

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

Psalms 105:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19

Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22, 39-40



REFLECTION

Have you ever wondered what Jesus was like as a child? Was he a quiet baby or very energetic? Did he get into Joseph's tools, or would he sit on his mother Mary's lap and play? The Gospel tells us that Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple in order to follow the Jewish law, presenting the child to God. Although this was a normal thing to do, it turned out to be an extraordinary glimpse into God's plan of salvation. Simeon and Anna spoke to the family and to others gathered there about the redemption that Jesus would bring to the people.

How do you think this event shaped the life of the Holy Family? Perhaps Mary and Joseph talked about it in the evenings to try to better understand God's plan. Maybe it shaped how they raised Jesus.

The Gospel remains silent on what the child Jesus was like, his personality and temperament. As we look at the young Jesus, we might then imagine ourselves. How did your personality as a child influence how you are today? What influence did your upbringing have on you?

Today we see Jesus as a man full of faith, justice, and mercy. As we look at ourselves, how do we reflect our own personality, the influence of our parents, and our heavenly Father's love? All these things and more go into making us who we are, but ultimately our actions and choices tell our story. We pray that we, like Jesus, will grow in strength and wisdom as God's grace is upon us.

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Who has been an example of living faith in your life?
- ❖ In what areas of your life do you desire to grow in strength and wisdom?

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

December 31, 2023

ACTION

Spend some quiet time in prayer reflecting on the adults in your life and their commitment to faith. Who has inspired you in your faith? Reach out to them, thanking them for their example. Every person is on a journey of faith. Say some prayers for those ahead of you on the journey, for the children behind you continuing to learn, and for your faith to grow in this season of your life.



Check out this short reflection from Fr. Pontifex:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tHcUalM3yYg>



December 31, 2023

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

LECTIONARY #17B

Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3 or Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

Psalms 105:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9 or
128:1-2, 3, 4-5

Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19 or

Colossians 3:12-21 or 3:12-17

Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22, 39-40

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

This Gospel can be challenging for teens, because there's a lot to read between the lines. On the surface level, this is a story about Jesus being presented in the temple, where two people make a big deal over the young Jesus. But there are also some interesting things we can pick up from paying close attention, and we can gain some insights into Jesus' life as a child. For one thing, we learn that Mary and Joseph, despite the angels appearing to them before Jesus was born, are still being surprised and amazed at how people react to him. Thus, it seems that Jesus must have looked and seemed like other children, but there was something about him that revealed his divinity to those who were open to encountering God in their lives.

Q FOCUS: *There are some who recognized that Jesus was the Christ even when he was young.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

Today's feast is usually celebrated the Sunday after Christmas. Throughout Christmas Time, we focus on the mystery of the incarnation—on the fact that God became human. Celebrating the Holy Family helps to call our attention to the fact that Jesus not only was born, but also had a childhood and a

family. Put another way, Jesus had to grow up just like we do. This feast also reveals to us the importance of the family in Christianity. Tomorrow, on January 1, the Church celebrates Mary, the Holy Mother of God. This is always celebrated on January 1 and is an opportunity for us to continue learning about the incarnation, focusing on Mary's motherhood and how Jesus was both human and divine.

Church Teaching Connection

"Children's growth is a great joy for the family, we all know it. They are destined to grow and become strong, to acquire knowledge and receive the grace of God, just as happened to Jesus. He is truly one of us: the Son of God becomes a child, agrees to grow, to become strong; he is filled with knowledge, and the grace of God is upon him. Mary and Joseph have the joy of seeing all this in their son; and this is the mission to which the family is directed" (Pope Francis, Angelus Message, December 31, 2017).

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 2:22-40

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.

When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to

Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, *Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord*, and to offer the sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: / "Now, Master, you may let your servant go / in peace, according to your word, / for my eyes have seen your salvation, / which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, / a light for revelation to the Gentiles, / and glory for your people Israel." The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted—and you yourself a sword will pierce—so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

When they had fulfilled all the prescriptions of 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 favor of God was upon him.

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:

Today's reading presents us with an interesting juxtaposition. On the one hand, we hear at the end of the Gospel that the child Jesus "grew and became strong, filled with wisdom." Put another way, Jesus learned and grew up, just like all humans do. But while it seems that Jesus shared those life experiences with us all, the reading also points out that some people were able to tell that he was the messiah, even as an infant.

► **What do you think was it about Jesus that made him stand out? Why do you think only some people noticed it and not others?**

It seems that people like Simeon and the prophetess Anna are able to tell that there is something different about Jesus, and they can identify him as the Christ. Today's Gospel passage tells us that Simeon and Anna were people of great faith. Each in their own way had a relationship with God and were open to listening to the Spirit guiding them. They already had faith and trusted that God would fulfill his promise of salvation. Because they were open to God, when they encountered Jesus, they were able to recognize him as God's fulfillment of the promise.

► **How do you encounter God? What type of attitude do you have when you go to church or pray throughout the day (open and ready to listen, distracted, and so on)?**

How do you think Mary and Joseph reacted to the presence of Jesus? God had shared his plan of salvation with them, through the words of the angel and what they knew through their faith. But Jesus was fully divine *and* fully human. What was he like as child, learning to read and write? Interacting with his parents, relatives, and neighbors? Helping with the chores? We don't know the specific answers to these types of questions, but as the Son of God, all of Jesus' actions must have reflected the grace of

divine love. There must have been so many ordinary moments of life for the Holy Family that were made extraordinary because of Jesus' presence and Mary and Joseph's openness to God.

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 106.

Jesus grew up and learned, just like we do.

Jesus was not just human, but also divine, and that was recognized by others.

When we are open to God, we become more aware of his presence in our lives.

Act on the Word

Entering the Story

For this activity, you will need copies of the Gospel reading to give to small groups and props for skits, if available.

In order to help the teens better to understand the experiences of those named in this story, they are going to act out this scene in the form of short skits. After the skits have been performed, the whole group will discuss the experience.

Divide the teens into small groups, each containing at least six people to fill the six roles: Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Simeon, Anna, and a passerby in the temple. If the numbers don't divide evenly, you can have additional members be passersby who would have witnessed what happened but don't speak. Once the skit groups have been determined, give them a copy of the Gospel reading and some time to prepare and rehearse. Then have each group perform their skit.

After all the groups have performed, gather everyone together and ask questions about the experience each person had in the different roles. As they placed themselves in the shoes of the person from Scripture, what thoughts went through their head? What expectations would they have in this situation? What questions would arise from what they were seeing? Would they have acted the same way as the person in Scripture did? Ask the young people if there were any acting interpretations that caught their attention and gave them more insight into Scripture. Ask "why" as often as possible to help the teens dig deeper into their expectations and insights.

Closing Prayer

*God of Israel,
your Son thrived in the care of parents
who were obedient to your word.*

*Give us the wisdom to aid in the
formation of those around us
in what we say and how we act.*

Through our Lord Jesus

*Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.*

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.itp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.