

1 Sam. 2:18–20, 26

Ps. 148

Col. 3:12–17

Luke 2:41–52

Growing in Wisdom

Goal for the Session Adults will identify ways to foster growth within families that emerge from today's story of the boy Jesus and his parents.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Luke 2:41–52

WHAT is important to know?

— From "Exegetical Perspective," Paul J. Achtemeier

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WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," William J. Danaher Jr.

That the incarnation took this shape in the life of the holy family gives hope for families of all kinds and conditions on this day. The model of living that the holy family offers is not, as is sometimes depicted in romantic paintings and portraits, that of a family perfectly ordered and without division or differences. Rather, it is of a family that lives into messy moments with the confidence that God in Christ Jesus has entered and redeems them from within.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Stephen Bauman

Yet no congregant is truly like Jesus, and his uniqueness seems the seminal aspect of this story. Just as Luke's birth narrative revealed Jesus' special position, this story provides a transitional marker emphasizing his growing self-knowledge of his need to be in his "Father's house" (v. 49). Later, when visiting Jerusalem at the end of his life, Luke reports that Jesus returns to the temple to drive out those who were selling things, saying, "My house shall be a house of prayer; but you have made it a den of robbers" (Luke 19:46). His Father's house is his house too and demands his attention. Where is our attention?

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

— From "Homiletical Perspective," Barbara Brown Taylor

On this Sunday after Christmas preachers might find parallels in the local church, where those who are not our kin sometimes see things in us that our kin cannot. What young person will not welcome the good news that parents do not know everything? Parents may also profit from the reminder that there are other adults in the community of faith to look after their children when those children seem lost to their own families. Finally, there may be Simeons or Annas sitting there just waiting for permission to say what they see when they look at the children of this congregation.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:41–52

Focus on Your Teaching

For some adults in your group, the recent holiday brought increased family time and perhaps tensions. The added pressure of holidays and travel may exacerbate disagreements that arise in this season. Even without those seasonal factors, ordinary relationships between parents and children are fraught with growing pains. Needs for obedience and independence often feel at odds. Today's session offers an opportunity to consider ways in which a Christian community can encourage family members to open themselves to new possibilities for growth and respect.

Help me, O God, to be open to new possibilities, and renewed devotion, as I search for understanding and seek to lead others on that search in this session. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- ❑ Bibles
- ❑ table and white cloth, white Christ candle, lighter
- ❑ copies of Resource Sheet 1
- ❑ copies of Resource Sheet 2
- ❑ copies of Resource Sheet 1 for January 6, 2019

For Responding

- ❑ option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

In advance of the session, set up the table at the front or center of the meeting space. Cover it with a white cloth and place a large, white Christ candle on it.

Welcome adults and introduce any guests or visitors.

Invite participants to recall one experience from their adolescence or teenage years when they intentionally asserted their independence from their parents. Ask for silent reflection:

- ✠ What led you to do that?
- ✠ How did your parents respond?
- ✠ Looking back, in what ways did that experience reveal both what you and your parents were devoted to?

Form pairs, and have partners relate their experiences to one another.

Gather the whole group. Invite participants to identify something they will take with them from the experience related by their partner, particularly related to the values or purposes to which youth and parents devote themselves.

Light the Christ candle, identifying it as a symbol of the twelve days of Christmas and the light Jesus brings into the world. Offer this prayer:

Holy God, to what, and to whom, are we so devoted as to leave all else behind in the search? Guide us, and grow us, in your ways. Amen.

The connections between Mary and Hannah explored last week continue today in their children. Jesus' maturing (Luke 2:52) in tandem with the temple story parallels today's Old Testament lection story about Samuel's maturing while he serves at the Shiloh shrine.

As you explore this story, be especially mindful of adults in your group who may be in the midst of troubled relationships with adolescent and teenage children. How might you help this story speak grace to them and their children?

EXPLORING

Note that in the church's liturgical year, today is still part of Christmas. Jesus' birth story is past, but Jesus' adulthood remains on the horizon. Today's focus scripture comprises the Gospels' only story set in Jesus' childhood. Present the following information as background to the class:

"This story of the second visit of the young Jesus to the temple (see Luke 2:22–39) serves as a transition between Luke's infancy narratives and his account of the ministry of the mature Jesus. . . . it also marks the transition between what others say about Jesus (Gabriel, Simeon, the angels at Jesus' birth) and his own words, which begin in this passage (verse 49). . . . Finally, the narrative's Jewish roots are very evident. The setting at the time of the Passover, the location of the central elements of the story in the temple, and Jesus' obedience to his parents all make these roots manifest."

