

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes provide additional information about today's Scripture reading that may be helpful for your study.

1. Luke 2:51 echoes Luke 2:19.
2. Jesus' interaction with the Temple scholars is consistent with the affirmation in Ecclesiastes 3:7b.
3. Jews were required to make three pilgrimages to Jerusalem each year: Passover/Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:6, 15–20, etc.), Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15–21; etc.), and Tabernacles (Exodus 23:16b; 34:22; etc.). Therefore the Temple was a familiar place to Jesus by the time he was twelve (Luke 2:41–42).
4. "Be in my Father's house" can also be translated "be involved in my Father's affairs" and "be among those belonging to my Father." In either case, Jesus' response indicates awareness that relationship with the heavenly Father was of greater importance than the earthly one of Mary's question in Luke 2:48.
5. Luke tells us that Jesus was raised by a devout Jewish family. His presence in the Temple with the teachers further shows his foundation in the law and prophets.
6. Contrary to traditional interpretations, Jesus does not teach the elders; rather, he impresses them with his questions. Wisdom is exercised through cogent questions.

A LOOK AHEAD

DAILY BIBLE READINGS			
M	Jul. 13	Jesus Restores Leader's Daughter to Life	Mark 5:35–43
T	Jul. 14	Samaritans Testify to Wisdom of Jesus	John 4:27–29, 39–42
W	Jul. 15	All Wisdom Dwells in Christ	Colossians 2:1–5
Th	Jul. 16	Jesus Denounces Human Traditions	Mark 7:1–8
F	Jul. 17	God's Wisdom Trumps Human Commands	Mark 7:9–15
Sa	Jul. 18	The Heart Not the Stomach Defiles	Mark 7:17–23

THE BOY JESUS

6

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15;
Luke 2:39-52

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

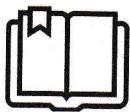
The child grew and
became strong,
filled with wisdom;
and the favor of
God was upon him.
(Luke 2:40)

STEPPING INTO THE WORD

This week we move to the Gospel of Luke and go back in narrative time for the only story in which we meet Jesus in his boyhood. Luke dates from about the same period as Matthew and also draws from both Mark and Q (a collection of sayings). The author, who we believe composed both Luke and Acts, wrote for educated Greek-speaking Gentiles like himself. Although his background was not Jewish, and he did not always present Jewish practices with accuracy, the author nevertheless drew a thread through the history of Israel to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. There are a number of famous characters and stories found only in Luke, including Zacchaeus, the Persistent Widow, the Prodigal Son, and the Good Samaritan. They ask us to reconsider what we believe about community and privilege. This story from Jesus' childhood creates its own upheaval in our assumptions about wisdom, who can have it, and when it may be shared.

The Gospel begins in classic Greek style. The first act concerns the conception and birth of John the Baptist and features a meeting between his mother, Elizabeth, and her cousin, Mary, who is also pregnant. Jesus is connected through Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah, to the elite and historic priesthood of Israel. Yet Mary's song, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), lets us know that his ministry will not uphold the establishment but rather will lift up the lowly. Jesus' concern for the poor and marginalized is the strongest theme in Luke's Gospel. As many pastors would note, they are sometimes accused of preaching politics when they simply read from the Gospel of Luke.

Holy God, when you agitate our spirits with wisdom from unexpected sources, settle us into new awareness. Amen.



SCRIPTURE

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 7b; Luke 2:39-52

3:1 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

.....

^{7b}A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

.....

2:39 When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.
40 The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

41 Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. **42** And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. **43** When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. **44** 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. **45** When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. **46** After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. **47** And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. **48** When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." **49** He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" **50** But they did not understand what he said to them. **51** Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

52 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.

A WORD ABOUT TIMING

Eccllesiastes includes one of the best-known pieces of Scripture in the Bible, so famous it found its way into The Byrds' song "Turn, Turn, Turn." The wisdom writer speaks to us of time in two senses. The word "seasons" evokes the planting and harvesting of a farming culture. A time to weep and a time to laugh may make us think

of phases of life when sadness overwhelmed us and of times when we felt carefree, as if anything might be possible. Sometimes read at funerals, in that setting the text points to the long arc of life, from our youth to our maturity to our waning toward death. In that context, the passage feels reassuring; there is a time for everything. Perhaps that timing is beyond our control.

Ecclesiastes connects to the story of the boy Jesus in the Temple in the specific phrase, “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.” Some of us may have been raised in the era of “children should be seen and not heard.” It is important to note not only that Jesus went somewhere without telling Mary and Joseph, but that he went to a place where a twelve-year-old boy would not have been particularly welcome to speak. During Jesus’ time, he would have reached maturity at the age of thirteen according to Jewish law, but at that time, there was no temple ceremony celebrating his Bar Mitzvah.

