

COMMENTARY FOR HOLY FAMILY – YEAR C

Commentaries:

- Wansbrough, H. (2012). [*The Sunday Word: A Commentary on the Sunday Readings*](#) (pp. 40–41). London; New York: Burns & Oates.
- St. Charles Borromeo Bible Study

INTRODUCTION

The Feast of the Holy Family honors the family group of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. This feast developed only in the 17th century. Built on the Gospel accounts, this family is looked upon as an excellent domestic unit representing the ideal family life. To promote family life and build up devotion to the Holy Family, a feast was established for the Universal Church in 1921 (under Pope Benedict XV), and it is currently celebrated on the Sunday after Christmas or on December 30th when Christmas falls on Sunday. There is an optional set of readings for the 1st and 2nd Readings, both are presented here.

First Reading Sir 3:2–6, 12–14 or 1 Sa 1:20–22, 24–28

Response Ps 128:1 or Ps 84:5a

Psalm Ps 128:1–5 or Ps 84:2–3, 5–6, 9–10

Second Reading Col 3:12–21 or Col 3:12–17 or 1 Jn 3:1–2, 21–24

GOSPEL: Luke 2:41–52

⁴¹ Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover.

Nazareth to Jerusalem is about 85 miles by road.

The festival of the Passover is one of three major feasts (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles) that the Law prescribed Israelites to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (see Exodus 23:14; Deuteronomy 16:16).

⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival.

A boy officially reached manhood at the age of 13; the event is celebrated today with the ceremony of the bar mitzvah. Males aged 12 and over were required to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

⁴³ When the festival was ended

The celebration of the Passover meal began a week-long feast of unleavened bread.

and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it.

“It is a joy to see Jesus behaving just like any other 12-year-old. He was a real child, and a child of that age goes off exploring, adventuring, frog hunting, sure that the all-powerful, all-knowing parents will know where he or she has gone. Parents meanwhile worry themselves sick at the unexplained disappearance. Mary, the young

mother, knows her son and the ways of the 12-year-old. She does not scold or expostulate, but just accepts him with love and relief” (Wansbrough).

⁴⁴ Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day’s journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends.

Entire villages joined in the pilgrimages, breaking up into two groups; one of men, the other of women. Children could go with either group. This explains how they could go a day’s journey before they discovered the Child was missing when the families regrouped to camp.

⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple,

Three in the number of completeness in Hebrew numerology. This is possibly a symbolic reference to the three days which Jesus is to spend in the tomb.

sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

In one of the outer courts of the Temple, which is where the teachers usually taught. Listeners used to sit at their feet, now and again asking questions and responding to them. This is what Jesus did, but his questions and answers attracted the teachers’ attention, He was so wise and well informed. The way this story is recounted, it implies that Jesus was in the center of a circle or group (the position of the teacher) and the teachers had assumed the position of the students. He knows the Torah and its interpretations; this is not in opposition to Jewish Law or practice.

⁴⁸ When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, “Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.”

Imagine the thoughts which ran through the minds of Mary and Joseph when they realized that they had lost track of the Son of God (a fact of which they have been aware since the Annunciation), who was placed into their care by God Himself.

We all get hurt most by family because we love each other the most. Jesus hurt Mary and Joseph – not on purpose – but His concern for doing the Father’s will seemed to show that He didn’t care.

⁴⁹ He said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”

The Greek can also be translated “about my Father’s business”. It implies a close personal relationship between Jesus and the Father. These are the first words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel. They form an explanation and they clearly show His divine Sonship; and they also show His determination to fulfill the will of His Eternal Father.

“Jesus’ reply gives us a glimpse of his relationship to the Father. Whether the correct translation is ‘in my Father’s house’ or ‘on my Father’s business’ matters little. Just as his questions to the teachers showed his wisdom, no doubt as yet unsharpened, so his reply to Mary shows his total absorption with his Father, inarticulate also. Jesus’ human mind needed to develop and become fully articulate. Even he needed to go on learning and clarifying to himself who and what he was. We learn only gradually who and what we are. A child’s development—even a divine child’s development—is not to be rushed. *Question: Am I content to await God’s good time?*” (Wansbrough).

⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them.

Mary and Joseph realized that His reply contained a deeper meaning which they did not grasp. They did not understand the full implication of what divine Sonship entailed, that His relationship to God takes precedence over His relationship to them. One of a parent's greatest sorrows afflicts Mary; not to understand her own child; one of the swords spoken of by Simeon (Luke 2:35).

⁵¹ Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.

Jesus lived like any other inhabitant of Nazareth, working at the same trade as Saint Joseph and earning His living by the sweat of His brow. This is the last reference to Saint Joseph in the Gospels and is a beautiful tribute to him: obedient to his guidance, Jesus grew to perfect manhood.

"Jesus' obedience to Mary and Joseph flows directly from His obedience to the will of His heavenly Father... Joseph and Mary aren't identified by name, but three times are called "his parents" and are referred to separately as his "mother" and "father." The emphasis is all on their "familial" ties to Jesus. But these ties are emphasized only so that Jesus, in the first words He speaks in Luke's Gospel, can point us beyond that earthly relationship to the Fatherhood of God. In what Jesus calls "My Father's house," every family finds its true meaning and purpose (see Ephesians 3:15). The Temple we read about in the Gospel today is God's house, His dwelling (see Luke 19:46). But it's also an image of the family of God, the Church (see Ephesians 2:19-22; Hebrews 3:3-6; 10:21). In our families we're to build up this household, this family, this living temple of God. Until He reveals His new dwelling among us, and says of every person: "I shall be his God and he will be My son" (see Revelation 21:3,7)." – **Scott Hahn**

His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Jesus grew in all ways – physically, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually – for the work that lay ahead of Him.

Other thoughts on the Holy Family:

"Similarly, you cannot suspend the idea of a newborn child in the void or think of him without thinking of his mother. You cannot visit the child without visiting the mother, you cannot in common human life approach the child except through the mother. If we are to think of Christ in this aspect at all, the other idea follows as it followed in history. We must either leave Christ out of Christmas, or Christmas out of Christ, or we must admit, if only as we admit it in an old picture, that those holy heads are too near together for the haloes not to mingle and cross."

~ **G.K. Chesterton, The God in the Cave**

"Nothing will destroy the sacred triangle [of the family]; and even the Christian faith, the most amazing revolution that ever took place in the mind, served only in a sense to turn that triangle upside down. It held up a mystical mirror in which the order of the three things was reversed; and added a holy family of child, mother and father to the human family of father, mother and child."

- **G.K. Chesterton, The Superstition of Divorce**

The Holy Family is the model for all our families. Although this model can seem unrelatable – Jesus is God, Mary is sinless, Joseph is a righteous and just man – nevertheless, each member of the Holy Family can teach us an important lesson about family life. Let us look at one lesson from each member.