

# Sunday Message

The Holy Family Of Jesus, Mary And Joseph

THE WORD

Year C • 29 December 2024 • Psalter Week 1



It is less than a week since Christmas and already the Gospel reading has jumped twelve years to when Jesus is on the cusp of becoming a teenager. Mary and Joseph have gone to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover.

Three times a year the Jewish people celebrate major festivals - Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles - and it was customary in the time of Jesus for Jewish males to visit the temple for these feasts.

Mary and Joseph, as devout Jews, would have considered it important to take their son along with them. It is a happy occasion, but then Jesus goes missing. His parents think he is with one of the other families in the group and when they realise that he isn't, they are distraught. They rush back to Jerusalem and eventually find him sitting in the temple answering questions and talking to the adults, oblivious to their distress. Mary and Joseph are puzzled and hurt when they find him, and they question him as to why he had left them. He tells them that he has been going about his heavenly Father's business. They remain puzzled. They do not fully understand the mission of Jesus, and they must ponder the mystery of it all.

Jesus returns with them to Nazareth and grows in stature and wisdom, learning about life and about faith from his parents. ■

## DO

Take time today to tell your family members, wherever they may be, how much you love them.

## SAY

"Lord, bless my family and all families. Help us to grow rich in what matters most of all - love, unity and joy."

## LEARN

The feast of the Holy Family was instituted in 1921, and has been celebrated on the first Sunday after Christmas since 1969. The Holy Family is seen as the model for the human family, the religious community and the Church itself. It is a celebration not only of the Holy Family itself but of the ideal of the Christian family on which the Church has always placed great emphasis.

## PRAY

Pray for families who are divided and broken and for all who have family members who are missing, that they will have the courage to remain hopeful.

## REFLECT

Earlier this year when the Princess of Wales disappeared from public view for some time, there was intense speculation as to the reason for her absence. Had something happened to her? Was a cover up under way to prevent the true story from coming out? Was something sinister going on? Social media especially was full of wild speculation and conspiracy theories, which ended only when the Palace revealed that she was being treated for cancer.

Most of us enjoy a bit of gossip and speculation. Discretion is hard, especially if we've received a juicy piece of news. We promise to keep it a secret, but it spills out. We can't help it. We get a buzz from passing it on, especially if it's salacious. This impulse to share is part of the human condition. Even though we know how harmful gossip and idle speculation can be, still we end up engaging in it, as if we've been compelled to do so by some inner force we can't control.

And all gossip is harmful. It almost always does damage to an individual or a relationship. Even if there is some basis to it, it is still harmful, because it hurts a family or a good name. It is never innocent because there is always a victim.

And once a story spreads, it starts to get embellished, becoming ever more detailed and colourful along the way.

Humans enjoy scandal. Being purveyors of embarrassing information seems to make us feel better about ourselves. "Did you hear about so and so? The wife is after walking out on him. Sure, it's no surprise. They say things have been bad in that house for a long time."

We can imagine what was being said about Mary and Joseph's parenting skills after Jesus went missing in Jerusalem. "Did you hear about Joseph and Mary's young fellow? He's after running away. I wonder what that's all about?" And so the gossip begins.

Pope Francis is a frequent critic of gossip, which, he says, "is not a work of the Holy Spirit, it is not a work of the unity of the Church. Gossip destroys the work of God."

He points to its disruptive nature. Peace is a gift that can easily be destroyed through petty gossip and speaking ill of others, he says. "There is no such thing as innocent gossip."

If you've ever been its victim, you will know how spot on Pope Francis is about gossip. God's word is constructive. It creates, not destroys. It builds up, never tears down. So it must be with our words too.

The start of a new year is a good time to reflect on how we use words, and whether and to what extent we spread gossip or speak ill of others. In an era when it's easier to disseminate fake news than ever before, when disinformation and misinformation are rife, we need to take Pope Francis' words of admonition to heart. We can never hurt somebody by not gossiping about them. ■



**ENTRANCE ANTIPHON**

*The shepherds went in haste,  
and found Mary and Joseph and the Infant lying in a manger.*

**COLLECT**

O God, who were pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family, graciously grant that we may imitate them in practising the virtues of family life and in the bonds of charity, and so, in the joy of your house, delight one day in eternal rewards. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

*Amen.*

**FIRST READING** 1 Samuel 1:20-22. 24-28

A reading from the first book of Samuel.

In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, 'I have asked for him from the LORD.'

The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow. But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, 'As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the LORD and dwell there for ever.'

And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. And the child was young. Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. And she said, 'Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD.' And he worshipped the LORD there.

The word of the Lord.

*Thanks be to God.*

**RESPONSORIAL PSALM** Psalm 84(83):2-3. 5-6. 9-10. R. cf. 5a

*R: Blessed are they who dwell in your house, O Lord.*

- How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O LORD of hosts.  
My soul is longing and yearning  
for the courts of the LORD.  
My heart and my flesh cry out  
to the living God. **R.**
- Blessed are they who dwell in your house,  
for ever singing your praise.  
Blessed the people whose strength is in you,  
whose heart is set on pilgrim ways. **R.**
- O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer;  
give ear, O God of Jacob.  
Turn your eyes, O God, our shield;  
look on the face of your anointed. **R.**

**SECOND READING** 1 John 3:1-2. 21-24

A reading from the First Letter of Saint John.

Beloved: See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

The word of the Lord.

*Thanks be to God.*

**ACCLAMATION BEFORE THE GOSPEL** cf. Acts 16:14b

*R: Alleluia, alleluia.*

Open our hearts, O Lord,  
that we may pay attention to the words of your Son.

*R: Alleluia.*

**GOSPEL** Luke 2:41-52

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

The parents of Jesus went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. After three days they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, 'Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.' And he said to them, 'Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and man.

The Gospel of the Lord.

*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.*

**PRAYER OVER THE OFFERINGS**

We offer you, Lord, the sacrifice of conciliation, humbly asking that, through the intercession of the Virgin Mother of God and Saint Joseph, you may establish our families firmly in your grace and your peace.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
*Amen.*

**COMMUNION ANTIPHON**

*Our God has appeared on the earth, and lived among us.*

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Bring those you refresh with this heavenly Sacrament, most merciful Father,  
to imitate constantly the example of the Holy Family, so that, after the trials of this world, we may share their company for ever.  
Through Christ our Lord.  
*Amen.*