

December 31, 2017

Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Luke 2:22-40

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord," and to offer the sacrifice of "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons," in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

Background:

The gospel text presents a picture of the faithfulness of Joseph and Mary. In the first verses of the second chapter of his gospel, Luke tells his community that Joseph and Mary went to Nazareth to be enrolled to fulfill the decree of Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1-5). Just as Joseph and Mary are faithful in fulfilling the command of the civil authorities, they are also faithful in fulfilling their religious requirements of purification. In this text, Luke states five times that Joseph and Mary are acting to fulfill the law (verses 22, 23, 24, 27, and 39).

This faithful home of Joseph and Mary is the home in which Jesus will be raised and grow not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually. Following this gospel text Luke will also recount the occasion when Mary and Joseph found "the lost" Jesus in the temple. (Luke 2:41-

51) While many have tried to fill in the missing details of Jesus's early life, the early Christians who would have had access to those who remembered Jesus's early life chose only to record these two incidents from that time. This gospel text is an important window into the family and the early life of Jesus that deserves our attention.

The Jews believed that blood contained a life-power, belonged to God, and was sacred. Therefore, it was kept separated from the mundane things of life. When that separation was not preserved, the people and the objects that came into contact with the blood needed to be ritually purified. Naturally both birth and death became the focus of many purification practices. A second belief within the Jewish tradition was that the first-born son belonged to God. Therefore, an offering was made to God as a way to acknowledge God's claim on the child.

In the text, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus had gone to the temple to make the necessary offerings in fulfillment of requirements associated with these two beliefs. While they were there, they encountered Simeon and Anna. This encounter probably took place in the outer courtyard of the temple where women would have been permitted. By addressing Mary, Simeon was acting in way that was out of character for men of the day, who never addressed unfamiliar women in public. Both Simeon and Anna are described as people who had spent much of their life waiting for the day of fulfillment. They are the ones who recognized the divine presence within the infant Jesus. While it is not directly stated, it is implied that the religious officials who would have been about the temple area did not recognize God's presence within the child.

Reflection Questions:

1. How much did the values of your parents and their culture affect how they raised you?
2. Has there been a time in your life when you felt disappointed in the preparation your parents provided?
3. Has there also been a time or an incident when you discovered a new appreciation for the way you were raised?
4. How do you look on the role Joseph and Mary played in the life of Jesus?
5. The gospels present that God has been actively preparing not only Joseph and Mary for this moment in history, but all of creation with them. Why would God choose this manner of beginning God's fullest presence in our world?
6. Can you talk to God, who chose to bring Jesus into the world through the family of Joseph and Mary, about your own beginnings, or about your hopes to be a place where God presence can grow and develop, or some other awareness that rose within you as you read this gospel?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. The homepage is <https://fsc-calledtobe.org/>. The third link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on

Fridays and it will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted. Excerpts from the Lectionary for Mass for Use in the Dioceses of the United States of America, second edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. No portion of this text may be reproduced without permission from the copyright owner. *Please include this information when printing or forwarding.*

Excerpts from the readings for December 31, 2017, Feast of The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

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. Take care of your father when he is old; grieve him not. Even if his mind fail, be considerate of him; kindness will not be forgotten, planted against the debt of your sins—a house raised in justice to you.

Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways!
For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork; blessed shall you be, and favored.
Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in your home; your children like olive plants around your table.
Behold, thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord.
The Lord bless you from Zion: may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

Brothers and sisters: Put on, as God's chosen ones, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and avoid any bitterness toward them. Children, obey your parents in everything, this is pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they may not become discouraged.

When the days were completed for their purification, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, to offer the sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves. There was a man, Simeon, who was righteous, awaiting the consolation of Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him, and had revealed to him that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ. He came in the Spirit into the temple; he took Jesus into his arms and blessed God, saying: "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, a light to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted—and you yourself a sword will pierce— so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." There was also a prophetess, Anna, a widow, she was eighty-four. She worshiped night and day.

She spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.
They returned to Nazareth. The child grew strong, filled with wisdom; the favor of God was upon him.

Excerpts from Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; Psalm 128:1-5; Colossians 3:12-21; and Luke 2:22-40

Excerpts from the readings for December 31, 2017, Feast of The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

The word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying: "Fear not, Abram! I am your shield; I will make your reward very great." But Abram said, "O Lord God, what good will your gifts be, if I am childless and have as my heir the steward, Eliezer? You have given me no offspring." Then the word of the Lord came to him: "No, that one shall not be your heir; Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so shall your descendants be." Abram put his faith in the Lord, who credited it to him as an act of righteousness. The Lord took note of Sarah as he had said he would; he did for her as he had promised. Sarah bore Abraham a son in his old age, as God had stated. Abraham gave him the name Isaac.

The Lord remembers his covenant forever. Give thanks to the Lord, invoke his name. Sing to him, sing his praise, proclaim among the nations all his wondrous deeds. Glory in his holy name; rejoice, O hearts that seek the Lord! Look to the Lord in his strength. You descendants of Abraham, his servants, sons of Jacob, his chosen ones! He, the Lord, is our God. He remembers forever his covenant which he made binding for a thousand generations which he entered into with Abraham and by his oath to Isaac.

Brothers and sisters: By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he received power to generate, even though he was past the normal age—and Sarah herself was sterile—for he thought that the one who had made the promise was trustworthy. So it was that there came forth from one man, himself as good as dead, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sands on the seashore. By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac descendants shall bear your name." He reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead, and he received Isaac back as a symbol.

When the days were completed for their purification, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, to offer the sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves. There was a man, Simeon, who was righteous, awaiting the consolation of Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him, and had revealed to him that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ. He came in the Spirit into the temple; he took Jesus into his arms and blessed God, saying: "Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, a light to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel." The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted—and you yourself a sword will pierce— so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." There was also a prophetess, Anna, a widow, she was eighty-four. She worshiped night and day. She spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem. They returned to Nazareth. The child grew strong, filled with wisdom; the favor of God was upon him.

Excerpts from Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3; Psalm 105:1-9; Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19; and Luke 2:22-40