

Read

1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28

Psalm 84:2-3, 5-6, 9-10

1 John 3:1-2, 21-24

Luke 2:41-52

LIVING THE WORD

Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

December 26, 2021



REFLECTION

Today we celebrate the holy family, not the perfect family. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus formed a family unlike any other in human history. What other parents have the privilege—and pressure—of raising the Son of God?! While Jesus and Mary were without sin, their family was not without distress as we see in today's Gospel. Mary and Joseph lose Jesus in the temple. For three days they search for their son and are worried.

Luke's account of Jesus getting lost in the temple is the perfect reading for today's feast. It's easy to think of the Holy Family as a pristine, perfect trio living life spot-free. But that would make them unapproachable and their lifestyle unattainable. This is not why Jesus came to earth. Jesus came to be like us in all things but sin. His family life answers the same call. The foibles of the Holy Family speak to our own family lives that are surely marred by mishaps along the way. The Holy Family finds their holiness in the ordinary, the mundane. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus model how to faithfully engage the day-to-day realities that come with living under one roof.



ACTION

For many people, the holiday season is a time where family is fresh on the mind. Sketch out your family tree: parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and close friends. Say a prayer of gratitude for these people who walk with you through life's ups and downs. Consider: is there anyone on this family tree who you need to forgive, or seek forgiveness from?



This week, share uplifting stories about families on your social media pages. They could be about your family, or ones you read about in the news.



QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ How does your family practice holiness?
- ❖ What is one way your family can grow in holiness together this week?



December 26, 2021

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH

LECTIONARY #17C

1 Samuel 1:20–22, 24–28 or Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14

Psalms 84:2–3, 5–6, 9–10 or 128:1–2, 3, 4–5

1 John 3:1–2, 21–24 or Colossians 3:12–21 or
3:12–17

Luke 2:41–52

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

We have little information about the life of Jesus as a child. The story heard in today's Gospel, the finding in the temple, is the most detail we have about Jesus' childhood or adolescence. In this reading we hear themes of Passover; sacrifice, fear, suffering, relief, and joy. Mary and Joseph would have known fear for their child's life and safety as they searched for him. They would have known tremendous joy—and likely confusion—when they found the boy at the temple. Jesus' statement helps us learn about his identity as the Son of God. He further demonstrates this by having a special understanding of the matters he discussed with the teachers at the temple. Calling the temple his Father's house reminds us that the presence of God dwelt within the Holy of Holies; Jesus himself is the incarnate God, the holy one made flesh.

Q FOCUS: *Even as child, Jesus knew that he was the Son of God.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

On December 26, the Church traditionally celebrates the Feast of St. Stephen (this year it is replaced with this Sunday's celebration of the Feast of the Holy Family). St. Stephen was the first martyr—the first person who was killed because of his faith in

Christ. You can read his story in Acts 6–7 (his martyrdom is found at Acts 7:54–60). It is interesting that the Church placed such a somber feast on the day after Christmas. It reminds us that the infant Jesus is truly the Son of God, and because of his salvific activity people in every time have been called upon to share his message with the world, despite persecution and rejection.

Church Teaching Connection

Mary and Joseph taught Jesus Jewish traditions and raised him in their faith. A faith-filled family is an important part of the Catholic Church's understanding of family life and the domestic church. Our parents, relatives, friends, and other important people in our lives help to shape our faith and instill in us traditions and practices. They model for us the Christian life. This group of people will look different for every individual, but all together they make up our domestic churches. Likewise, the Church itself becomes a family of faith; no one is without a family who are members of the body of Christ (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1655–1658).

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 2:41–52

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

Each year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

In the Gospel accounts we hear precious little about the child Jesus. Early in some of the Gospel accounts we hear the infancy narrative, but no canonical gospel tells stories of his childhood. What we do know is that sometime after the flight to Egypt the Holy Family returned to Nazareth, and Jesus grew up a Nazarene. We also know that Jesus' parents were faithful Jewish people, and that Jesus was raised in a faithful Jewish home. As faithful people, Mary and Joseph would have taken Jesus to Jerusalem, the holy city. In today's

Gospel reading we hear that the family had traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover observation.

