

Weekend Readings & Reflections December 25-26, 2021 – The Holy Family

Reflection: *Why did Jesus choose to become a baby born of a mother and father and to spend all but His last years living in an ordinary human family? In part, to reveal God’s plan to make all people live as one “holy family” in His Church (see 2 Corinthians 6:16–18). In the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, God reveals our true home. We’re to live as His children, “chosen ones, holy and beloved,” as the First Reading puts it. The family advice we hear in today’s readings—for mothers, fathers, and children—is all solid and practical. Happy homes are the fruit of our faithfulness to the Lord, we sing in today’s Psalm. But the Liturgy is inviting us to see more, to see how, through our family obligations and relationships, our families become heralds of the family of God that He wants to create on earth. Jesus shows us this in today’s Gospel. His obedience to His earthly parents flows directly from His obedience to the will of His heavenly Father. Joseph and Mary aren’t identified by name, but three times are called “his parents” and are referred to separately as his “mother” and “father.” The emphasis is all on their familial ties to Jesus. But these ties are emphasized only so that Jesus, in the first words He speaks in Luke’s Gospel, can point us beyond that earthly relationship to the Fatherhood of God. In what Jesus calls “my Father’s house,” every family finds its true meaning and purpose (see Ephesians 3:15). The Temple we read about in the Gospel today is God’s house, His dwelling (see Luke 19:46). But it’s also an image of the family of God, the Church (see Ephesians 2:19–22; Hebrews 3:3–6; 10:21). In our families we’re to build up this household, this family, this living temple of God - until He reveals His new dwelling among us and says of every person: “I shall be his God and he will be my son” (see Revelation 21:3, 7).*

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Welcome to our study for the Sunday Within the Octave of Christmas, The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Let’s begin this time together by praying for wisdom and understanding in the words of the great saint and doctor of the church, St. Anthony of Padua. You may know him as the Patron Saint of Lost Items, but his prayers, especially this one for wisdom, have guided Catholics for centuries.

All: Oh Light of the World, Infinite God, Father of Eternity, Giver of Wisdom and Knowledge, and ineffable dispenser of every spiritual grace; who knows all things before they are made, who makes the darkness and the light; put forth thy hand and touch my mouth, and make it as a sharp sword to utter eloquently thy words. Make my tongue, Oh Lord, as a chosen arrow, to declare faithfully thy wonders. Put thy Spirit, Oh Lord, in my heart, that I may perceive; in my soul, that I may retain; and in my conscience, that I may meditate. Do thou lovingly, holily, mercifully, clemently, and gently inspire me with thy grace. Do thou teach, guide, and strengthen the comings in and goings out of my senses and my thoughts. And let thy discipline instruct me even to the end, and the Counsel of the Most High help me through thy infinite wisdom and mercy, Amen.

Where is Jesus?

“ In moments of spiritual aridity, we may feel like Mary and Joseph. We may feel we have lost Christ. Our prayer seems dry and pointless. Our pious practices seem like chores. We search for him everywhere through all our familiar methods of prayer and devotion, but he is nowhere to be found. We do not understand. Eventually, however, we find him again. And then we discover that Jesus has been with us all along. By withdrawing the pleasant consolations that initially attracted us to the spiritual life, Jesus invites us to come to him for who he is—not for the good feelings he may give us in prayer. In doing so, he calls us to a deeper level of trust and an even more intimate communion with him.” --Edward Sri, *The New Rosary in Scripture*

Leader: All of us go through hard times in our lives, times when we pray and it doesn’t seem like God is hearing our prayers. What has helped you most when you’ve prayed and it doesn’t seem like God is listening? On this first Sunday of the new year, let us look at how the Blessed Mother and Joseph handled a stressful situation in their lives when Jesus was lost for three days. As you listen, think about what you do when you are worried and anxious.

[Play the video on FORMED.org](https://www.formed.org) - [Opening the Word – The Holy Family \(Year C\)](https://www.formed.org)

FIRST READING ~ Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14 ~

God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority he confirms over her sons. Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and preserves himself from them. When he prays, he is heard; he stores up riches who reveres his mother. Whoever honors his father is gladdened by children, and, when he prays, is heard. Whoever reveres his father will live a long life; he who obeys his father brings comfort to his mother. My son, take care of your father when he is old; grieve him not as long as he lives. Even if his mind fail, be considerate of him; revile him not all the days of his life; kindness to a father will not be forgotten, firmly planted against the debt of your sins - a house raised in justice to you.

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Family. Each of the readings provides a reflection on how family life is lived so as to lead us into 'holiness'.

The Book of Wisdom - or Sirach – arrives at a reflection on the commandment to honor one's parents. Implied is a respectful relationship between parents and children. The covenant relationship with God is mirrored in relationship to parents. This relationship is indicated by prayer and obedience, forgiveness and justice. Consider the ups and downs mom and dad have been through in raising your family.

- *How do you currently show and practice thankfulness? As parents grow old, the mind fails - what do you do that may grieve them? How do you show kindness?*

SECOND READING ~ 1 John 3:1-2, 21-24 ~

Beloved: See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. And so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God and receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us. Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit he gave us.

Family life has struggles and difficulties. The Community of Colossae that Paul is writing to is struggling greatly with Jewish Christians being open to welcoming Gentiles - Greeks into the community family. 'Put on' is referring to the white garment of baptism and the new life of Jesus that we live.

