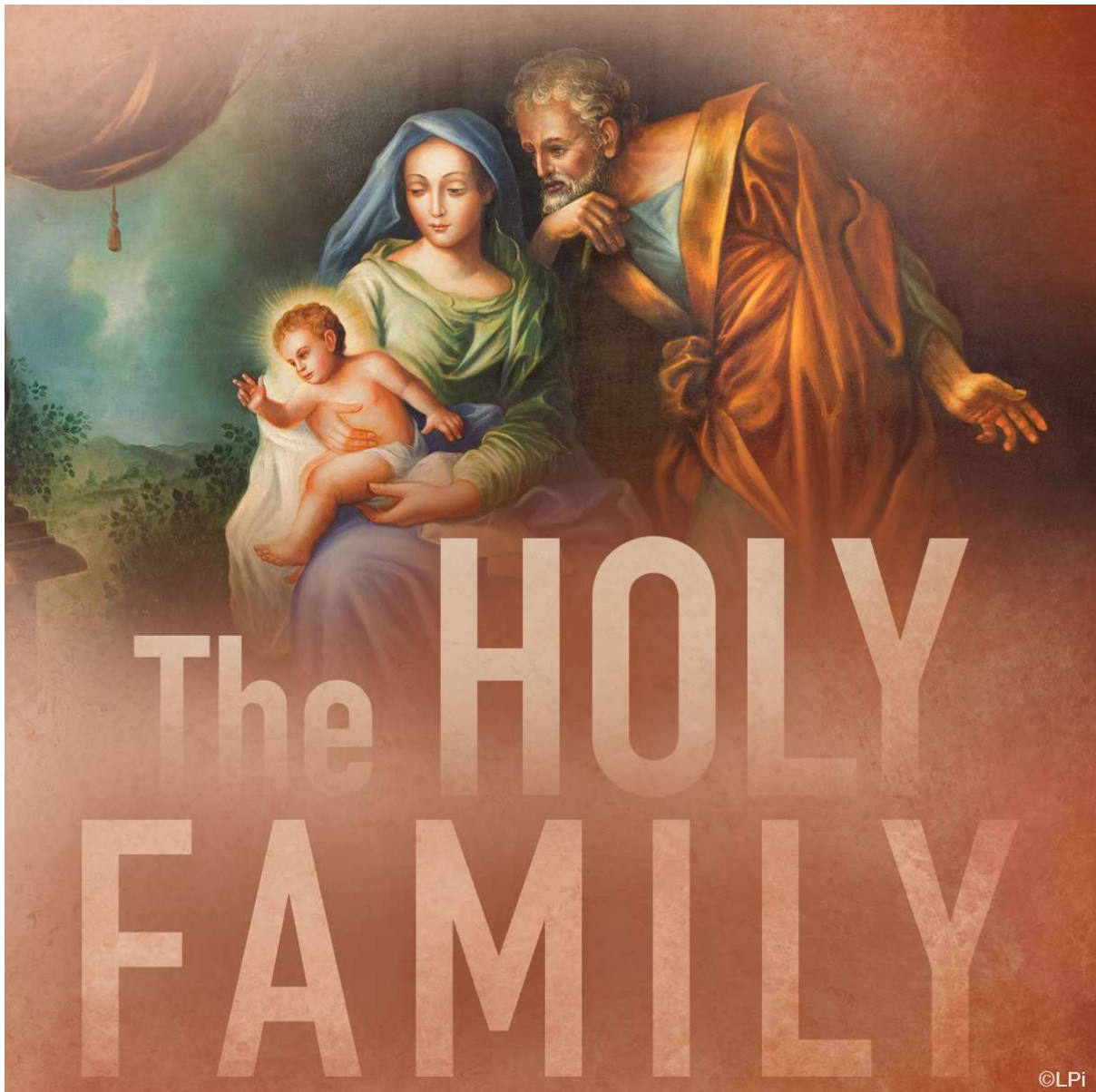


## The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph



We celebrate the feast of the Holy Family on this first Sunday after Christmas, - just when some toys are already broken, chocolate Santas sit in the rubbish bin and thoughts turn to Valentine's day.

As we get back to "normal," the church offers us the ideal of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, the Holy Family whose supposed peaceful, loving life might seem further removed from us than we would want to admit.

But, in spite of the 'holy picture' image, a very different reality emerges when we contemplate the story of the Holy Family.

In this Year B we hear that when the poor parents met the saintly Simeon in the Temple, he predicted that the child they brought in would be a sign of contradiction and that Mary would live under the sword of sorrow.

From his earliest days, Jesus' life is, as we know, fraught with threat, danger and rejection – a fate shared by his parents.

### **Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3**

Abram, a name which means “father figure”, is told his name is to be Abraham, which means “father of a great nation”.

### **Hebrews 11:8. 11-12. 17-19**

Abraham is extolled as the example of great faith, trusting in God, even when what he experienced appeared to be the opposite of what God promised.

### **Luke 2:22-40**

Jesus' parents present him in the Temple to fulfil what the Law required. Jesus is revealed as the saviour, as witnessed by the prophetic figures of Simeon and Anna.

### **Reflection**



"They took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord".

As faithful Jews, Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the temple for the rite of purification. Though this poor family could not afford a lamb for the sacrifice, they held the "lamb of God" in their arms.

In the temple that day were two elderly servants of God, Simeon and Anna, who awaited the deliverance of Israel. Simeon praised God for allowing him to see the one who would bring salvation to his people, and light to the Gentiles (Lk 2:32). Simeon's words to Mary pierced her heart; she would not be spared the suffering of her son.

Luke paralleled the account of Simeon with that of Anna, a pious widow who spent her days in the temple praying and fasting for the redemption of Israel. Anna is called a "prophetess," one who interpreted God's actions in the world. She gave thanks to God and told everyone that deliverance would come through this child.

When they left the temple, the holy family returned to Nazareth where their son Jesus grew in wisdom and grace.



As an example for us to follow, the Holy Family may seem a little bit too perfect. The more dramatic events of the Christmas and Easter story, it can seem very far removed from us. And yet, as today's Gospel reminds us, there were also the so-called 'hidden years' - the many years of family life in Nazareth, spent in doing very ordinary things. During that time, we hear how Jesus grew and matured, and it is in the glimpse of that family life we see our example.

The family is a basic unit of our Christian society, despite coming under all kinds of threat nowadays. Our celebration of this feast, and the Word of God we proclaim, announces that there is a lasting value in the ideals of family life, and the relationship between husband, wife, parents and children. Whatever the changing details every age, honour, understanding and love always remain the

recipe for the perfect, and holy, human family. It is love that we put on over all the other clothes of changing cultures and places, to guarantee the life of the family in imitation of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

### WORDSEARCH

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E	E	L	I	L	A	G	N	A	A	EGYPT	HEROD	MOTHER
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