



On your marks

Education Sunday is observed in many churches, with a focus on prayer for the children and teachers in our local schools. Education Sunday is normally in late January or early February.

The following idea is a possible Bible story to use at such a service and centres on the only incident from the gospels where we see Jesus as the child among teachers. It comes from Luke 2:41-52

Get set

Read this story through several times. Put yourself into the shoes of the different people who are involved - Mary, Joseph, the family friends as they make their Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem and back, the teachers in the temple and of course Jesus himself. Note what feelings, questions and insights come to you as you step into the story from these various perspectives.

Go!

Here are some ways into the story.

1 Four questions arise as different parts of the story come into focus, namely:

- *Have we left Jesus behind?*- a word for us all at the beginning of a new year.
- *Are we looking for Jesus in the right place?*- a word for the world in the confusing times of this new century.
- *Are we still willing to learn?*- a word for us in church about going on to discover more about God's Kingdom (God's way of doing things) and linked to the educational encouragement of 'lifelong learning'.
- *Are we growing in wisdom?*- a word for children and adults. Wisdom is deeper than just mere knowledge.

2 Later in his teaching Jesus very deliberately invites a child to be at the centre and tells us that we should become like this child if we want to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Here in this story it is Jesus who is the child at the centre among the teachers, so the adults can learn about the way into the kingdom

Both these incidents pick up the more fundamental truth that our salvation comes because God entered the world as a 'child at the centre' - as a baby in Bethlehem - and that the way of the kingdom is revealed by the child in the midst. It is the child who challenges us all to go on being God's children, ready to learn at whatever stage of life we are. In the secular world this is recognised in all sorts of initiatives for lifelong learning. How much more true it is in the things of the kingdom, where we have hardly begun to understand the ways of God.

3 This story must have been of particular importance to Mary who has remembered it and, it seems,



passed it on in particular to Luke for us to read. It is the one story from Jesus' childhood that has survived in the Gospels from the many other apocryphal stories that there are. I wonder what Mary felt about happened? Perhaps in some strange way it was the first time she really began to understand what it meant that Jesus was God's son - even though the angels had said so much to her back at the time of his birth. Did she see in this incident a pattern of how it must be for us all - to be doing our Father's business and putting Jesus at the centre of all our questions and discussions? Jesus at the heart of good learning together, which is good education?

4 This story can easily lend itself to a piece of whole-church drama. Ask everyone to be part of the story as you retell it in your own words and then at various points stop to interview people randomly as they become:

part of the party travelling south for the Passover...

among the crowds in the busy streets of Jerusalem...

those who are enjoying the Passover celebrations...

the group of friends setting off home again...

part of the initial search party when they discover that Jesus is missing...

looking frantically for Jesus in all the likely places in the city (what would be the likely places in your own church and neighbourhood?)...

with Mary and Joseph discovering Jesus in the temple...

listening to Mary as she tells you of Jesus' strange reply when he was found (verse 49)...

This sort of role play is something which children are quite familiar with from drama lessons in schools and maybe the children will lead the way in this and encourage the adults also to play their part. This can be a very powerful way for the whole congregation to a step into the story and use their imaginations to discover what God is saying to them from it.