- *Who is included or excluded in your family? Which attitude do you recognise could be practiced more by you in your 'family'. How could you allow 'peace' to control your heart?*

Subordinate - "under" - reflects the customs of the early Roman times. Christians were keen to live by the family code to show Roman authorities that they were not dangerous to government.

- *What order do you have in the family? Home? How is bitterness resolved? What arguments arise over children's behaviour and obedience? What attitudes or behaviours provoke and discourage your children? Does the Word of God dwell richly in your home? Is there any singing and praying and showing gratitude to God?*

GOSPEL ~ Luke 2:41-52 ~

Each year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day

and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.

Around the age of 12 a young boy would leave the company of mom and the woman and mix and be led by the men. Perhaps this transition is reflected in the scene of Jesus getting lost. Joseph may have thought the boy had gone back to mom. Mom had pondered the boy was now more the responsibility of Joseph and he had things under control! Strikingly Jesus is shown as obedient to the will of the Father and sits in the midst of teachers of the law in the Temple to discover what this will involves.

- *Holiness is marked by doing the will of God. What desire or call of love, justice, truth, integrity, self-gift is in your heart? What commitment are you called to be faithful to as an expression of the will of God?*

Consider how challenging it was for Mary to say Yes.

- *What challenges did Joseph face in saying Yes? How do Mary and Joseph (as parents) cope with Jesus identifying his own individual call in choosing His Father's house? Do you see the Holy Family as exceptional and perfect or can you glimpse the normal family struggles of your own family life in them?*

MEDITATION

When God sent His only begotten Son into the world, Jesus was born into a human family as a Jew who was raised according to the teaching and wisdom of God's word in the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament Scriptures) and the religious customs of his people. Jesus was born under the law of Moses (Galatians 4:4) and was circumcised (the sign of being a covenanted member of Israel) on the eighth day and given his name, *Yeshua* in Hebrew (*Jesus* in English) which means "God saves." We know little about Jesus' early life at home in Nazareth. Luke in his Gospel account gives us a glimpse of Jesus' growth as a boy into young manhood. Luke tells us that Jesus was obedient to his parents - Mary, his mother and Joseph, his foster father. As devout and God-fearing Jews, Joseph and Mary raised the boy Jesus according to the Scriptures and Jewish customs. It was the duty of all Jewish parents to raise their children in the instruction and wisdom of God's word in the Scriptures.

Jewish home life was centered on daily family prayers, including the singing of the Psalms and the reading of the Scriptures. Every Friday evening, the family gathered for a festive meal with the lighting of the Sabbath candle and prayers of blessing over the bread and wine to open the celebration of the Sabbath holy day. Each Saturday morning the family attended the Sabbath service which includes a reading from the Torah (five books of Moses) and chanting the psalms at the local community synagogue. Older boys were sent to school on weekday mornings, called the "house of the book" (either

at the synagogue or the rabbi's house), where they were given further instruction in the reading and study of the Jewish Scriptures. Every Jewish boy was required to memorize the first five books of the Jewish Scriptures (the Torah or Books of Moses) by the age of 13. They also learned to memorize and put into practice the wise counsels found in the Book of Proverbs (Wisdom of Solomon) and the Book of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) which was another common book of instruction for Jews living throughout the Greek-speaking world.

Jews were also expected to travel to Jerusalem for the high feasts each year (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles). Jesus undoubtedly traveled with his parents every year from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. This eighty-mile journey normally took three days. So families often traveled in large groups, for safety and comfort.

Luke records a remarkable incident which happened when Jesus went up to the temple at Jerusalem for His first Passover at the dawn of his manhood (usually the age of twelve for Jewish males). It was at this key turning point in His earthly life that Jesus took the name "father" from Joseph and addressed it to God His Father in heaven. His answer to his mother's anxious inquiry reveals his confident determination to pursue his heavenly Father's will. *Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house? (Luke 2:49)*

While Jesus identified Himself as Son of the eternal Father in heaven, He, nonetheless, submitted Himself with love and obedience to Mary and Joseph. Like all godly parents, Mary and Joseph raised their Son in the fear (Godly respect) and wisdom of God. Luke tells us that Jesus grew as a man in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and with the people of Nazareth, His home town. He remained at Nazareth until the age of 30 when He was baptized by John at the River Jordan and anointed by the Spirit for His mission as the Messiah and Savior of the world. (Thirty was the traditional age when a Jewish man could become a rabbi who taught and formed disciples in the knowledge and wisdom of God's word.)

- Do you seek to love and serve your family and to pursue peace and harmony in your home, neighborhood, and community? If not, what can you do to improve this?

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: In closing, let us pray that we may be led by the Holy Family, and if we feel we have lost Christ, find Him again in His Father's house...

ALL: Lord Jesus, you came to restore us to peace and friendship with the Father in heaven. Where there is division, bring healing and restoration. Where there is strife bring peace and forgiveness. May all families and nations on the earth find peace, harmony, and unity in you, the Prince of Peace and Savior of the world. Amen.

Leader: (if time, let us offer up our intercessions ... St. Michael... Our Father... Hail Mary... Glory Be...)

[Opening reflection was shared from St. Paul Center at <https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/sunday-bible-reflections>]

[video can be found at FORMED.ORG "Opening the Word". Additional reflections can be found at FORMED in "Opening the Word"]

[Discussion questions created by Fr Frank Bird sm, Marist Priest, and distributed by www.maristlaitynz.org, were shared with permission from www.livingtheword.org.nz.]

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