—Paul Achtemeier, *Feasting on the Word, Year C*, Exegetical, pp. 165 and 169.

Form four groups. Assign each group one of the following characters or set of characters: Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the "group of travelers" (including relatives and friends), and the teachers at the temple. Distribute Resource Sheet 2. Have each group read Luke 2:41–52, and then formulate responses to the questions for their character listed under "Putting Yourself in the Story." Ask them also to imagine comments or questions their character(s) would interject at various points in the story. Allow time for groups to carry out the activity.

Gather the group. Explain you will read the passage aloud, one verse at a time. If any group has a comment or question related to that verse, have them raise it after the verse's reading. Carry out the reading and "commentary," allowing for brief discussion of questions as well as differing perspectives brought to the same verse or action by characters. At the end of this reading and discussion, invite participants to identify lingering observations and questions evoked by the text.

Read the "Where?" excerpt on Resource Sheet 1. Talk about its affirmation of this story, giving hope for families precisely because of the differences and misunderstandings revealed here. Ask where they see hope arising in this story and its characters, and how such hope might move out from this story into our lives, families, and communities.

Have a volunteer read aloud Jesus' words to his parents. Recall the Gathering remembrances of personal assertions of independence. Discuss ways in which Jesus' action and words are similar to, and different from, those remembrances. Read the "So What?" excerpt, focusing on its final two lines. Invite adults to consider how this story might encourage or challenge where we place our attention and devotion—or not.

EASY
PREP

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of these activities depending on the length of your session:

1. Family, Community, and Faith Faith and grace come to us in the imperfections of our lives. Read the Danaher quote at the beginning of Resource Sheet 2. Invite adults to identify where they have seen (or experience now) this passage's assertion about incarnation in the midst of "difficult familial circumstances." Similarly, invite adults to lift up children and youth who have been unexpected sources of wisdom for their own lives and faith. Discuss: How might the situations and persons identified above shape how the church portrays and/or supports families in worship, in programming, and in opportunities for fellowship?

2. Devoting Ourselves To . . . Actions reveal our devotions. Lead the following silent meditation.

Imagine that someone who doesn't know you observed everything you said and did over the past week. What would they surmise you are devoted to? If their assessment of your devotion does not reflect what you would like it to be, what will you do this week to make that change? Pray in silence for such growth and the wisdom it will require.

3. Companions and Mentors As reflected in today's story from Luke, the movement to growth is neither easy nor without conflict for families. Invite your pastor and/or leaders of boards related to family nurture to lead the following discussion. Identify ways in which adults in the church community currently help to care for children who are not their own. Brainstorm other ideas for how the church community might encourage or mentor children, youth, and adults in supportive ways for their families.

CLOSING

Gather around or in front of the table and candle. Recall the words read from the "Where?" excerpt on Resource Sheet 1 about today's story being one of "hope for families of all kinds and conditions." Invite (do not require!) each individual to name a hope they carry from this session: from Mary and Joseph, from Jesus, and from the conversations and activities that have explored and then responded to this story.

Offer these or similar words for prayer.

God of hope and growth, you love parents and children alike. Empower the exercise of care that brings life; embolden the stretching of wings that brings wisdom. And in the struggles that come in the give-and-take of family, may we know ourselves loved—by one another, by you. In Jesus Christ. Amen.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 for January 6, 2019, or e-mail it to the participants early in the week, so that they have adequate time to reflect on the Scripture passages and the excerpts throughout the coming week.

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Beneath the Surface of Luke 2:41–52

“In the context of this passage, the incarnation teaches that God can be found even in difficult familial circumstances. It teaches that God’s wisdom is available to the young as well as to the old, which means that we must make room for God to surprise us with unexpected revelations given by unusual messengers.”

—William J. Danaher Jr., *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Theological*, p. 168.

PUTTING YOURSELF IN THE STORY

- **Mary and Joseph:**

What were you trying to communicate in your words to Jesus—and what was he trying to communicate to you in his response?

- **Jesus:**

When you said, “I must be in my Father’s house,” what did you do there that was a “must” for you; why?

- **Travelers and Relatives:**

If you were a child in this group, what did you learn when:

Jesus turned up missing?

you heard what he told his parents?

Jesus returned with his parents and “was obedient to them”?



- **Teachers in the Temple:**

What did you make of a 12-year-old who spoke to his parents as he did, after the time he spent with you?