

Grade 1—Unit 6

Special Religious Traditions of Jesus' Time

Jesus lived within the cultural framework of first-century Palestine. This unit helps students understand that Jesus was a person, like them, whose life was ordered by certain traditions and customs.

LESSONS

1. Religious Ceremonies for Babies
2. Jesus Worshipped God
3. Jerusalem Adventure

Unit 6: Special Religious Traditions of Jesus' Time

Unit Information

SUMMARY

This unit will give the students an understanding of the time and culture in which Jesus lived. People were waiting for the Messiah to be present among them, but no one was exactly sure what form the Messiah would take. Imagine their surprise when the promised Messiah came in the form of a baby!

KEY BIBLE TEXTS

Exodus 13:1-2*

Leviticus 12*

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (main memory verse)

Deuteronomy 6:4-9*

Psalms 78:1 (memory verse)

Psalms 100:1-3 (memory verse)

Jeremiah 7:23 (memory verse)

Luke 2:21-52*

John 1:29-34

**texts used in lessons*

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

Dedication at the Temple

Three ceremonies marked the birth of a firstborn male child in all Jewish families: circumcision, the redemption of the firstborn, and a sacrifice for ritual cleansing of the mother. The child was circumcised when he was eight days old. Jews believed that circumcision for males was the mark of their covenant with God, as sons of Abraham. It was common practice to name babies on the eighth day. Mary and Joseph chose the name Jesus (or *Joshua*, in Hebrew) for their baby. It was a common Hebrew name, meaning “Yahweh is salvation.”

During the first month of life, a firstborn son must be redeemed, following the laws given to Moses governing the firstborn (Leviticus 12). By the time Jesus was born, a family had to pay the temple a tax of five shekels to “redeem” their firstborn son. Daughters and later-born sons were exempt from this tax.

Forty days after the birth of a son (80 days for daughters), mothers must go through a ritual cleansing before they could enter the temple. They were to offer a lamb (if they were wealthy) or two turtledoves (if poor) as a sacrifice. Following this ceremonial cleansing, women could again take part in societal functions.

In Luke 2:22-40, the visit of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to the temple is described. This visit probably combined the ritual cleansing for Mary and the redemption of the firstborn. Mary and Joseph would have been living in Bethlehem, just six miles away from Jerusalem. It would not have been a major journey to go to the temple.

While in the temple, Joseph and Mary met Simeon and Anna, faithful worshippers who had been praying for the return of the Messiah for many years. Both recognized Jesus as the Messiah, the promised Savior of their people, and both offered blessings to the baby. Simeon’s blessing is double-edged: “this son will cause the rising and falling of many in Israel and will cause the parents sorrow, too.”

Everyday Worship Observances

When Jesus was a boy, Jews worshipped at home, in synagogues, and in the temple. Daily prayers were a part of the routine for Jewish men. They wore phylacteries as reminders to pray. Jewish families observed Sabbath services and certain holiday services in their homes. Jewish neighborhoods and villages worshipped in the synagogue daily, if enough men were present. In the synagogue, ten men or confirmed boys made up a *minyan*. If fewer than ten men were present, they could not worship. Women, girls, and boys who were not yet confirmed were not considered participating members in the synagogue service. They sat behind a screen that separated them from the men.

By the time a boy was 13 years old, he was considered old enough to obey Jewish law without reminders. His actions had to show that he knew the difference between right and wrong. In Jesus’ time, this rite of passage was marked by moving to the men’s section of the synagogue and by being allowed to read from the Torah during the service. (The Bar Mitzvah ceremony was developed later in Jewish history.) After confirmation, boys began to wear phylacteries during week-day prayers.

Tenets of the faith that young Jewish men observed after coming of age included reciting the Shema three times daily, fasting on set fast days, and undertaking the traditional pilgrimages. The Passover pilgrimage was the greatest.

The Temple

The temple in Jerusalem was central to special religious practices. There were many synagogues, but only one temple. Faithful Jews traveled to Jerusalem at special times to worship and attend special temple services. We know that Zechariah served as priest in the temple and that Jesus was taken to the temple by Joseph and Mary to be dedicated. The temple was the heart of Passover celebrations.

The temple was built by Herod, in an attempt to win the favor of the Jews and impress Rome. It was an imposing structure—twice as high as Solomon’s temple. The temple included an outer courtyard for foreigners. In the outer court, vendors sold animals for use in sacrifices and money-changers gathered.

