

Today we hear the earliest words spoken by Jesus on record. And quite honestly, he sounds just like an adolescent. At the age of twelve, Jesus goes to Jerusalem for Passover with his parents. After it's over, they start back, assuming he's somewhere in the pack headed for Nazareth. They get about twenty miles out and notice he's missing; I'd love to have heard that conversation. Jesus has stayed in Jerusalem; whether he was lost, just liked it there, played a practical joke, or was inspiring the future writers of the *Home Alone* movies we do not know. When his parents find him, Mary tells him they've been searching in great anxiety; she asks, "Why have you treated us like this?" Then Jesus speaks his first words in Luke's gospel: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" It's not a great model for parent/adolescent communication, but it sure rings real.

There is much misunderstanding in this story. Joseph and Mary do not understand why Jesus was not with them. Jesus does not understand why they do not understand. And the teachers in the temple don't understand how Jesus understands all that he does. It's a lot like family life. One of the most persistent complaints from adolescents is that their parents don't understand them. One of the most persistent frustrations of parents is that they love their kids but can't get it communicated. Everyone wants to be understood, everyone. You can even hear it in the first words of Jesus, "Why were you searching? Didn't you know?" Well, no, they didn't know.

Misunderstanding can lead to some pretty serious stuff. It can lead to broken relationships; it can lead to violence. Here it leads to a loving sorrow, which isn't all that bad. Mary and Joseph want Jesus to understand they love him. And Jesus wants them to understand he's got another Father to obey, another home to call his own. Like any adolescent he's developing his personality, his values, his independence, and he expects his parents to understand that. At least they're talking, listening, and thinking it over; Mary treasured all these things in her heart, Luke says. Misunderstanding of itself is not evil, whether it involves adolescents or the will of God; it turns wrong or right depending on where it leads: to isolation or to conversation, to anger or to love, to violence or to patience. Even the holy family had to work on it.