

TUESDAY, MARCH 19

Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.

Luke 2:48b



I've always felt a bit protective of St. Joseph. Carefully referred to as the guardian of Jesus—categorically not his father—Joseph strikes me as the quintessential third wheel.

The Gospel of Luke describes this curious episode in Jesus' early life when he goes missing for three days. When found in the temple, Mary tells her son, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." The Gospel writer uses this exchange to clarify who Jesus' actual father is. Referring to the temple, Jesus tells his mother, "Did you not know I must be in my Father's house?" Jesus makes an important point, yet I imagine Joseph standing awkwardly by, feeling both relief and perhaps somewhat slighted by the exchange.

Here's what we know about Joseph's relationship to Jesus: We know Joseph wasn't absent. He was a loving and present guardian to Jesus. Further, we know Joseph didn't shrug off the fact that his son went missing for three days. He didn't return to work or go golfing with his buddies. Along with Mary, he was consumed with anxiety for the well-being of this child. In other words, he loved Jesus deeply. We also know Joseph helped to raise a moral and spiritual genius. Something about the space that Joseph and Mary created together helped Jesus grow, flourish and live into his true identity.

Today's readings

Psalm 89:1–29 or 89:1–4,26–29
2 Samuel 7:4,8–16 | Romans 4:13–18
Luke 2:41–52

Joseph wasn't Jesus' father, but he was Jesus' fatherly guardian. Give thanks for the parental guardians in your life who have helped you on your way.