

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND STUDY

- Read Jeremiah 29:13. Has there been a time where you have really searched for God? Did you persist? Did you find him? Were you surprised when you found him? Did anything unexpected happen?
- How do you go about seeking after God?
- When or where was the last time you felt aware of Jesus' presence?
- Where is Jesus on your journey? How close do you feel to him? When or how do you feel close to him? When or where do you feel aware of his absence? Pray into those things, particularly if you feel like God is distant.
- Read Matthew 6:33-34. Jesus calls us to partake in his father's business, and urges us to seek first the kingdom. How can you seek first the kingdom in your life? Where do you need to know his presence more closely? Pray for God's empowering Spirit to be upon you.

APPLICATION

Spend time this week reading through, and meditating upon the passage from Luke 2:41-52. Reflect on whether you need to search for Jesus, and where he is on your journey. Perhaps use the words of the different characters within the account as a basis for prayer – talk openly with Jesus about how you feel, express what is on your heart.

PLEASE PRAY FOR...

- We will be recruiting a number of new members to the team this January. Please pray for the new roles – **Kingdom Life Director, Information and Communications Officer, Resource Coordinator, Pastoral Director, Prayer Coordinator**. Pray for those applying.
- Continue to pray for the work of **In2Out**, trying to provide a safe way of integrating ex-offenders back into the community on release, and **Mission Without Borders**, helping families in Eastern Europe become self-sufficient. Give thanks to God for the money raised for the projects over Christmas, and pray for all those involved in running the charities.
- The **Alpha Course** beginning on 20th Jan from 10-11.30am (running fortnightly)

2014 LEAFLET

Have a look at our 2014 leaflet, to see what is happening at St Mark's this year, and send your feedback. If you don't have the leaflet then you can find a copy at church or on the website:

<http://www.smch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/2014-at-St-Mark's.pdf>

This week's study notes were written by Andy Patrick



St Mark's

Inspiring each other to
love and follow Jesus Christ...
everywhere in everything

INDIVIDUAL STUDY NOTES

Week Beginning:
12th January 2014

Luke 2:41-52: 'Where's Jesus?'

WORSHIP:

Read Matthew 16:15-16. Who do you say that Jesus is?

Spend time praising Jesus, the Son of the living God. Listen to a song that proclaims Jesus Lordship.

READINGS: LUKE 2:41-52; Luke 24:13-31

Would Christmas be complete without a rerun of that quintessential festive film 'Home Alone'? Well, yes it probably would be, but in my house it appears to be part of the deal of being married to Claire. For those of you who have never seen the film here's a flavour of what you've been missing...

It's Christmastime and the McCallisters are preparing to go on holiday in Paris with extended family. But on the eve of their departure, 8-year-old Kevin gets into a fight with his older brother and is sent to bed, on the third floor of the house. Overnight the power in the neighbourhood fails, and with it, the alarms that had been set to wake the family early for the morning flight. The family are awoken by the taxi driver banging at the door, and a mad panic to get to airport on time ensues. They make it to the flights in the nick of time but there's a nagging feeling that they've forgotten something. Half way across the Atlantic, it dawns on them... "Kevin!!!" In the hustle and bustle of everything going on they've left their boy, home alone.

Now this isn't the first or last time a loving parent has set out on their journey and failed to notice that their beloved child is not in tow. In the account in Luke we can empathize with that feeling that Mary must have had in the very pit of her stomach, the anxiety, the feeling of dread. Three days they looked for him.

Mary's lost boy was in a city of backstreets lurking with potential danger. You can imagine Mary yelling out as she realized that her boy was not with them - "JESUS! WHERE'S JESUS?!" They began the search.

Across all four gospels we have very little in the way of Jesus' childhood and life growing up through adolescence to adulthood, so why did Luke include this particular story, as interesting as it is, in his gospel? It's a good question to ask as we arrive at different texts – why is this included? Why is it significant? What is it saying?

To answer some of those questions it can be helpful to do two things. Firstly, to look more closely at the story, to pick out specific details that point to what the author, in this case Luke, is getting at. Secondly, to look at the wider story, including other accounts found within the book.

So, let do those two things.

