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## Holy Family - 31 December 2023

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# 31 December 2023

## Feast of the Holy Family

Reflection by Angela McCarthy

### Introduction

The feast of the Holy Family speaks to us all of faith in God's promises and what we must do to live out our family lives in faith and hope.

### Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you are the Nazarene. Lord have mercy.

You are the mercy of the Father. Christ have mercy.

You are the salvation of all people. Lord have mercy.

### First Reading

**Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14**

Wisdom is turned towards the relationships within a family and guides the legacy of the parents that is built on the love that is taught.

Or

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

Within the wisdom and planning of God, Abraham and Sarah see themselves with an heir and a place at the foundation of our belief.

### Responsorial Psalm

**Psalm 104:1-6, 8-9. R. vv 7, 8**

*The Lord remembers his covenant for ever.*

The psalmist calls us to praise God for all the wonderful works of creation, to be proud of God's name. The psalm links the readings through its praise of the covenants that God has made that will be remembered forever.

### Second Reading

**Colossians 3:12-21**

As we listen, we are invited to share in an understanding of the characteristics of a family marked by the divine: compassion, patience, forgiveness.

Or

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

Our text today gives a sense of the family present in our midst as a first step to a greater set of descendants, who are a testimony to our faith.

## **Gospel Reading**

**Luke 2:22-40**

The Gospel shows us the way in which two wise people receive the revelation of Jesus as the one who will bring deliverance for Jerusalem and to the gentiles.

## **Reflection**

At the time of writing this reflection, the land in which Jesus was born is being torn apart by war. Punitive violence on both sides is impacting the families of innocent civilians. The parents and children are suffering. Jesus came to bring 'a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel'. How can we reconcile the two?

Australia has recently had a referendum to enact part of the Uluru Statement from the Heart – for our First Nations people to have a voice in Parliament. The sad divisiveness of the campaign of 'Yes' and 'No' did not do anything to improve the lives of indigenous families and it will be some time before a solution can be found and for the Statement to be given strength in action and solidarity, not just words of assent.

With these and other things tearing us apart what face do we put on hope? Simeon and Anna are very good examples. Both aged people of faith who come to the temple because they believed what God has told them, that there will be a Saviour and that they will see what God has promised. Anna saw the deliverance of Jerusalem. Simeon saw someone who would be a light to the Gentiles and the glory of the people of Israel. Beautiful as this is, it all seems so ancient and far away from our reality.

The birth of a baby is always an extraordinary miracle to witness and hope comes with the possibilities for life. A new life promises growth, exciting development, future possibilities and eventually independence. However, it also promises suffering. As Simeon put it to Mary, 'a sword will pierce your own soul too'. We know as parents that suffering will always accompany growth. For some, the suffering will lead to deep despair and suicide which is far too prevalent among our young people in regional areas and our indigenous youth. For others, the suffering will be redeemed by recovery from the deep pitfalls of addiction or reparation for the damage done by irresponsible behaviour on the roads and in other places. Sometimes suffering comes without any cause, it just happens. Having faith in the promises God has made to us and the way in which Jesus leads us to live through the gospel, is always

a benefit because we feel the grace of God through the divine heartbeat that keeps the world in place.

The emphasis on faith in the first reading from Genesis is a powerful lead for us. Abram set out for an unknown land with Sarah because of God's promise. This then seemed thwarted by Sarah's barrenness but not for God, all things are possible. God promised that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars and that is so. We are the descendants of Abraham in faith as are all Jews, Christians and Muslims as we count Abraham as our common ancestor.

The psalm reiterates the divine covenants and how God remembers and how we must also remember the wonders, the miracles and God's justice.

The second reading does not often line up as well with the gospel but in the Letter to the Hebrews Abraham and Sarah's faith is remembered. Also, the near sacrificing of Isaac is remembered because it was done in faith. Because of that faith, God did not take the sacrifice of Isaac but made an alternative available. Being thus rescued Abraham continued to live a life of faith until his death and all the promised descendants are a result of Isaac's continuing life of faith.

The faith of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Simeon and Anna must be models for us to follow in family life. For all the disappointments and joys, the hope and the despair, there is one way forward and that is in hope. Our hope is in the Lord who made heaven and earth! Paul's letter to the Colossians also calls us to hope with the directives of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. And above all love. If family life is lived with this understanding, with the message of Christ in all its richness, then our homes and families will be places of hope and faith, bound together in love. Through our lives lived in faith we can change the world little bit by little bit. Mary and Joseph went back to Galilee having stood with Simeon wondering about 'the things that were being said about him'. They did everything that they were required to do as faith filled Jews and then had the joy of watching Jesus grow to maturity.



Open our hearts  
to receive  
Christ's light.

# Prayer of the Faithful

## Introduction

Knowing that the Lord remembers his covenant forever, let us offer our needs and the needs of our world to God.

## Petitions

We pray for the leaders of our Church that they will always follow in faith the promises of God and lead families carefully and compassionately in the way of faith.  
(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the leaders of nations throughout the world. With war in the Middle East and in the Ukraine as well as Africa, may they be inspired to have faith in peaceful negotiations that lead to lasting peace.  
(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for the leaders of businesses, corporations and finance organisations. May they be opened by the Spirit to make decisions that lead to economic justice, not greed through war opportunities.  
(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all families. May they be filled with the gifts of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.  
(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for families that are separated through division or grief. May they find compassionate ways to live through the separation and remain hopeful for unity in the future.  
(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for childless couples. May their grief be turned into love for others who are in need of nurturing and may they find joy through such loving.  
(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

## Conclusion

God of love, you fulfill all promises and so we know that you will hear this prayer and answer all our needs through the power of the Spirit and in the name of Jesus, Our Lord.

**Amen.**

## Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	CWB	CWBII	GA
Angels we have heard on high		140		622	255	286
At last, all pow'ful Master (Canticle of Simeon)					225	
Away in a manger					256	289
Baby lying in a manger			63		257	
Good Christians all, rejoice				696	261	
In the temple now behold him					427	
Joy to the world	170			728	265	295
Lord God, you now have set your servant free (Canticle of Simeon)					226	
My master, see, the time has come (Canticle of Simeon)				636	227	
Of the Father's love begotten				779	268	
O little town of Bethlehem				772	266	
Once in royal David's city				782	269	297
Save us, Lord ,while we are awake (Canticle of Simeon)					223/224	
Sing of Mary, pure and lowly				808		
There is nothing told					418	
What child is this? (Verses 1-2)	165				275	

Title	AOVNG	S&S2
Among all	8	
Hail Mary: gentle woman		336

## Psalms selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 104: *The Lord remembers his covenant for ever.*

	CWB	JOBB
Psalm 104	193	20

## Music selections by Michael Mangan

There is a child (TT/SYJ) *based on Is 9:1-7* [Gathering]

Song of Blessing (SHOF) *based on Numbers 6:22-27* [Gifts]

Glory to God (TT/SYJ) [Gathering, Recessional]

My Spirit Sings (FWS/SYJ/CWB II) *Magnificat* [Gathering, Recessional]