► **Do you know of any other Jewish holydays?**

Jerusalem was a large city, filled with people and activity; it was a very different place than Nazareth, Jesus' hometown. The temple in Jerusalem had stood for generations, and the child Jesus would have known from his family the purpose and some workings of the temple. The Passover story, and recalling the holy of holies in the desert during the Exodus may have been stories that Jesus had just heard repeated during his family's Passover observation.

► **What religious traditions do your family or friends practice during Catholic holydays? How did you come to learn about these?**

After celebrating an important religious holiday, and being with family and friends, Mary and Joseph were quite shocked when they realized Jesus was nowhere to be found. When they finally found him after days of searching, his answer (not given flippantly, but seriously) must have given them pause in the fear they faced in their search. They were confronted with the truth that they had known from the beginning of Jesus' life, that he was the Son of God. Today we read this Scripture passage and we reflect on one specific aspect of it, and that is the identity of Jesus.

Jesus' response to his parents and what he was doing in the temple tells us who Jesus is, and it tells us part of what he's come to do. First of all, we know that the Passover is the holy day during which we will later witness the institution of the Eucharist, at the Last Supper. Secondly, we hear who Jesus is. Historically, people were identified by who their fathers were. Jesus, in this second chapter of Luke, identifies God the Father as his father. He is the Son of God. Thirdly, Jesus demonstrated religious understanding beyond his years. The teachers at the temple were stunned at his understanding.

► **How do these things help you to come to a better understanding of what Jesus was like as a child?**

After being found in the temple, Jesus returned home with his parents. We hear that the Son of God was obedient to his parents, and that he continued to grow in wisdom. Despite being the God incarnate

on earth, Jesus held himself to the commandments God gave to his people; he obeyed his parents, and grew up under the law. Like Jesus, we too are called to grow in wisdom and follow God's commands.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 98.

Jesus is the Son of God.

Jesus was a faithful Jewish boy raised in a faithful home.

Jesus was obedient to his parents and to Father.

Act on the Word

Family and Vocation

For this activity, you will need a board or a large sheet of paper, paper or journals, and pens.

Lead the young people in a discussion about family. You may want to have this as a large group discussion or in small groups. Be aware of the various and sometimes painful family situations the teens might be coming from.

Begin by reflecting briefly on what a family is. It might help to write down thoughts on a board or a large sheet of paper. What is a family? Many people define family as parents and their children. What about grandparents, and aunts, uncles and cousins? Perhaps foster children live in your home, or you have cousins who share your home. What about friends who are as close as family? Some people lack family, and rely on close friendships to fill the gap left by not having a family, yet that gap still exists. Invite the young people to share their thoughts on what is included in the definition of family.

Then discuss how families are the basic building block of our society. Women and men who are called to the sacrament of marriage come from parents, and eventually the new couple become parents

themselves. Children rely on the stability of their parents and perhaps their extended family unit to grow physically, emotionally, and spiritually; children rely on their families for basic survival and for the tools to thrive in life. Without families, children don't have their basic needs met. Invite the young people to reflect on other things a family provides for the children. They can also reflect on what it looks like when children's needs are not met.

Finally, discuss what aspects of being Catholic are important to family function? Recall today's Gospel reflection about the importance of building faith and keeping religious traditions.

After the discussion, invite the teens to reflect on their place in their family and what they contribute to it. This is an important reflection for the young people as they begin to assert their independence and look to the future. They can journal about this or discuss it with one another or in a large group.

Closing Prayer

*Triune God,
we are created to be a community
of persons in your image.
Fill us with your inner life, your Holy Spirit.
Help us find your presence in the midst
of our real world
that families of origin, choice, or
circumstance might bring to all we meet
the light of your love, Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.*

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.