

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph - Year B
26 & 27 December 2020

Entrance Antiphon:

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

First Reading: Gen 15:1-6. 21:1-3

A reading from the book of Genesis

Your own son shall be your heir.

The word of the Lord was spoken to Abram in a vision, 'Have no fear, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great'.

'My Lord', Abram replied, 'what do you intend to give me? I go childless...' Then Abram said, 'See, you have given me no descendants; some man of my household will be my heir.' And then this word of the Lord was spoken to him, 'He shall not be your heir; your heir shall be one of your own flesh and blood.' Then taking him outside he said, 'Look up to heaven and count the stars if you can. Such will be your descendants,' he told him. Abram put his faith in the Lord, who counted this as making him justified. The Lord dealt kindly with Sarah as he had said, and did what he had promised her. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the time God had promised. Abraham named the son born to him Isaac, the son to whom Sarah had given birth.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God

Responsorial Psalm: Ps 127:1-5. R. see v.1

R. The Lord remembers his covenant for ever.

Give thanks to the Lord, tell his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. O sing to him, sing his praise; tell all his wonderful works! **R.**

Be proud of his holy name, let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice. Consider the Lord and his strength; constantly seek his face. **R.**

Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, the judgements he spoke. O children of Abraham, his servant, O sons of the Jacob he chose. **R.**

He remembers his covenant for ever, his promise for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. **R.**

Second Reading: Heb 11:8. 11-12. 17-19

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews

The faith of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac.

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going.

It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise would be faithful to it. Because of this, there came from one man, and one who was already as good as dead himself, more descendants than could be counted, as many as the stars of heaven or the grains of sand on the seashore.

It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He offered to sacrifice his only son even though the promises had been made to him and he had been told: It is through Isaac that your name will be carried on. He was confident that God had the power even to raise the dead; and so, figuratively speaking, he was given back Isaac from the dead.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation:

Alleluia, alleluia!

In the past God spoke to our fathers through the prophets; now he speaks to us through his Son.

Alleluia!

Gospel: Luke 2:22-40

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

The child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom.

When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord – observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord – and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to

him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said:

'Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel.'

As the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected – and a sword will pierce your own soul too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.'

There was a prophetess also, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him. .

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Communion Antiphon:

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



Readings The Epiphany of the Lord – 3rd January 2021

First Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6

Second Reading: Ephesians 3:2-3. 5-6

Gospel: Matthew 2:1-12

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph - Year B

Sunday 27th December 2020

In respect to the family there is certain ambiguity in the scriptural record. The Old Testament generally, as in the First Reading from Ecclesiasticus (3:2-6, 12-14) and later New Testament documents, such as the Letter to the Colossians in today's Second Reading (3:12-21), commend family life in a highly traditional way. In the interests of greater stress upon mutuality, sensitive preaching of this latter reading will require some qualification of the injunction, 'Wives give way to your husbands'. Today it is probably best to see both this maxim and the one directed to the male partner ('Husbands, love your wives and treat them with gentleness') as applying to both partners in the marriage.

The Synoptic tradition, with its roots in the teaching and practice of Jesus himself, insists that family ties can in fact be a hindrance to following the call of the Kingdom. It records Jesus saying that no one could be his disciple without 'hating' one's father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters (see Luke 14:26). Such statements, of course, reflect a Semitic idiom using 'love' and 'hate' simply to express a preference for one thing over another (see Matt 10:37: 'Whoever loves father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me'). But the ambiguity remains.

Something of this ambiguity in fact appears in the Gospel itself, featuring Luke's account of the presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple (2:22-40). On the one hand, there is a respect for traditional values. Joseph and Mary act in dutiful fulfilment of the requirements of the Torah: they bring their child to the Temple to observe 'what stands written in the law of the Lord' (Luke 2:23). Actually, the Lukan account conflates two separate prescriptions here: first, the redemption of a first born (see Exod 13:1, 11-16), which required the sending of a sum to the Temple, though not actual presence at the Temple; second, the purification of the mother of a child some forty days after childbirth (see Lev 12:1-8), on which occasion an offering was to be made – in the case of the poor, as Luke notes, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons'. The custom of 'redeeming' a first born (whether a child or animal) acknowledged the fact that all life was ultimately the possession and gift of the Lord. The parents 'bought back' their child from the Lord. In the case of Jesus, however, as the next episode in the Temple will show (2:41-51), Mary and Joseph will have to surrender him back to the Lord to be about his 'Father's business' (v. 49): the costly redemption of the world.

A similar ambiguity hovers over Simeon's blessing of the child and the two oracles he pronounces. He, along with the prophetess Anna, represents continuity with the past. They model faithful Israelites who have spent their lives hanging upon the promises that God would send a Saviour. Through prayer and fasting they are equipped to discern in this otherwise very ordinary family from the poorer class the divine fulfilment of promise. In his *Nunc Dimittis*, canticle, Simeon has become the patron saint of those who, having found meaning at last in their lives, are able to let go and surrender all to the Lord.

But, along with continuity with the past, there is rupture as well. The child will be not only the 'glory of ... Israel' but also – and even first! – 'a light for the revelation to the Gentiles'. Here we have a sense of boundaries being extended, of a salvation widely cast. This is going to cause trouble, as Simeon's second oracle points out. The child is destined 'for the fall and the rising of many in Israel, and for a sign of contradiction'. The wide-ranging scope of salvation – the fact that it is not going to be confined to Israel but will be a light also for the Gentiles – will challenge the narrowness of many hearts and bring resistance. In this connection Simeon speaks of a 'sword' that is to pierce Mary's soul. While allusion to Jesus' passion can hardly be excluded, I suspect that the 'sword' has a wider reference. Mary will have to surrender her Son to a broader, more costly role – in effect to 'his Father's business' (2:49) where 'Father' refers not to Joseph but to God.

The surrender required of the Holy Family was, of course, unique. However, there is a sense in which all parents know something of that 'sword'. Bringing new life into the world and nurturing it to adulthood involves rupture as well as continuity, pain and surrender as well as joy. Today's feast is not so much about modelling an impossibly lofty ideal of family virtue, as about recognising a divine sharing, sympathy and involvement with the challenges of everyday family life.