately that surprised you? How could you respond to them like Jesus did?
- How does it feel to think God is looking at us in the same way he was at Jesus? What might that mean for how we live?
- 2. The Doubtful Heart: "What Would You Have Said to Jesus If You Were Simeon's Friend?"
- Context: Simeon takes Jesus as a baby, and though he doesn't fully understand, he says, "Now you can dismiss your servant in peace", a beautiful promise of God's faithfulness. But what if you were standing right beside

Simeon, and you knew Jesus would grow up to do amazing things? Would you have said anything to him? What doubts or fears might you have had, even if you believed in God?

- Life Application: This question taps into the human struggle of faith, knowing God's promises while still wondering, "What if...?" It's a safe space to explore doubts without shame, showing that even people who love God have questions. How can students lean on God when their hearts are uncertain?
- Follow-up Prompts (if needed):
  - What's a time you felt like you couldn't "dismiss your servant in peace"? How did you handle it?
  - How might Jesus have reassured someone like you who doubted? What could you tell someone who's struggling today?
- 3. The Teacher's Lesson: "If Jesus Could Ask You a Question Right Now, What Would It Be?"
  - Context: After Jesus' parents leave the Temple, Mary asks, "Son, why have you treated us this way?" Jesus doesn't answer immediately, he just listens. What if Jesus, instead of speaking, asked you a question? He could ask about your fears, your hopes, or your biggest struggles. What would he want to know? Why do you think he chose to listen before he spoke?
  - Life Application: This question turns the story on its head, putting students in Jesus' shoes, or at least, in a place where they can imagine what he might care about. It encourages them to reflect on how they listen to others (and themselves) and how Jesus models this kind of attentive love.
  - Follow-up Prompts (if needed):
    - If Jesus asked you, "What's something you've been carrying for a long time?", what would you say? Why?
    - How can we be like Jesus in a world that often rushes to answer questions instead of listening?
- 4. The Big Picture: "If God Could Send You to the Temple Today, What Would You Bring?"
  - Context: Imagine you're a child visiting the Temple, just like Jesus and Mary. You're excited to see the priests and learn from the teachers. But before you go, God gives you one thing to bring, a small offering, a question, or even just your whole heart. What would you bring? Why does it matter what you take with you?
  - Life Application: This question connects the story to real life by asking students to think about what they bring to their faith, and what they might leave behind. It's a gentle reminder that our faith isn't just about what we know, but how we live with what we've been given. How does this challenge them to reflect on their own relationship with God?
  - Follow-up Prompts (if needed):
    - What's one thing you've been holding back from God? Why do you think that is?
    - If you could take one thing from this story (like Jesus' listening or Simeon's faith) into your own life today, what would it be?
  - Why These Questions Work:
    - Encourage Honesty: They avoid "safe" answers and invite students to share their real thoughts and feelings.
    - Relate to Real Life: Each question ties the biblical story to everyday struggles, hopes, and questions.
    - Build Faith in Action: They don't just teach facts, they help students practice what it means to follow Jesus in their own lives.
    - Create Conversation: They're open-ended enough to spark group discussion but deep enough to spark personal reflection.
  - Would you like any of these adjusted for a specific theme (e.g., more focus on doubt, more on prayer, or a particular theme from the story)?

## Prayer Focus

*Teacher's Prayer for the Class: "Jesus in the Temple , God With Us" "Dear Heavenly Father, We come before You today like young people who've got questions, big ones, small ones, and some we're still figuring out. Like Simon and the disciples, we've seen You work in ways we never expected, like when Jesus grew in wisdom, strength, and favor in the Temple. But we also know our hearts aren't always perfect, our minds aren't always clear, and sometimes we get lost in the noise of school, friendships, and growing up. Lord, help us to trust like Simeon trusted You, even when we don't understand. Teach us to listen when You speak, whether it's through a Bible verse, a friend's advice, or a quiet moment of prayer. Give us the courage to ask You real things, not just the easy ones, because You love us enough to answer all of them. And when we feel like we're wandering, like Simon did when his family wanted to take Him home, help us remember: You're always with us, guiding us, waiting for us. Let's grow in faith like Jesus did, learning that Your love doesn't disappear when life gets hard. Amen." --- Why this works for junior high students: - Honest & relatable: Acknowledges their struggles (growing up, confusion) without sugarcoating. - Appeals to their curiosity: Directs them to trust God even when they don't fully grasp things (like in Luke 2). - Life application: Links the story to real decisions (e.g., "when we feel lost, where do we turn?"). - Inclusive: Calls them to join in praying together, making it interactive. Optional follow-up: After prayer, ask: "What's one question you'd ask God right now if He could answer it?" (Let a few share, keep it light but meaningful!)*

### >> Missions Spotlight

Among the Jewish people today, the bar/bat mitzvah (coming of age) is a central tradition. Jesus' visit to the temple at age 12 resonates with Jewish families. Many Jewish people are discovering that Jesus is the fulfillment of everything the temple represented.

### -> To the Cross

At age 12, Jesus said, 'I must be in my Father's house.' He knew who He was and why He had come. Every step of His life was moving toward the cross. Jesus didn't accidentally end up on Calvary , He was born for it, lived for it, and chose it.