A Closer Look

Within the passage we're told that Jesus' parents went every year to Jerusalem for the Festival of Passover. When Jesus was twelve years old, they went up to the festival according to the custom. We might ask at this stage 'what custom?' It was specified by law that every male who lived within twenty miles of Jerusalem must attend the Passover festival. At twelve years of age a Jewish boy became a man, and became a *son of the law* - taking the obligations of the law upon him. The twelve year old Jesus was going to the Passover in Jerusalem for the first time - something of a rite of passage. It must have been an exciting time for the young man – new people, new experiences. As the festival winds up, the people begin to leave town. We might wonder then how the young Jesus was left behind by his parents – how could they do that you might be thinking!

We have to remember what kind of culture Mary and Joseph lived in. It was a world of extended families of kinsfolk and neighbours, living together in close-knit community and mutual trust. Furthermore, when travelling long distances, such as the one to the festival, it was common for the women in the travelling party to start out much earlier than the men, so that they'd have plenty of time to natter along the way (OK, I added the detail about the nattering). The men would set out later and travel faster, and the two parties would not meet until the evening encampment was reached. This was Jesus' first Passover – no doubt, new arrangements... new routines... Quite possibly Joseph thought he was with Mary and Mary thought he was with Joseph, and it wasn't until the evening camp that the mix up became apparent.

So they dash back to Jerusalem to find him. And where is he? In the temple courts, sitting among the teachers.

So why was he there?

It was the custom of the Sanhedrin (the supreme council of religious authority in the Jerusalem Temple) during the Passover season to meet in public in the temple court to discuss religious and theological questions, in the presence of all who would listen. And here we find Jesus, listening to them and asking them questions, and "Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understating and his answers". It is clear that Jesus is no ordinary young man.

After three exasperating days his parents find him there in the temple courts.

Mary's response is an outpouring of emotion. Perhaps with arms wrapped tightly around her son, embracing him, she exclaims "Why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you".

Jesus response is extraordinary.

"Did you not realize," he said, "that you would find me in my Father's house"? This is one of the key lines within the passage, even within the story of the life of Jesus as a whole. Within the opening chapters of Luke's Gospel we read of a child born in extraordinary circumstances, the one who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, the one called Son of God. Now we are given a glimpse of Jesus' developing understanding of his identity. In his reply to Mary, Jesus takes the name father from Joseph and gives it to God. He is conveying, quite clearly, his identity as the **Son of God**.

And yet, this isn't a rejection of his earthly parents, for we read, he "was obedient to them". It is simply a powerful and definite statement that his ultimate identity and supreme connection and commitment are with his heavenly Father.

This isn't just one of the many childhood anecdotes of Jesus early life that Luke could have told - it's an account of the dawning realization of **who Jesus was and is**, an important indication of his identity.

Looking Beyond

There's a much-loved story later in Luke's gospel of the story of the 'Road to Emmaus' (24:13-35). Within the account two disciples are walking and talking together, sharing their anguish and confusion after the events of Jesus' death when they are met on the road by a stranger. At least they think it's a stranger – it is Jesus who meets them, and he explains to them how 'it was necessary that these things had to happen'. Can you see a parallel with Mary and Joseph? Here is another couple, coming back to Jerusalem, finding Jesus after three days, having thought they had lost him, and him explaining that 'it was necessary' – necessary that 'I had to be in my Father's house'. Tom Wright suggests that a good name for this pair of stories might be 'On Finding the Jesus You Thought You'd Lost'. He adds that in finding Jesus, we may discover that he may not do or say what we expect – it will normally involve a surprise! He didn't do or say what Mary and Joseph, or those two disciples on the Road to Emmaus expected.

Perhaps today you are unsure where Jesus is, when the last time you saw him was, or when you were last aware of his presence? Maybe you've experienced times where you've cried out, 'Where's Jesus?', in regards to a situation or from a place of anguish, or you've exclaimed 'Why have you treated us like this?'. A question for us might be 'are we prepared to look for him?' Will we persevere until we find him? Maybe sometimes we go about our own business, and fail to recognize that *we are not with Jesus*. We're travelling along without him, unaware that he's not been part of our journey. Will we be prepared to seek him out, to search for him? And when we find him, will we be ready for the unexpected, as we find Jesus engaged in his Father's business, the place he is calling us to, together.