A women’s court was inside the outer courtyard. Farther inside the temple was the Court of Israel. This court was reserved for men and separated from the women’s court by a heavy door.

The priest’s court, with the sacrificial altar, was the heart of the temple. This court was divided into three rooms: a vestibule; the Holy Place, which contained the altar of incense and the big golden candlestick with seven branches; and the Holy of Holies.

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- Jesus was born into a Jewish family that observed Jewish customs.
- Jesus and his family worshipped God.
- We can worship God, too.

WORSHIP

1. Lesson 3, Extend the Lesson, suggests reading a book that explains the Passover dinner to children. Worship by celebrating a Passover meal together.
2. Read a Psalm together (memory verse Psalm 100:1-3 would work well) and explain that this is a passage Jesus would have heard when he went to the synagogue. Write the verse on a long piece of paper and use craft sticks to make a scroll.

BULLETIN BOARD IDEA

Write the words of Luke 2:40 on the bulletin board. Surround the words with the students' baby pictures.

MEMORY PASSAGES

This unit offers the following verses for students to memorize. You may copy and clip the following verses for students to take home.

Obey me and I will be your God and you will be my people.
Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you.
Jeremiah 7:23

O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth.
Psalm 78:1

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God
with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.
Deuteronomy 6:4-5

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come
before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made
us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.
Psalm 100:1-3

MEMORY VERSE CONNECTIONS

Make this memory verse connection during Lesson 2:

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” Repeat the verse together as you make phylacteries, and as the students cut and paste the verse on the Activity Sheet.

ASSESSING TEACHING / LEARNING

Observing students and their interactions is one of the best ways to discover if students are practicing the lessons. Look to see if they cooperate with each other, if they use caring words, and if they practice peacemaking skills.

A quiz is also included at the end of the unit.

Special Religious Traditions of Jesus' Time

LESSON 1: RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES FOR BABIES

Objective

Students will recognize that babies are important to God.

Key Concepts

- Jesus was named.
- Jesus was dedicated.
- God cares about babies.

Text: Exodus 13:1-2; Leviticus 12:8; Luke 2:21-40

Estimated Lesson Time: 30 minutes

Materials

- Bible
- Baby Book for Jesus

Teacher Preparation

- Practice telling the story of Jesus' dedication at the temple. Use your own words or the paragraphs in Lesson Step 3.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

New babies at church. Ask students what happens when newborn babies are first brought to church. Do people want to see the baby? Do they want to hold the baby?

Ask if the church does anything special for the baby. Some congregations hold special dedication services. Talk about what kind of things happen during a baby dedication service. Sometimes the parents are invited to share about their baby. Usually the pastor prays a special prayer and the congregation shows their support for the parents and the baby. Many times, other family members or close friends stand with the parents and the baby.

Explain to the students that babies are important to God and that is why people want to dedicate their babies to God, or promise to teach them about God.

LESSON STEPS

1. A special tradition. Tell the students that newborn babies during Jesus' time also had special ceremonies at the temple. Ceremonies at the temple were traditions that people followed for many years, because God told them to do so. Read Exodus 13:1, 2. Explain that Jesus was the firstborn male in Mary and Joseph's family, so they needed to follow the instructions God gave to the Jewish people long before.

2. Two special ceremonies. Mary and Joseph were Jews, so Jesus was a Jewish baby. They needed to follow two ceremonies: the Naming Ceremony and the Dedication of the Firstborn. The Naming Ceremony, when the parents gave the baby a name, took

place when the baby was eight days old. Read Luke 2:21. Ask the students how this is different from naming babies today. Do parents wait eight days to name them?

The second ceremony, the Dedication of the Firstborn, took place when the baby was 40 days old. Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple to be dedicated. Introduce the names Simeon and Anna. Ask the students to listen for how Simeon and Anna responded when Jesus was brought to the temple to be dedicated.

3. Tell the Bible story. Opening your Bible to Luke 2:25-38, tell the story in your own words, or use the following:

Simeon loved God. He knew that God had promised a Messiah would come and rescue Israel, so he eagerly waited for the Messiah. In fact, the Holy Spirit told Simeon that someday he would see the Messiah.

One day Simeon went to the temple. It happened to be the same day that Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to be dedicated. Simeon held baby Jesus. Then he said, "Now that I have seen the Messiah, the Savior, I can die in peace!" Simeon said that Jesus would be a light to show God to the nations.

Mary and Joseph were surprised at what Simeon said! But Simeon had something else to tell them. He said that this baby would be rejected by some, but to others he would bring great joy.

