

Matthew 2:19-23; Luke 2:39-52

Aim of Lesson

To show how Jesus grew up like any other boy and how he learned obedience, not only to his earthly mother and father, but also to his heavenly Father.

Background study

Exodus 12:1-28; 13:3-10; Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Look into the history of the period, and the home life in a village in Palestine.

Suggested outline of lesson

Very little is recorded in the Bible about the childhood of Jesus. It is clear however that their neighbours did not distinguish him from the children who were afterwards born to Joseph and Mary, so we can assume that Jesus must have been brought up in the same way as his brothers and sisters and the other children in the village. Also, since he is later referred to as 'the carpenter' (Mark 6:3) we know that he was brought up to follow Joseph's trade. Although he was God's son, there was to be no special treatment for him. No doubt this was how God wanted it to be; if Jesus learned the hardships of village life and the discipline of school, he would learn to understand his fellow men and gain wisdom for teaching them later in life.

Give the children some examples of the kind of things Jesus would have done as a child, such as going to the well, playing games with other children, hearing Bible stories from Mary, sharing in the Jewish feasts, attending school in the synagogue (where he would learn by heart the laws and commandments of God), helping Joseph in his workshop and learning the trade of carpentry. Reference can be made to everyday customs which Jesus observed, and to which he later referred in his teaching, e.g. the patching of old clothes with old material, the positioning of an oil lamp to give the maximum light in a room, the spoiling of clothes by moths and dust, the use of salt to season food, the payment of taxes, and many others.

One incident in the boyhood of Jesus is described in detail - the visit to Jerusalem for the passover when he was twelve years old. Explain the importance of this feast to the Jews, together with the part Jesus would have played in its observance each year. Whenever possible, Mary and Joseph would go to Jerusalem for the feast, thus demonstrating to their children how much it meant to them. Describe the bustle and excitement in Nazareth as preparations for the journey were made. Clothes had to be packed, food prepared, water-skins filled, and camels and donkeys fed and watered. All the people from the village who were able to make the journey would travel together for safety and companionship. The children will appreciate the pleasure of anticipation before a journey, and will be able to imagine the excitement of the village children as they helped make ready.

Refer to a map in order to show the children the distance to be travelled and the kind of country they would pass through to get from Nazareth to Jerusalem. It may help to explain why they travelled in a large group, for the journey would take almost a week along rough roads and through barren country where robbers lurked and wild animals wandered. The travellers felt safe, and the days would have passed quickly as they chatted and maybe sang together.

Try to imagine the feelings of Mary and Joseph as they journeyed with their special son. They would recall the time when they had taken him to the temple as a baby, and had heard exciting and disturbing things said about him. Ask the children to try and imagine the effect upon the twelve year-old boy of his first sight of the capital city, Jerusalem. Describe its narrow streets teeming with people, and especially busy at this time of year. What a difference from quiet Nazareth. Describe the beautiful temple with its vast columns and ornate detail, and its series of courts; the money-changers and sellers of animals and birds for sacrifice, and the quiet places where the learned men of Israel sat and talked to one another about the scriptures. It is easy to see how Jesus, who loved God so much, would want to be with these men and talk with them about his Father. Imagine the joy of the family sharing the passover meal together and joining with fellow worshippers in the prolonged celebrations. After a week of busy and exciting events, the time came for the long journey home.

The company from Nazareth reassembled, eager to talk over everything they had seen and heard, and the journey began. It was easy for Mary and Joseph to think Jesus was with friends. He was such a good and thoughtful child that he had never given them cause for worry. It did not, therefore, occur to Joseph and Mary that Jesus had not joined the party at the appointed time. What a shock when, after travelling all day, Jesus did not appear. Imagine their growing concern as they searched and asked their friends if they had seen Jesus, and their self-reproach because they had not looked for him earlier in the day.

Anxiously they made their way back to Jerusalem in search of him and, to their relief, found him there in the temple. Jesus was so involved in speaking to and learning from the teachers, and amazing them with his questions and answers that he had lost track of time and was unaware of the worry he had caused. Mary and Joseph reproached him. The children will probably have experienced their parents' sharpness when finding them after they have been lost, and maybe understand that it is caused by relief rather than anger. Although Mary and Joseph had known from the start that Jesus was God's son, they were astounded by his calm and direct answer and his manifestation of maturity and single-mindedness. The incident was evidently a turning point in his life; it shows that he had learned that God was his father and that his real home was with him, not in Nazareth. Yet, we are told, he went back to Nazareth and obeyed his parents in all things, growing wiser and more prepared for the work that was to come in his Father's good time.

Relevance to the children's lives

Jesus showed that from an early age he had a deep love of God. He was keen to learn as much as he could about his Father. We can follow his example and, however young we are, try to please God. Try to think of things that Jesus would have done as a young boy, that we could do also.

Worksheets

The solution to the code is 'Jesus grew in wisdom and in favour with God and men'. In 'Now Something Harder' the texts are taken from the NIV, but should be easily completed from other versions.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, thank you for the Lord Jesus, who was good and obedient even when very young. Help us to be like him. Amen.

Memory verse

“How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49).