

Son, why have you treated us like this?

Most depictions of Luke 2:41-52 show Jesus among the teachers, unaware that Mary and Joseph have been searching for him, with his parents pushed to the margins. A few artists emphasize their relief in finding him, but only one artist fully captures the emotional complexity of this moment: Simone Martini in *Discovered in the Temple* in 1342.

Each year, Jesus' extended family made the roughly 32-hour pilgrimage from Nazareth to Jerusalem for Passover, joining the crowds that tripled the city's population. Every year, the Temple complex had additions. They

would stay for a week or more, maybe in tents. On the brink of manhood, Jesus likely offered his first animal sacrifice at the Temple alongside the men, maybe a lamb that walked with them from Nazareth. Afterwards, the family ate roasted meat with unleavened bread and bitter herbs retelling the Exodus story. During the week, Jesus likely roamed the city with other children, maybe joking with his cousin John. Luke 2:40 describes Jesus as strong and "filled with wisdom and the grace of God." His parents trusted him.

After the festival, the family set out for Nazareth. A day later, perhaps at mealtime, Mary and Joseph realized Jesus was missing. They returned to Jerusalem and found him in the temple courts "sitting among the teachers, listening and asking questions." Perhaps Jesus was unaware that his family had left the city. Still, two sunsets had passed, and he did not return for food or sleep. Mary asks, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." Jesus responds, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" I imagine a hint of cheek in his tone.

As the master of a large fourteenth-century Siennese



Simone Martini, *Discovered in the Temple*, 1342. Tempera on panel (43.5 x 35.1 cm). Liverpool Royal Institution.

workshop, Simone Martini had trained many twelve-year-old apprentices. He knew tweens. His composition omits the temple and rabbis typical in depictions of the topic with a simple gold background, forcing our focus onto adolescence and his parents navigating it. Jesus stands with arms crossed—indignant. Mary's open book bears her question in Latin: *Fili, quid fecisti nobis sic?* Joseph gestures toward Jesus as if to say: *Look what you're doing to your mother.* It's achingly human.

My nearly twelve-year-old son wants independence but still needs help, and that tension often surfaces as indignation. Recently, while I was helping him get where he needed to be, he

disappeared. When I finally found him, he said calmly, "I was just in the bathroom." He could have told me, but he didn't and I was furious. My husband later called it a power move: he didn't want my help. To me, it felt like a demotion.

Perhaps something similar is happening between Mary and Jesus. By staying in Jerusalem, Jesus refused to let his earthly parents set his agenda. Jesus subtly clarifies that Joseph was not his father, the Temple was his Father's house.

Still, Luke tells us that when they returned to Nazareth, Jesus was obedient to them. The relationship had changed. Jesus was his own person under God's authority. This story reminds me that growing up—divine or human—is rarely smooth. Sometimes, even in Scripture, it looks like a twelve-year-old with crossed arms.

Thanks to Jamie Ewing for pointing out this piece—I'd love to hear about other parishioners' favorites.

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