A woman named Anna was also at the temple the day Jesus was dedicated. Anna was very old, and she stayed at the temple to worship God. She came to Simeon and Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus, and began to praise God. Anna talked to everyone about Jesus, the promised King to redeem Israel.

Explain to the students that all babies are special to God, but that baby Jesus was extra special, because he was the Son of God. Simeon and Anna recognized Jesus as the Messiah, even though no one had told them who he was.

4. Jesus' childhood. Read Luke 2:40 and explain to the students that this is all the Bible tells us about Jesus' childhood. We can guess about other things that might have happened, though, because we know about Jewish traditions. Tell the students that they will learn more about that in the next lesson.

5. Work on the Baby Book for Jesus. Hand out the students' baby books for Jesus and work on the dedication page together. When you have filled in the words, the children may color the stars at the bottom of the page (or use star stickers to decorate) or draw a picture on the back of Simeon or Anna with baby Jesus.

Where: The temple in Jerusalem

When: 40 days old

People who were there: Simeon and Anna

What they thought about Jesus: This is the Son of God!

EXTEND THE LESSON

(This activity will extend the lesson to longer than 30 minutes.)

• **Waiting and preparing.** Talk about Simeon and Anna, and how they both knew they wanted to see the Son of God, the Messiah, before they died. Ask the students to share some things they'd like to do someday. What might they do to prepare? Compare what Simeon and Anna needed to do (wait at the temple) with what the students might need to do. Should they also wait at the temple (church)?

- **Echo pantomime.** Invite students to echo the words and pantomime after each phrase:

Jesus Grew

When Jesus was a child (*Point index finger*)
He lived with his family. (*Extend arms outward, as if to include others*)
Mary prepared Jesus' clothes (*Brush clothes smooth with hand*)
And food. (*Make stirring motion*)
Joseph worked in his carpenter shop. (*Make hammering motion*)
What did Jesus do all day? (*Shrug shoulders*)

Jesus would run (*Pat knees rapidly*)
And jump. (*Bounce hands on knees*)
Jesus climbed trees (*Reach upward, alternating hands*)
And drew pictures in the sand. (*Draw with index finger*)
Jesus listened to birds sing (*Cup hands around ears*)
And watched flowers sway in the breeze. (*Sway from side to side*)
Jesus helped Mary carry water jugs to the village well. (*Circle arms*)
Jesus helped Joseph pick up wood scraps in the carpenter shop.
(*Bend and pick up imaginary scraps*)
What did Jesus do at night? (*Shrug shoulders*)

Jesus would climb the outside steps to his roof. (*Pat knees alternately*)
Jesus would spread his mat. (*Make smoothing motions*)
Jesus would rest on his mat and watch the night sky. (*Put head back and look up*)
Jesus listened as Mary and Joseph told stories: (*Cup hand around ear*)
Stories about his people, (*Extend arms outward*)
Stories about God, (*Extend arms upward*)
Stories about loving others. (*Cross arms in front*)
Soon Jesus was fast asleep. (*Rest head on folded hands*)

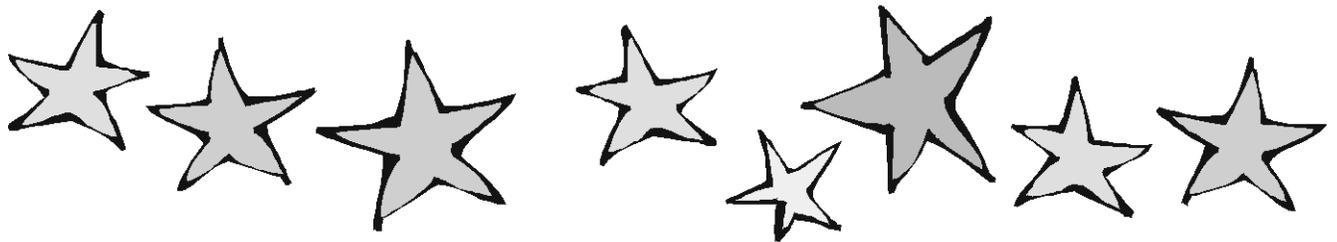
Jesus Was Dedicated to God

Place

When

People Who Were There

What They Thought about Jesus



Special Religious Traditions of Jesus' Time

LESSON 2: JESUS WORSHIPPED GOD

Objective

Students will learn about Jewish traditions during the time of Jesus.