If we compare the depiction of twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple to his counterpart in John 2, there is a fascinating contrast. John’s Jesus is nudged by his mother to a sign of power he is reluctant to reveal; it is not the time yet, he says. Luke’s Jesus takes his mother by surprise; she knows very well who he is to be, but the timing is in his hands.

A season can also suggest a moment in time, a crucial intersection of the right timing and the right circumstances that shows we have arrived at a crossroads. Beth remembers a contentious congregational meeting during which accusations flew and power players in the church community said things she knew were simply not true. She stepped out and went to the ladies room, where she looked at herself in the mirror, right in the eye, and asked herself, “Who am I going to be?” Sometimes we keep silent to lessen the damage, or to protect the system for the overall good. Sometimes we keep silent to shield ourselves.

Beth returned to the meeting and lined up at a microphone. When her turn came to speak, she told the truth.

② What season is it in your life? Are you called to be silent or to speak?

MY FATHER’S BUSINESS

The novelist Anne Rice, perhaps best known for her vampire stories, also wrote a two-part fiction series beginning with *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* (2005), which imagined Jesus as a

boy learning to harness his cosmic powers. She drew from the Gospel of Luke to describe a young Jesus already on the side of the underdog. When he encounters a bully, he uses his powers both to strike the boy down and to bring him back to life, a story Rice drew from ancient tales understood to be invented as a sort of early version of what we now call fan fiction.

Luke's author might be considered to have done the same in telling a story about twelve-year-old Jesus, since it has no other known source. If so, he hopes to show us something crucial about Jesus before turning to his recounting of stories found in the other Gospels as well. For Luke's audience, Christian converts influenced by Greek literature, the exceptional wisdom of a young person would be a familiar indicator that he is a true hero.

The generations that grew up hearing the King James Version of Luke 2 might remember the now-archaic sounding translation of Jesus' reproof to his mother in verse 49: "And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Contrary to the apocryphal stories, Jesus doesn't center this revelation on actions, such as bringing another child back from the dead. Instead his business concerns the Temple, understood as a place not only where God would be discussed by scholars but a place where God could be seen by the priests in the Holy of Holies. Jesus shows himself in the Temple.

Mary, as we have read earlier in the Gospel, will ponder these things in her heart, but surely this felt like the undeniable confirmation of what was to come. We find him firmly replying to his mother, who recounts the terrible worry she felt while she and his father spent three days searching for him. Jesus wonders why she didn't know he would be in his (heavenly) Father's house, making it clear he knows who he is and that he knows she knows too. Her son will not take up his earthly father's business; instead, Jesus will claim his divine identity.

② This story about Jesus includes the Temple priests, Mary and Joseph, Jesus, and the unnamed relatives, friends, and fellow travelers who heard the alarm sounded and helped look for the boy. Who do you identify with in the story?

STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

I was the child who had to arrange the remotely-controlled TV antenna for my family, so I am not a stranger to the idea that there are technological skills one generation may have that the

older folks do not. My youngest regularly helps his grandmother with the settings on her iPad, and in my work for a nonprofit that takes place primarily online, I note I am less interested these days in gaining new computer skills.

I want to think, however, that I have retained general knowledge such as that tested on the television show *Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader?*¹ When I took an online quiz that used actual questions from the show, I scored 9 out of 12, which the website tells me would have been enough to win, and I would note that one of the wrong answers about geography occurred due to a loss of control of the cursor on my laptop. But the two math questions I got completely wrong. I can still do basic arithmetic, but even the upper elementary level math concepts tested on the show have left my brain.

While we might be willing to admit that young people have superior technical skill and school-taught knowledge that surpasses what might have been retained by their elders, the Gospel story shows us a young person with wisdom so impressive that his elders, not just in years but in religious authority, accept him as a peer in their conversations. He does not only listen and ask questions; the teachers are “amazed at his understanding and his answers” (Luke 2:47).

When I need a shift in perspective, I often find my children, who range in age from their mid-teen years to their early thirties, open the window to a different view. My friend Nancy, a grandmother in her eighties, loved Facebook because it allowed her to see photos of her grandchildren and to keep up with their activities both nearby and far away. She grew increasingly distressed, however, as political conversation turned to debates and then arguments between her friends and neighbors. At a family gathering, she announced, “I will miss seeing what you are all up to, but I am going to give up Facebook. It is too stressful for me.”

Hearing her grandmother’s regretful tone, fifteen-year-old Grace made a suggestion. “Why don’t you just join Instagram and follow us there? Then you will only see the pictures.”

Sometimes the answers that amaze us come from a perspective we cannot access alone.

② When have you learned something from an uncannily wise younger person?

1. Find a sample quiz here: www.buzzfeed.com/staceygrant/who-actually-remembers-this-stuff?.