

**Jesus at age 12**  
**Luke 2:39-52**

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. (English Standard Version – ESV)

**Background:**

- The Mosaic Law required an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem at Passover (Deuteronomy 16:6); however, most Jewish people living far away could not come annually. Jewish teachers did not always require women to attend the festivals, but many did so anyway, as is the case with Mary.

- "Twelve years old" would have been one year before Jesus officially became an Israelite adult and accepted responsibility for fulfilling the Law. Although the Jewish bar mitzvah ceremony of today may not have existed in Jesus' day, its analogy to Roman coming-of-age rituals supports other evidence for an official entrance to adulthood at about this age.

- Caravans, which afforded protection from robbers, were common on pilgrimages for the feasts in Jerusalem. Traveling with a caravan, in which neighbors from the same town would watch the community children together, Mary and Joseph might assume that the near-adult Jesus was with companions, especially if they had younger children to attend. If one assumes a pace of 20 miles per day, Nazareth would be a little over three days' journey along the shortest route.

- Some Jewish teachers in this period reportedly conducted their classes in the temple courts. The famous Hillel and Shammai may have been two such teachers. Asking questions was used both in teaching and learning, but it was important for learners to ask intelligent questions, as Jesus does (His answers are also intelligent!). Teachers could answer questions with questions.

- The commandment to honor one's father and mother was regarded as one of the most important in the Law, and children not yet considered adults were to express honor, in part, by obedience.

## Questions:

- + The passage says that “the favor of God was upon [Jesus].” What does this mean?  
How does God’s favor come upon someone? Is God’s favor upon you? Why or why not?
- + What kind of questions do you think Jesus might have asked the teachers in the temple?  
What particular questions would you ask of highly educated religious teachers, and why?
- + What emotions are likely behind Mary’s question, “Son, why have you treated us so?”  
If Jesus was sinless, how does one justify what appears to be irresponsible behavior?
- + Jesus responds to his mother with two questions that some might interpret as disrespectful.  
How do you interpret each of his questions, and what is it that his parents cannot understand?
- + After returning with his parents to Nazareth, it is said that Jesus “was submissive to them.”  
What does this statement say about Jesus? How submissive are you to authority figures?
- + It says that Mary “treasured up all these things in her heart.” What things did she treasure?  
With regard to the life and times of Jesus, what things do you treasure about him, and why?