Key Concepts

- Jesus worshipped God.
- Jesus was considered an adult at age 12.
- We can worship God.

Text: Luke 2:42; Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Estimated Lesson Time: 30 minutes

Materials

- Bible
- Baby Book for Jesus
- For making a phylactery: 3-inch square paper or fabric, scissors, glue, ribbon, small piece of paper with verse written on it
- For Extend the Lesson, option one: enough materials for each student to make a phylactery
- For Extend the Lesson, option two: Memory Verse Activity Sheet (p. 188)

Teacher Preparation

- Make a sample phylactery to show the class, using instructions on p. 190.
- If using Extend the Lesson, option two, make copies of the Memory Verse Activity Sheet, one per child.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

Children's important events. Review the ceremonies you talked about in the last lesson (Naming Ceremony, Dedication Ceremony). Ask the students to think about other important events in the life of children as they grow. Starting ideas: losing their first tooth, first day of school, learning to tie their shoes.

LESSON STEPS

1. An important event for Jesus. Tell the students that there were important events in children's lives during the time Jesus lived, too. Add that it was important when a boy reached age 12, because then he was considered an adult. Compare that with current day adult milestones, such as getting a driver's license at 16, voting at age 18, etc.

2. Jesus at the temple. Ask the students to listen to what Jesus did when he was 12. Read Luke 2:41-42. Explain that there was a special ceremony when Jesus turned 12. Now he was considered an adult, and was expected to know the scriptures and to follow the important rules to be a faithful Jew. At age 12, Jesus

would have read scripture in the synagogue, worshipped with the men in the temple at Jerusalem, and worn a *phylactery* for the first time.

3. Show the class a phylactery and the paper inside it that contains a verse. Read the verse aloud. Explain that the phylactery is a way the Jewish people hold God's words close to themselves, as God instructed. Read Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Show the students how to wear the phylactery around the arm or on the forehead.

4. Work on the Baby Book for Jesus. Hand out the students' baby books for Jesus and invite each one to draw a picture on today's page, "Jesus Became a Man at Age 12." Pictures should illustrate one of the things listed at the bottom of the page.

EXTEND THE LESSON

(This activity will extend the lesson to longer than 30 minutes.)

- **Make phylacteries.** Using the instructions on page 190, have the students make phylacteries and wear them for the day.
- **Complete the Memory Verse Activity Sheet** (p. 188), putting phrases of Deuteronomy 6:4-5 in the correct order.

Memory Verse Activity Sheet

Name _____

Cut out the phrases of the memory verse at the bottom of the page and glue them in correct order at the top of the page.

the Lord is one.

and with all your strength.

Hear, O Israel:

Love the Lord your God

and with all your soul

The Lord our God,

with all your heart

(Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

Jesus Became a Man at Age 12

Jesus could worship with the men, read scripture in the synagogue, and wear a phylactery.

How to Make a Phylactery

Materials needed:

- 1 3-inch square fabric or construction paper
- Sharp scissors
- Ribbon (enough to go around arm or forehead)
- Small piece of white paper with memory verse written on it

Directions:

1. Cut 3-inch square from construction paper or light fabric.

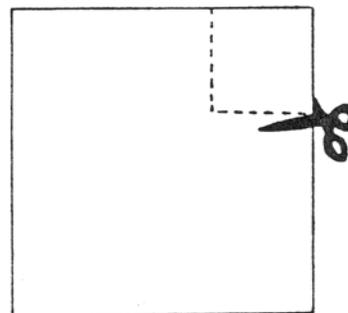
2. Fold square in half and cut one slit at each side, making sure cuts go through both layers of paper or fabric. Slit should be large enough for ribbon to go through.

3. Fold white paper with memory verse to fit inside folded square.

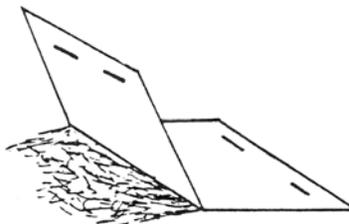
4. Thread ribbon through slits.

5. Tie phylactery onto upper arm or forehead. The phylactery reminds us of a particular scripture passage and helps us remember to worship God in all we do.

