

*Luke 2:41–52 (CEB)*

<sup>41</sup> Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. <sup>42</sup> When he was 12 years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to their custom. <sup>43</sup> After the festival was over, they were returning home, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't know it. <sup>44</sup> Supposing that he was among their band of travelers, they journeyed on for a full day while looking for him among their family and friends.

<sup>45</sup> When they didn't find Jesus, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple. He was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and putting questions to them. <sup>47</sup> Everyone who heard him was amazed by his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup> When his parents saw him, they were shocked.

His mother said, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Listen! Your father and I have been worried. We've been looking for you!"

<sup>49</sup> Jesus replied, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup> But they didn't understand what he said to them.

<sup>51</sup> Jesus went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. His mother cherished every word in her heart. <sup>52</sup> Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people.

*Luke 4:1–13 (CEB)*

Jesus returned from the Jordan River full of the Holy Spirit, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. <sup>2</sup> There he was tempted for forty days by the devil. He ate nothing during those days and afterward Jesus was starving. <sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, "Since you are God's Son, command this stone to become a loaf of bread."

<sup>4</sup> Jesus replied, "It's written, *People won't live only by bread.*"

<sup>5</sup> Next the devil led him to a high place and showed him in a single instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup> The devil said, "I will give you this whole domain and the glory of all these kingdoms. It's been entrusted to me and I can give it to anyone I want. <sup>7</sup> Therefore, if you will worship me, it will all be yours."

<sup>8</sup> Jesus answered, "It's written, *You will worship the Lord your God and serve only him.*"

<sup>9</sup> The devil brought him into Jerusalem and stood him at the highest point of the temple. He said to him, "Since you are God's Son, throw yourself down from here; <sup>10</sup> for it's written: *He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you* <sup>11</sup> and *they will take you up in their hands so that you won't hit your foot on a stone.*"

<sup>12</sup> Jesus answered, "It's been said, *Don't test the Lord your God.*" <sup>13</sup> After finishing every temptation, the devil departed from him until the next opportunity.

*From the temple to the wilderness, Jesus' journey begins.*

So often, the Bible fails to meet our expectations; we want to engage the Bible on our terms rather than enter into its world. It strikes us as odd that the gospel writers give us only one story about Jesus from infancy until he is well into adulthood. Only Luke gives us anything and his story is remarkable for its lack of miracles, angels, or other special revelations. Indeed, the circumstances and his parents' reactions seem quite ordinary.

But, then again, the gospels are not biographies of Jesus. They don't conform to any of our notions of what makes up a sound biography. All four of the gospels are narrative proclamations of the Good News, that in and through Jesus the kingdom of God had arrived, that things would never be the same. Every event, person, and movement in

human history was either before Jesus or after. Does it really matter what Jesus looked like or the nature of his teen years?

But the one story we do have from Jesus' youth is telling and, not surprisingly, focused upon the temple in Jerusalem, the heart of Judaism for so long as the temple stood. In contrast to Bethlehem, I remember vividly the first time I arrived in Jerusalem. We were riding in the bus making our way to the Old City. As I sat there, Scripture passages flew through my mind and tears formed in my eyes. There is the Temple Mount . . . there is the Mt. of Olives . . . there is the Kidron Valley. The whole experience is emblazoned in my memory. We stopped on the Mt. of Olives overlooking the city and then made a short drive up to the top of the hill so we could look out over the Judean Wilderness to the east – a stark, lifeless moonscape with the Dead Sea in the distance.

In Jesus' day, of course, Jerusalem was quite different. Rather than the Dome of the Rock, the city was dominated by the great temple Herod had built. It stood twice as tall as the golden dome today; Jew and Gentile alike traveled far just to see it. It was customary for Jewish men to go to Jerusalem at least three times a year for religious festivals. Entire families would accompany the men at least once a year for the Festival of Passover in the spring.

In today's passage from Luke, Joseph, Mary, and their children are part of a large group of Galileans making their way southward to Jerusalem. Assuming they could cover fifteen miles a day on foot, the journey would have taken them four or five days. After the festival was over, everyone headed back north to Galilee. You can picture a large group making their way up the dusty road, with packs of children and teenagers doing their own thing while the adults tend to the work of the journey. It is certainly no surprise that Mary and Joseph expected Jesus to be running around with cousins and friends. But, actually, Jesus took it upon himself to stay behind in Jerusalem.

Having raised several sons myself, I'd bet Mary and Joseph headed back to Jerusalem both anxious and angry. Sure enough, when they find Jesus, who is only twelve, at the temple, Mary angrily asks Jesus how it is that he could treat his parents in such a manner. I'm sure she didn't know whether to be angry with him or to hug him . . . probably both. After all, it had been several days.

*Who is this Jesus?*

During the days away from his parents, Jesus amazed all the adults (Pharisees, scribes, and priests) in the temple with his understanding and his answers to their questions. But Jesus' responses to his mother's questions are the center of this story.

Jesus wonders how she couldn't know that he "must be in my Father's house" (v. 49). *Must!* What an interesting choice of words. Not "ought to be" or "want to be" . . . but "must be." Even at this young age, Jesus knew that his life would be driven by the divine imperative. He would do what he did because that would be the vocation laid out for him by God. His life would not be controlled by fate. He was not working toward some impersonal destiny. No one would coerce him into anything. He would simply do as he must, regardless of the consequences. God was revealing the boy's vocation to him and Jesus would be 100% faithful to that vocation, even if it took him to death on a cross.

