

DATE: January 3, 2021

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:41-52

TITLE: Child Jesus in the Temple

Luke 2:41-52—Jesus at age 12 at the Temple

This week we have another story of young Jesus at the Temple. It should be clear that the writer of the gospel is placing Jesus firmly within the tradition of Judaism. His family is at the Temple to celebrate Passover. The story also reveals that the family is a part of a community, joining in a pilgrimage with other families that has taken place for centuries.

That Jesus gets left behind when the caravan heads home is not inconceivable. The families would have traveled together in a caravan and watched over the kids as a group. It was only when the family struck camp in the evening that the kids would have been expected to return. When Jesus doesn't turn up, his parents are forced to sleep one night—for traveling back to Jerusalem alone at night would have been dangerous. The next day they would have had to travel back to Jerusalem. On the third day they would have searched for him.

As the story says, they found him at the Temple on the third day. This is not the last time that Jesus would be "missing," and then be found on the third day. Some decade and a half later, Jesus would hang on a cross and be put in a tomb on Friday. On Saturday he would remain hidden behind the stone. On the third day he rose and left the empty tomb behind.

In both of these instances, people were looking in the wrong place for Jesus. On Easter Sunday, Luke tells us that the women went to the tomb very early in the morning and found the stone rolled away and Jesus' body missing. Then an angel asked them "Why do you look for the living among the dead? Jesus told you this was going to happen" (paraphrase from 24:5)

In this story there is a similar situation. Jesus' parents are looking for Jesus, and when they find him he asks, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you

know it was necessary for to be in my Father's House?" (2:49).

Scholars say that this phrase "it was necessary for me to be in my Father's House" could also be translated thus: "it was necessary for me to be doing my Father's work."

Jesus, found deeply immersed in the Torah, discussing, questioning, and probing the ancient stories of God with others, was "doing God's work."

In both of these stories, Jesus was not where he was expected to be by people—and both times he was found to be exactly where he belonged—doing God's work. Today, we search for Jesus in many places. Some insist we should be finding Jesus within the walls of the sanctuary. Some insist we should find Jesus in the halls of school, or in public gatherings.

Now, just as then, we may not find Jesus in the places some expect to find him. Instead, we find him where he told us he would be—doing God's work.

When we do God's work of Bible study and prayer, when we worship at home in order to protect one another, when we do God's work of showing kindness and mercy to our neighbor, when we do God's work of feeding the hungry and offering healing to the sick—that is when we find Jesus.



Christ Returning to his Parents, Simone Martini, 1342 © Web Gallery of Art