



Feast of Holy Family (Year B)



Luke 2: 22 – 40

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph brought the child Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, “Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

And the child’s father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, “This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul, too.”

There was also a Prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day.

At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

When Mary and Joseph had finished everything required by 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 favour of God was upon him.

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Reflection:

As we reflect on the life of the Holy Family, we are reminded of the difficulties that were theirs and the sufferings that awaited them. Not blessed with wealth, Mary and Joseph offer the traditional sacrifice offered by the poor (those who were able to afford it, were expected to offer a lamb); not knowing what would come of Jesus, Mary and Joseph are told how suffering will play its part. Holiness is received through difficulties and sufferings; in turning to God in our time of need, it is he who sustains us.



Table Discussion (at mealtime):

How does suffering bring you closer to God?



Parenting Corner:

Customs are an important part in family life. Customs can range from ways of celebrating particular feast days or milestones to the way you hold a family meal or tuck your children into bed. Prayer can play a big part in family customs, but so too can ritual, symbols, blessings, gestures and food.

We hear how Mary and Joseph were also guided by customary practices. By presenting Jesus in the Temple 40 days after his birth, they were doing “what was customary under the law”. The same can be said of their family’s annual trip to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover (made reference to in Luke 2: 41) or Jesus’ attendance in the synagogue each Sabbath, “as was his custom” (Luke 4: 16).

The Christmas Season (which begins on December 25th and runs until the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord (this year it falls on January 10th) is a wonderful time for family customs and family activities. From making a family “snow sculpture” in the front yard, to making your own special treats for New Year’s, to extending the Christmas festivities into the “twelve days of Christmas” (the days between Christmas and the Feast of the Epiphany), there is bound to be a few things that can become a natural part of your family.

Here’s a few things you might want to try:

- Snow Sculpture Fun: Decide on a theme (Angels, Nativity (Jesus, Mary and Joseph), Shepherds, Saint Nicholas, Saint Wenceslaus’ help to the poor man, Heaven’s Gates, A Castle, A Symbol for Peace etc.). Have a little “hot chocolate party” afterwards.
- Celebrate the twelve days of Christmas by lighting an extra candle in the house each day. (See prayer below).
- Celebrate the twelve days of Christmas by unwrapping one small present each day.
- Prepare for a Family New Year’s party that involves a traditional treat you can make with the kids. (The treat may even be shaped in the form of an angel, shepherd, babe in manger, etc.).

- Celebrate Epiphany by dressing up as the three kings and bringing a treat to someone you know. (This can be done at any point during the Christmas Season and can be repeated as often as you want).
- Celebrate the Season by dressing up and singing Christmas Carols at the door of someone you know. (It may be wise to phone ahead).
- Plan a Christmas themed scavenger hunt around the house.
- Have a Christmas story/picture/puppet show/play/song contest, where everyone is encouraged to come up with their own unique way of telling the Christmas Story (This can be introduced early in the Season, so that it can be worked during the “downtimes” kids experience during the break, to give them something to work on. This should be more in the line of a talent show than a judged contest).
- Organize a short prayer service on New Year’s Eve, thanking God for the blessings that were received over the past year and asking for his blessing on the New Year (See Service below).
- Make sure to attend Mass on New Year’s Day, marking the end of the Christmas Octave (Christmas Day lasts eight days in the Christian Calendar and the Feast of Mary, Mother of God).
- Come up with one “family” New Year’s Resolution that will enhance your family’s faith life (i.e. a designated spot set up for prayer, a bedtime custom, a mealtime custom (keep it short and do-able).

If you have any other family customs or traditions, please feel free to share them. This is part of family life that everyone enjoys.



Daily Lighting of a New Candle Prayer:

(gather in a semi-circle around the candle)

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you are the light that scatters the darkness, you are the flame of God’s love that warms our heart, be the source of our light and love during this Season of Christmas, and help us to share it with one another and with those in need. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Take a minute of silence to “welcome the Light of Christ into your hearts”)

Together sing:

This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine / This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine /
 This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine / Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.



New Year's Eve Prayer Service:

Arrange to sit around the Nativity set, an open Bible with a lit candle or some, a Christmas wreath, or some other symbol that speaks of Christ's birth.

Begin by lighting a candle.

Prayer:

Lord God, we come together as a family to thank you for the many blessings you have given us over the past year. We spend a minute of silence together in order to thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Please fill our hearts with joy. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Spend a minute in silence reflecting on God's many blessings to you over the past year. You may want to repeat the words "Thank you" in your head.

Prayer:

Lord God, we come together as a family to ask your blessing on the coming year. We spend a minute of silence together in order to open our hearts to you once more. Please help us to make room for you each day. We ask this Christ our Lord. Amen

Spend a minute in silence opening your heart to God once more. You may want to repeat the words "Open my heart, Lord" in your head.

Conclude by saying:

"May the peace of Christ be always with you." Response: **"And also with you."**

"Let us offer each other a sign of peace." (**"Peace be with you"** -- exchange hugs).



A Mother's Love (Bedtime Story):

"How do I express my love for you?" Mary asked Jesus, as she cradled him in her arms.

"How do I express my love for you when words are not enough and my many acts of kindness cannot begin to express my love? I can write to you a poem or sing you a beautiful song. I can smother you with kisses or hold you in my arms.

"I could tell you how much you mean to me; how your birth has changed my life. I could offer you my life for yours, I could protect you from all harm.

"How do I express my love you?" Mary asked her baby child. "For you becoming flesh in me, for making me a Temple, a place for you to dwell.

"I wish I could be true to you; I want to give my all. And yet I wonder if I can, if I can at all."

There Mary sat with Christ, the Lord, her baby, weak and small; not knowing how to serve him best, not knowing how at all. She turned her heart to God instead, and shed a single tear; "I love you so, I love you much; I love you God, most dear."

There she sat, and there she prayed, she knew her babe would grow. He would leave the house, and say "Goodbye", he would move out on his own. "I love you so, I love you much," she said to him once more. "For all the worries I will have, when you step out my door.

"I know struggles you will face, the many who won't believe; I know the pain that's sure to come, the cross you will receive. I wish I could hold you dear, and never let you go; to lock the door and bolt you in, and love you evermore.

"But just as you were born for us, for us you soon must die; I hold you now with tenderness, I'll hold you then, and cry. I wish I could prevent the harm, I wish it with all my heart; I wish that I could save you from the ridicule from the start.

"How do I express my love for you when words are not enough and my many acts of kindness cannot begin to express the love? I'll hug and I'll kiss and I'll smother you with love; I'll teach you and look after you, and care for you, my love.

"So that when that time shall, as I know it certainly will; you may know that I have loved you, that I love you even still."

What is Love (Bedtime Reflection):

Love is patient, love is kind; love is not jealous of what others have or boastful or rude. Love does not insist on its own way or get irritated and hurt. Love doesn't say: "I told you so", but accepts what others bring. Love continues to believe and hope, even when it is hard. Love is willing to endure what is difficult for the prize that lies ahead. When we love as God loves, then truly love has no end.

(written by God for you in St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 13: 4 – 7)