

Who can remember whose birthday we celebrate at Christmas?

[Jesus]

At Christmas, we think about the baby Jesus being born in a stable in Bethlehem. But Jesus didn't grow up in Bethlehem. Does anyone remember the name of the town where he lived?

[Nazareth]

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, cared for by Mary and Joseph. He grew. He became strong and wise, and God blessed him. And that's all the Bible tells us about Jesus, until he reaches the age of twelve.

Who knows someone who's twelve?

What's it like being twelve in England today? What kinds of things do twelve-year-olds do?

[take answers]

They go to school. They might hang out with their friends, or play football, or watch tv ... We think of twelve-year-olds today as children.

But in Jesus' day, twelve was just about the end of childhood: the time when boys began to learn a trade.

Ok, let's hear about what happened when Jesus was twelve.

Every year, Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem for Passover. When Jesus was twelve years old, they all went there as usual for the celebration. The journey took four days, and when they arrived the great city was crowded with visitors.

After Passover, Mary and Joseph joined the other families going back to Nazareth. They thought Jesus was in the crowd with the other boys. It wasn't until they stopped in the evening to camp for the night that they realised that

Jesus was missing. When they couldn't find him with their relatives and friends, they hurried back to Jerusalem to look for him there. For three days, they searched the city for Jesus.

How do you think Mary and Joseph were feeling, after searching for three days?
[take answers]

I expect they were feeling pretty frantic by now. Let's hear what happened next.

At last, they found him in the Temple. He was sitting with the Temple teachers, listening to them and asking questions. The teachers were amazed that Jesus understood so much, and were astonished by the questions he asked.

"Son, why did you do this to us?" Mary asked. "We've been so worried. We've been searching everywhere for you. We thought we'd never find you."

"Why did you have to look for me?" asked Jesus. "Didn't you know that I'd be in my Father's house?"

Mary and Joseph didn't understand what Jesus meant. He went home with his parents to Nazareth, and obeyed them. He became wise, and grew strong. God was pleased with him, and so were all the people.

Mary and Joseph didn't understand what Jesus meant, and it's kind of hard for us to understand, too. But remember that Jesus, at twelve, was just becoming a man. He was ready to learn his father's trade.

Who knows what Joseph did? What was his job?

[carpenter]

So everyone would have expected Jesus to be a carpenter, too - just like his dad.

God had chosen Joseph to be Jesus' dad on earth, but Jesus was also the Son of God. And now that he was becoming a man, it was time for him to start learning about God's work. That's what he was trying to tell Mary and Joseph.

Jesus went back to Nazareth, and obeyed his parents. No doubt he did learn to be a carpenter like Joseph. But he also obeyed his Father God. He knew that God had a special plan for him. And he knew that God's plans are always good.

God wants us to call him Dad, just like Jesus did. He has a special plan for each one of us - and his plans are always good, because he loves us.

So let us pray.

Father God,

thank you for sending Jesus to show us how much you love us.

Please help us to love you, to trust you and to obey you.

Amen.