

December 27, 2020

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:

While the gospel text includes Simeon's and Anna's responses to Jesus being brought to the temple in Jerusalem, the focus is on the Holy Family—Jesus, Mary and Joseph. In the alternative shortened form of today's gospel, the part that includes Simeon and Anna is held back. The same long version text for today is read for the feast of the presentation on February 2.

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 Bethlehem 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 he will 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' early life, the early Christians would have had access to those who would have remembered Jesus's early life. While the early church did not choose to record all those accounts, they include these incidents. This 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 object

that came in contact with the blood needed to be ritually purified. Naturally both birth and death became the focus of 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.

Reflection Questions:

1. What stories are told about your early family life? What do those stories say about what was important to your parents and grandparents?
2. How much did their values influence how you were raised?
3. As you remember that experience now, are there places where you are grateful, and other places where you experience anger or disappointment?
4. In what ways has the pandemic affected your family life and its connection to the holy family?
5. Being more aware of the importance of your family, what insights do you have on the impact that Mary and Joseph had on Jesus?
6. Can you name some of the things Mary and Joseph gave to God by accepting God's invitation to become the parents of Jesus?
7. Can you talk to God about choosing to bring Jesus into the world through the welcome of Joseph and Mary as their son, or perhaps about your hopes to be a place of hospitality for God's presence in your own life?

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. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by 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. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One 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 are able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material is posted on Fridays and it is 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 typical edition © 2001, 1998, 1997, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. Used with permission. All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced by any means without permission in writing from the copyright owner. *Please include this information when printing or forwarding.*

Excerpts from the readings for December 31, 2020, 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 alternative readings for December 31, 2020, Feast of The Holy Family

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

Friends,

Here are the gospel background and reflection questions for December 27th, the Feast of the Holy Family, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The gospel is again from Luke. It tells the story of the presentation in the temple, fulfilling the prescriptions of the law, and the return to Nazareth, where Jesus "grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him." The other three readings all make references to family life, and to practices of family life that are pleasing in the sight of God. In the first reading from Sirach, "God sets a father in honor over his children; a mother's authority he confirms over her sons." Psalm 128 declares, "Blessed is everyone who walks in the Lord's ways; your children shall be like olive plants around your table." In the second reading, Paul writes to the Colossians, "Bear with and forgive one another, and put on love. Children, obey your parents in everything. This is pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children."

There is a second page of readings excerpts this week, since the lectionary offers alternatives for all the readings except the Gospel on this feast. The three alternative readings all refer to Abraham and God's promise to him because of his faith. In the first reading from Genesis, the Lord did for Abraham and Sarah as he had promised. "Count the stars, if you can. Just so shall your descendants be." Psalm 105 declares, "The Lord, our God, remembers his covenant with Abraham. Look to the Lord, sons of Jacob, his chosen ones!" In the second reading, Paul writes to the Hebrews, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called. He received power to generate, for he thought that the one who had made the promise was trustworthy."

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