But what must this young boy, soon to be man, do? Jesus is actually very ambiguous about this. The NRSV translates Luke's Greek as "I must be in my Father's house." However, "house" is not in the Greek; in fact, there is no word there at all. Hence, the KJV translates the phrase as "I must be about my Father's business." In the NRSV footnote, there is yet another rendering, "I must be about my Father's interests." Regardless of exactly what Jesus meant, in these few words he claims for himself a special relationship with God. God would shape his life.

Many of us spend decades trying to find our identity, to come to know who we are and to find purpose in our life. Surely, in this story, Luke wants us to understand that by the age of twelve Jesus had found his identity, affirming it in his unique relationship with YHWH, the God of Israel. While still a boy, Jesus understood that he was called to obedience. He will *do* as he *must*. Jesus had grown up fast. He had come to the insight that obedience and commitment to God are expressed by participating in God's work, not adhering to an arbitrary list of do's and don'ts.

One might think that being about God's business would ensure a smooth road ahead, but such business must be conducted in this dark, sin-filled world. The shadow of the cross that fell across Mary at Jesus' consecration (Luke 2:35, from last week) would never leave Jesus as he confronted the evil powers of this world. I wonder if Jesus reflected on his "home alone" story as he set out toward the Judean wilderness two decades later at the beginning of his public ministry.

### *A time of testing*

Over the course of our lives, we are tested many times. Some tests are inconsequential, though it may not seem that way at the time. Some prove to be crossroads in our lives, shaping all that comes after. This was true even of Jesus.

After his baptism in the Jordan River by his cousin, John the Baptizer, the Holy Spirit led Jesus out to the Judean wilderness to be tested. Was he really ready to take on the vocation given him by his Father? Was he prepared to be Israel's Messiah and to remain faithful to his work, even when it would take him to his death? Would he truly trust his Father in all things?

Now, it may be a bit hard for you to see Jesus in this way, a man genuinely tested in the wilderness. He's God, we say . . . how real could the test be? No way he could ever fail such a test. But this way of thinking is a trap. It robs Jesus of his genuine humanity, turning him into an actor on a stage playing out his part for the masses. As Culpepper writes:

Temptation is a universal human experience. Had Jesus not been tempted, he would not really have been human. The temptations, therefore, are a vital part of the narrative Christology, which portrays Jesus as fully human. The author of Hebrews, writing in a different genre, asserts that Jesus "in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin" (4:15). The wonder is not that Jesus was incapable of sinning but that he was able to avoid sinning although he was tempted. Along with the birth narrative, therefore, the temptations make an important anti-docetic<sup>1</sup> statement: Jesus was fully human and knew what it meant to be tempted.<sup>2</sup>

The test was "administered" by the devil, who is unnamed in Luke's telling. The devil tempts Jesus three times. The first time Jesus is tempted to feed himself by using his power to turn stones into bread. He refuses, grounding his refusal in the Law of Moses. The third time Jesus is tempted to accept an offer to put God to the test. But, he refuses, knowing his vocation and trusting his Father. But it is the second of the three temptations that is our focus this week. The devil offers to give Jesus authority and power over the earth. Just think of the good Jesus could do. All it would entail is Jesus' worship of the devil. This seeming shortcut to putting wrongs right must have been attractive. But there can be no shortcut to salvation; Jesus' path would necessarily be paved with suffering. So, as in the other two temptations, Jesus responds with the Word of God as set forth in Deuteronomy. Jesus will worship only the Lord and will serve only him. What was true for Jesus is true for us.

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<sup>1</sup> Docetism is the heretical claim that Jesus wasn't really human, but only appeared so.

<sup>2</sup> R. Alan Culpepper, "The Gospel of Luke," in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994–2004), 100–101.

Rather than embracing the false gods on offer in our world, we devote ourselves to the worship of the one true God, the Lord God. This worship can take many forms, but it is our corporate worship that makes us a church. There are other places that we can serve and sing. There are other places we can gather and give. But it is here, on our campus, that we come together to worship our Lord.

## Daily Bible Readings

*More wilderness stories*

**Monday, Exodus 3** God leads the Israelites into the wilderness after they flee Egypt.

**Tuesday, Numbers 14:1-25** The people refuse to enter the promised land and are condemned to wander in the wilderness.

**Wednesday, 1 Samuel 23:15-29** David eludes Saul by fleeing into the wilderness.

**Thursday, 1 Kings 19:1-18** Fleeing Jezebel, Elijah flees into the wilderness.

**Friday, Mark 1:1-8** John calls the Jews out to the wilderness to be plunged into the Jordan River and embrace genuine repentance.

**Saturday, Revelation 12** The vision of a woman who flees into the wilderness after giving birth and is saved from the dragon by the earth.

## Scott Engle's Bible Classes

### Monday Evening Class

We have begun Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It is a great time to join us!

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

### Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Kings (1&2).

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

*About the weekday classes:*

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org) to make sure the class is meeting.

### Scott's 11:00 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Current series: *Deep Impact: crucial turning points in the biblical story*

Video of each week's class is posted here: [vimeo.com/groups/scottsbiblestudy](https://vimeo.com/groups/scottsbiblestudy)