

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary & Joseph – December 31, 2017 – Our Lady of Perpetual Help

Scripture Reading: Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3

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 keep on being childless and have as my heir the steward of my house, Eliezer?" Abram continued, "See, you have given me no offspring, and so one of my servants will be my heir." Then the word of the LORD came to him: "No, that one shall not be your heir; your own issue shall be your heir." The LORD took Abram outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can. Just so," he added, "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 became pregnant and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time that God had stated. Abraham gave the name Isaac to this son of his whom Sarah bore him.

Psalm: Ps 105:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

R. The Lord remembers his covenant forever.

Give thanks to the LORD, invoke his name;
make known among the nations his deeds.
Sing to him, sing his praise,
proclaim all his wondrous deeds.

Glory in his holy name;
rejoice, O hearts that seek the LORD!
Look to the LORD in his strength;
constantly seek his face.

You descendants of Abraham, his servants,
sons of Jacob, his chosen ones!
He, the LORD, is our God;
throughout the earth his judgments prevail.

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.

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19

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.

Gospel: Luke 2:22-40

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, the parents of Jesus 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 Christ 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.



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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures, be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

In my childhood—which happened a while back, I admit—I used to look forward every year to the big New Years Eve party that my parents had. A number of times, I—ever inventive—wrote and dittoed off a tiny newspaper for the entertainment of everyone in attendance. For me, that party came second only to Christmas! And of course, Christmas was the big deal. It was the main holiday—the presents, the Christmas village that my mother constructed each year on the mantel, and increasingly for me, the birth of the Christ child. The holidays had and have a big footprint. That is why I wonder about the Church having placed the feast of the Holy Family in between Christmas and New Years. Might this put family into the shade? Who has energy to concentrate if they have put effort into shopping, decorating, hanging lights, putting up Christmas trees, leaning out to relatives, giving, giving, giving, and obviously, cleaning up. Not to mention the big and late midnight Mass. The Holy Family feast happens between them. How can we make room for it, tired or not?

Maybe by looking at what we would miss if we ignored this particular Sunday, especially the Gospel. We can start by asking what is the Holy Family feast for? The actual Presentation in the Temple, portrayed in its Gospel, will be celebrated on February 2nd, using exactly the same Gospel reading. Thus the “historical” significance of the event is reiterated later when it can have full significance. It is as if the Church has something besides chronology in mind when it put this reading right after Christmas. What? Its spiritual content. Some highlights: 1. This Sunday contains one of the few descriptions of the Holy Family in all scripture. Their appearance here emphasizes how important family care is for children and for all human beings. Mary and Joseph seem hesitant but have exquisite care for the baby Jesus. 2. Look at the important words of Simeon, which interpret the Nativity for us, though they may not seem to: *“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.”* Simeon at last holds the baby in his arms. His famous words are like using an underliner on the Christmas story: the child brings peace; he is a fulfillment of the Lord’s word, that a Messiah would come; he is an entrance of God into the whole world not just to a part of it, being sent to the Gentiles as well as to Israel; he is a revelation and he is a glory. Don’t we need this kind of interpretation? Why ignore it? 3. There is not only Simeon, but also Anna. We are told she had done Advent fasting and prayer in the temple until she was 84! Now, poignantly, she begins to speak out about the child to anyone who had been awaiting redemption. Isn’t she a symbol of the Advent we have just been through, the period of waiting, learning, and patience? These are only three of the quiet beauties in the Gospel this Sunday, celebrating family, and bringing out spiritual qualities of the birth of Our Lord. What if we let this Sunday quietly unpack Christmas and our lives for us?

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Why do you think Sirach says that good things happen to you when you honor your parents (prayers heard, sins atoned, long life, made happy by children)?
2. “Over all these put on love.” What is the only thing God asks of us? What happens to people when they are loved? What would the world be like if everyone really loved others? What kinds of things would disappear off the face of the earth?
3. Luke mentions the Spirit three times regarding Simeon. Through the Spirit, Simeon recognized Jesus as the glory of Israel and the light to the rest of the world. Do you let the same Spirit who lives in you help you recognize Jesus in your daily life? How?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another’s openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O God, who were pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family, graciously grant that we may imitate them in practicing 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, one God, for ever and ever. Amen