

Holy, but Not in a Perfect World

Scripture Background

This information isn't meant to be read aloud, but as background for the leader. If helpful, share some of it in conversation with the group.

The first two readings today give instructions for conduct between family members from authors situated in two different cultures in which a strict social hierarchy was the norm. The author of Sirach wrote these verses as part of a Jewish community in the Middle East about 200 years before Christ. Paul wrote his words about 250 years later from his life situation as a Jewish Christian in the massive Roman Empire.

Some people may take offense at some of the instructions (ex: "Wives, be subject to your husbands"), coming as they do from a very different historical time than our own. Take the opportunity to point out that all of Scripture is influenced by the historical context of the writers, and we need to take the accepted, rigid patriarchy of Sirach and Paul's time into consideration when hearing lines like these.

Opening Prayer

Pray the following aloud together, beginning with the Sign of the Cross:

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

God of Light and God of Darkness,
thank you for this chance to slow down and listen to your Word for us.

Open our eyes, ears, minds, and our hearts
so that we experience how you are alive and active in our lives today.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Ask someone to read this passage aloud, then pause for a minute of silence.

Ask: What struck you about this reading or the liturgy this week?

Allow for sharing. Move on to the next section once the sharing has died down.

Reflections on the Reading

Invite each person in the circle to read one paragraph aloud:

December 28, 2025 • Year A

The Holy Family

- ▶ Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14 • Duties toward parents
- ▶ Colossians 3:12-21 • The practice of virtues
- ▶ Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23 • The flight into Egypt



With the story of Jesus' birth still fresh in our minds on this first Sunday after Christmas, the church uses the opportunity to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family with all of the readings focused on families. The Gospel readings are from Matthew this year, so the focus this week is on Jesus' earthly father, Joseph. (When we read from the Gospel of Luke, the focus is on his mother, Mary.)

If the story of Jesus' birth warmed our hearts with its tale of the star over Bethlehem and the magi who traveled long distances to worship and bring him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, the story today takes a terrible turn. Mary and Joseph have no time to savor his birth or let the wonder of the magi's visit sink in because suddenly their baby's life is in danger. Like millions of refugees throughout history, they must flee their home country on short notice with just a vague sense of a distant destination. Because they trust the guidance the angel gave Joseph in a dream, they save their son's life.

Tragically, however, many families lost sons to Herod's cruelty when he ordered all baby boys killed in his efforts to kill Jesus. (These verses are omitted from the Gospel passage today.) So the Feast of the Holy Family is not "The Feast of the Perfect Family in a Perfect World." The church celebrates this family today because of Mary and Joseph's willingness to say "yes" to raising God's son, even though it brought them great fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and even anguish because of the evil that one man, Herod, wreaked on so many families. They were a holy family, but they did not escape any challenges of being a human family.

Questions for Discussion

Read each question aloud, one at a time, followed by time for sharing.

- ① Does it change anything for you to think about Jesus' family as being a refugee family like so many millions today and throughout history? How so?
- ② Mary and Joseph changed course unexpectedly when they needed to in order to protect Jesus' life. When have you had to change direction suddenly? Can you see the hand of God at work in that change?
- ③ We may not often think of our families as being "holy families," but if being a holy family doesn't mean being a perfect family, how is your family holy?

Closing Prayer

Pray the following aloud together:

Lord, may what we have heard and reflected on today inspire us to go out from here to be better disciples in our daily lives.

May we be a blessing to all those we encounter this coming week.

Amen.