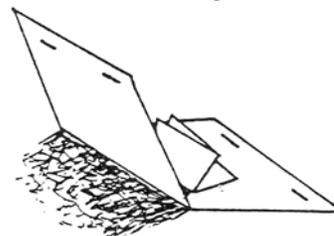
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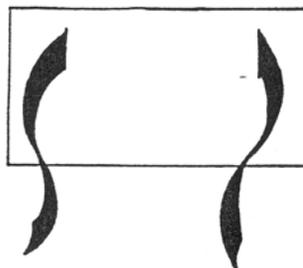
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Special Religious Traditions of Jesus' Time

LESSON 3: JERUSALEM ADVENTURE

Objective

Students will learn more about Jewish traditions.

Key Concepts

- Jesus followed Jewish religious traditions.
- Jesus knew that God was his father.

Text: Luke 2:41-52

Estimated Lesson Time: 30 minutes

Materials

- Bible
- Baby Book for Jesus
- For Extend the Lesson: *My Very Own Haggadah: A Seder Service for Young Children* by Judyth Groner and Madeline Wikler

Teacher Preparation

- Practice telling the story of the boy Jesus in the temple from Luke 2:41-52, or from the paragraphs in Lesson Step 2.

INTRODUCING THE LESSON

When Jesus turned 12 . . . Review the things that Jesus could do when he turned 12. Have some students share the pictures they drew on their Baby Book for Jesus pages during the last lesson.

LESSON STEPS

1. Jerusalem and the Passover. Remind the students that Mary, Joseph, and Jesus followed their Jewish religious traditions. One of those traditions was going to the temple in Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. Explain that Passover was, and still is, a special time when Jews remember how God saved their people a long time ago, in the time of Moses. Moses listened to God and led the Jews out of the land of Egypt. God made the angel of death “pass over” the houses of the Jews, so they could be free. Passover is now a time to celebrate that God saved the Jews from slavery and death.

2. Read the Bible story. In Jesus' time, Jews traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. It took several days for Jesus and his parents to walk to Jerusalem. Open your Bible to Luke 2:41-52 and tell the story in your own words, or use the following:

Every year, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph walked to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. One year, when Jesus was 12 years old, they started the long walk home to Nazareth, after the festival. Mary and Joseph didn't know that Jesus

stayed behind in Jerusalem. They thought Jesus was walking with friends, and so they didn't miss him at first. But later in the evening, Mary and Joseph started to look for Jesus and couldn't find him! They had to return to Jerusalem to search for Jesus.

It took Mary and Joseph three days, but they finally found Jesus. He was in the temple, sitting with the religious leaders and discussing things with them. The religious leaders were amazed at the things Jesus said to them!

Mary and Joseph were astonished! Mary told Jesus that they had been looking for him and were so worried.

Jesus asked, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that I must be in my Father's house?" But the people didn't understand what he meant.

Jesus returned to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph. And Jesus grew in height and in wisdom, and he was loved by people and by God.

3. Discuss the Bible story. Ask the students, "Do you think your parents would be worried if they couldn't find you?" Then ask how would they would feel if their parents were not with them for three days. When Jesus was found, he said that he was in his Father's house. What do they think he meant by that? (*Jesus knew he was the Son of God.*)

4. Work on the Baby Book for Jesus. Hand out the students' baby books for Jesus and work on today's page, "Going to the Temple in Jerusalem." Children may draw a picture illustrating one of the sentences at the bottom of the page.

EXTEND THE LESSON

(These activities will extend the lesson to longer than 30 minutes.)

- **Learn more about the Passover.** To find out more about the Passover meal, read and discuss *My Very Own Haggadah*, by Judyth Groner and Madeline Wikler.

Going to the Temple in Jerusalem

Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover.
Jesus spoke with the religious leaders.

Unit 6 Quiz

Name _____

Circle the correct answer:

1. Jesus was named at a naming ceremony when he was _____.
 - a. One day old
 - b. 8 days old
 - c. 40 days old
 - d. 60 days old
2. When Jesus was dedicated at the temple, what two people were waiting for him? (Circle two.)
 - a. Rachel
 - b. Noah
 - c. Simeon
 - d. Anna
3. Jesus went through a special ceremony at the temple and became a man at age _____.
 - a. 10
 - b. 12
 - c. 16
 - d. 21
4. A phylactery is worn
 - a. Like a necklace
 - b. On a belt
 - c. Around the forehead
 - d. On a shoelace
5. Where did Joseph, Mary and Jesus go to celebrate Passover?
 - a. Jerusalem
 - b. Bethlehem
 - c. Garden of Eden
 - d. Washington

Answers to Unit 6 Quiz:

1. b. 8 days old
2. c and d. Simeon, Anna
3. b. 12 years old
4. c. Around the forehead
5. a. Jerusalem