

The Hidden Years of Jesus

Grace: Ask for the grace to better know and understand Jesus so that your love for Jesus will grow and your desire to imitate him will increase.

Introduction:

You witnessed Jesus' birth and the visit by the magi to Jesus' bedside. You are growing closer to Jesus by learning about his early childhood. The reflection on the hidden years of Jesus allows you to use your imagination. In Scripture, there is not a lot of detail about Jesus growing up. There is the story of how Mary and Joseph had to flee Bethlehem and escape to Egypt because of Herod's desire to kill this threat to his kingdom. There is another story about Jesus being presented in the temple and then the embarrassing story of Jesus being left behind in Jerusalem after the Passover feast. The period of time in which Jesus "grew in wisdom" is often referred to as the "hidden years of Jesus" because so few details are provided.



Read each of the Scripture passages and pick the one that seems most interesting to you. You may choose to go with Mary and Joseph to the temple as Jesus is presented and circumcised. What is your relationship to Jesus? Are you a friend of the family? Did you just happen to be there that day? What was it about Jesus and His family that caught your attention? What do you think about all of the things that are said about Jesus? You may wish to talk with Mary about how she understands the things that were said about her son.

You may choose to travel with Mary and Joseph to Egypt. How did Joseph explain his dream to you or to Mary? What did you say to Joseph? What details do you remember from your journey? What was it like living in Egypt? Describe what happened the day you heard about all of the children that were killed because Herod was looking for Jesus. What was it like returning to Israel? What was it like watching Jesus grow up? Did you play with Jesus or help to take care of Him? How do you respond to Jesus as he says His first words?

Perhaps you choose to go with the Holy Family to Passover celebration in Jerusalem. What is it like to celebrate a special feast with Jesus and his family? Imagine what it would be like growing up with Jesus. As He grows older, what are some of the early conversations that you might have with Jesus? What were Jesus' hobbies? Was Jesus athletic? How did the other kids respond to Jesus? What would it be like to play with Jesus as a friend? As you are heading home from Jerusalem, you notice that your friend Jesus is not in the crowd. How do Mary and Joseph respond to this? How do you respond? When you talk to Jesus about this experience how does Jesus tell the story? Whom can you ask to explain what it means for Jesus to grow in wisdom? Reflect on what it means for Jesus to grow in wisdom and stature.

As you re-read the passage you choose to reflect on, pay attention to the details and to your own feelings. Ignatius encouraged those making the Spiritual Exercises to stay with a passage as long as it is providing spiritual fruit. One way of doing this is called a repetition. A repetition is used much like an instant replay of a big play in a game. The idea is that you will be able to observe with even greater detail and clarity that which God desires to share with you. By doing so, you can let the importance of the contemplation sink in and more deeply impact you. There are an unlimited number of questions that you could ask. What do you want to know about Jesus' "hidden years"? What do your questions and concerns reveal about your relationship to Jesus? Continue to journey closer to Jesus and fill in as many details about his "hidden years" as you can. These details and feelings are God's gift to you.



Luke 2:21-52 Jesus Presented at the Temple and the Hidden Years -

On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived. When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Anointed. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too." There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

Matthew 2:13-23 The Escape to Egypt and The Return to Nazareth -

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead." So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

Luke 2:41-52 The Boy Jesus at the Temple –

Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he was saying to them. Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

In these or similar words ... I am Joseph. When we are going to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover, I expect everything to go quite normally, but who knows what will happen? On our way there, Mary is sitting on the mule and Jesus is accompanying me leading the mule by walking. The Feast was good; everything turned out great. On our way back, Mary is just on the mule relaxing, while I am leading the mule. After about one day of traveling we wondered where Jesus was. We had no idea he wasn't with us! We searched the towns for 3 days and then, when we were in Jerusalem, he was there at the Temple, just listening to the people there and discussing things with them. We run up to him saying, "Where have you been?! We have been looking for you for 3 days!" All Jesus says is, "Did you not know I would be in my Father's house?" However confused we are, we are 10 times happier to see Him. After this, when we were about to leave, all the people engaged in the discussion told us how wonderful Jesus was and how wise He was for His age.



Lord Jesus Christ,
How intimately
You desired to
know us,
starting among us
as an infant,
leaving nothing out.
Your love ties You to
us - - even when
some among us
drive You away
into all kinds of exile.
But You just keep
coming back
to Your saints
and holy ones.
Lord, I say yes to Your
Being here
Housed in our flesh.
-- Joe Tellow, SJ



Practicing What Your Preach ... To better appreciate Jesus' "hidden years" spend some time getting to know someone in your family or parish that you know very little about. Ask them to tell you about their childhood. Your relationship with Jesus deepens as you spend time with Him and you may even start to recognize Him in some new faces and in the stories they share with you.

