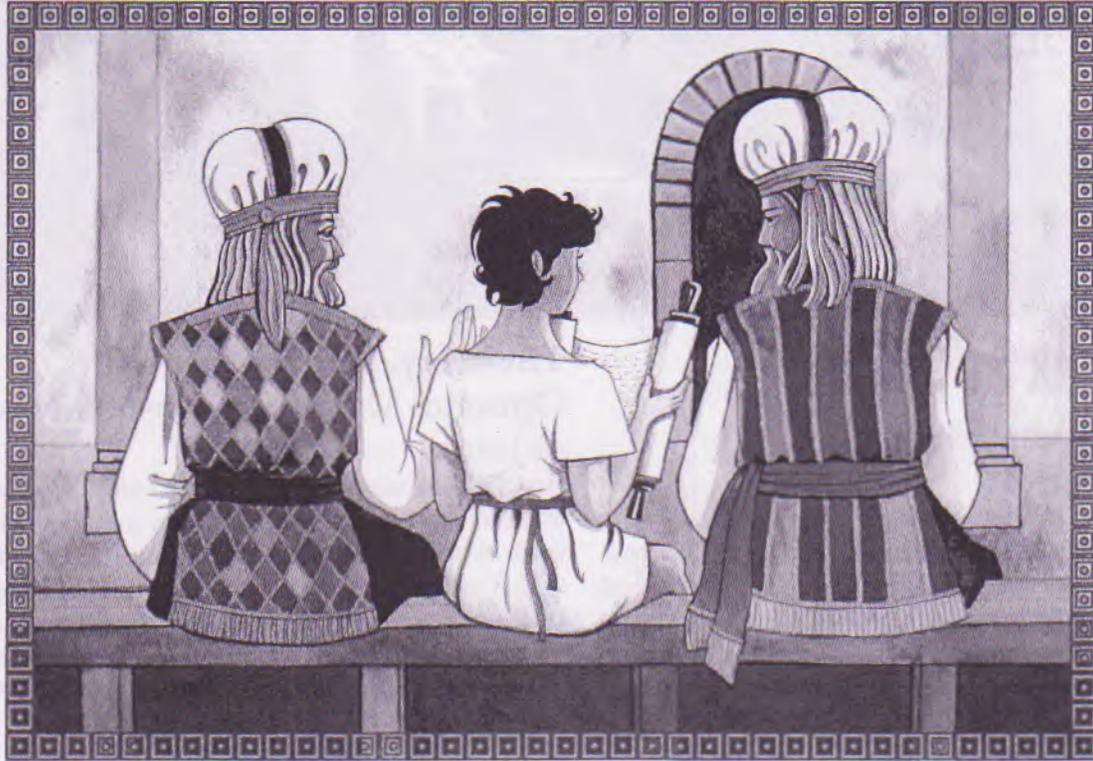


The Holy Family



A Blessing for Families

God of great mercy,
you who sent your Son Jesus
into a human family like ours—
not a palace,
or a military institution,
or a temple,
but a home—
help us as we create

a fragile peace,
a place to nurture the young
with tenderness,
and a place to live in reverence for your name.
Bless all who do this difficult work
of parenting.
We ask this through the same Christ
our Lord. Amen.

Sunday, December 30, 2012

The Real Thing



Today's Readings: 1 Samuel 1:20–22, 24–28; Psalm 84:2–3, 5–6, 9–10 (see 5a); 1 John 3:1–2, 21–24; Luke 2:41–52. Lest anyone be misled by idealistic portraits, today's Gospel shows that the Holy Family had heart-stopping, aggravating moments, as any family does. Anyone who has endured minor panic over a teenager's antics can relate to Mary's question, "Why have you treated us like this?" And their Son was God!

If Mary and Joseph can get upset, so can we. Here they give us permission to be natural, and sometimes anxious, humans. We, too, can marvel at children who develop so differently from their parents. In good rabbinic style, Jesus answers Mary's question with a question: "Why were you

searching for me? Did you not know . . . ?" Their mutual astonishment might translate today to the computer-adept child trying to help technologically-challenged parents, or poets financing a child's degree in business.

Although "they did not understand what he said to them," Mary and Joseph create a climate where their child can grow "in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor." They raised him with the mixture of forgiveness and patience, kindness and gratitude, mercy and peacefulness that characterizes all healthy human parenting. Luke gives the final thought to the parent, Mary: she "treasured all these things in her heart." Contemplative "treasuring" is part of the parent's work.



This Week at Home

Monday, December 31

New Year's Eve

The coincidence of John's prologue falling on New Year's Eve invites us to notice the light and the dark in the past year. Or have they sometimes overlapped? Did what first appeared disastrous become blessing? Making a list of both may be the gateway to gratitude. Looking back, can you see, "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace"? Today's Readings: 1 John 2:18–21; Psalm 96:1–2, 11–12, 13 (11a); John 1:1–18.

Tuesday January 1

Solemnity of Mary, Holy Mother of God

Luke's nativity story does not emphasize Jewish tradition as Matthew's does. Instead, Luke wrote for Gentiles, assuring them that this special child came to save *all* peoples. Indeed, every birth is a sacred and wondrous event. Mary gives birth, and she also treasures and learns from memories of him. What parts of your own story are most illuminating? Today's Readings: Numbers 6:22–27; Psalm 67:2–3, 5, 6, 8 (2a); Galatians 4:4–7; Luke 2:16–21.

Wednesday, January 2

Memorial of Saints Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen

The two saints honored today were born in the same area, Cappadocia, in the same year, 330, and both studied in Athens. Later, both became bishops. Gregory wrote of his friend: "we became everything to each other . . . We seemed to be two bodies with a single spirit . . . our great pursuit, the great name we wanted, was to be Christians." Today contact a friend to express your appreciation. Today's Readings: 1 John 2:22–28; Psalm 98:1, 2–3ab, 3cd–4 (3cd); John 1:19–28.

Thursday, January 3

Optional Memorial, Most Holy Name of Jesus

How embarrassing it is to forget a name; how heartening when someone remembers ours. How much more important when John the Baptist clearly recognizes Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away our sins. Today's First Letter of John recalls our deepest identity. At the very core, we are named God's children, promised that we will become like God. Today's Readings: 1 John 2:29–3:6; Psalm 98:1, 3cd–4; 5–6 (3cd); John 1:29–34.

Friday January 4

Memorial of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton

Elizabeth Ann's conversion to Catholicism might have been her response to Jesus' invitation, "Come and see." Later, she compared her small efforts to a mustard seed: to support her five children after her husband died, she took in boarders, cared for orphans, and taught some paying students. She never dreamed her work would lead to the vast American Catholic school system. Terminally ill, she kept her self-effacing humor, writing to her friend Julia Scott, "Here I jog on to the grave." Today's Readings: 1 John 3:7–10; Psalm 98:1, 7–8, 9 (3cd); John 1:35–42.

Saturday, January 5

Memorial of Saint John Neumann

Can anyone imagine a less likely candidate for the Bishop of Philadelphia? Neumann arrived on a boat from Bohemia, with nothing but the clothes he wore and a suitcase full of books, seeking ordination. Perhaps he remembered Jesus' request in today's Gospel, "Follow me." After years of service, despite opposition from those who wanted to prevent immigration, and from wealthy Catholics who wanted a more "polished" bishop, Neumann became a superb leader of the then-largest diocese in the country. Today's Readings: 1 John 3:11–21; Psalm 100:1b–2, 3, 4, 5 (2a); John 1:43–51.



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Keeping the Seasons
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