

Alleluia, alleluia! / May the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, / and the fullness of his message live within you. / Alleluia!

GOSPEL

Mt 2:13–25, 19–23

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew.

Take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt.

After the wise men had left, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him.’ So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, left that night for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod was dead. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken through the prophet:

I called my son out of Egypt.

After Herod’s death, the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ‘Get up, take the child and his mother with you and go back to the land of Israel, for those who wanted to kill the child are dead’. So Joseph got up and, taking the child and his mother with him, went back to the land of Israel. But when he learnt that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod as ruler of Judaea he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he left for the region of Galilee. There he settled in a town called Nazareth. In this way the words spoken through the prophets were to be fulfilled:

He will be called a Nazarene.

■ **The Gospel of the Lord.**

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Reflections on the Gospel

THE SAVING WORD

THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH / A

29 DECEMBER 2019

FAMILY LIFE IN GOD

The glimpse of Jesus’ family life that we read in today’s Gospel presents a picture that is far from idyllic. The Holy Family lives in a brutal and violent world. The coming of the wise men (Magi) from the East, with their consoling homage and gifts for Mary’s newborn Child, has provoked suspicion and violence on the part of King Herod. His murderous intent requires Joseph to flee with Mary and Jesus into a foreign country—to become, in effect, refugees.

But what the Gospel brings out is that it is precisely the Holy Family’s forced displacement to Egypt that enables the infant Messiah to replay the experience and captivity of his people, Israel, in Egypt, and to experience directly the liberating and saving power of God. Israel was metaphorically ‘God’s child’ (Hos 11:1), but Jesus is truly the Son of God. In the person of Jesus, God is ‘with us’ (‘Emmanuel’) in the intimacy and immediacy of family relationships, and in circumstances of danger and anxiety with which many families can identify.

Matthew’s presentation of Jesus’ family life in this way may, then, be for us a greater consolation than if it were ‘idyllic’. Holiness, according to the scriptural understanding, is where God is. Today’s Gospel brings out the way in which God is present to the family of Jesus amid violence, forced movement, and perplexity. If our own family life is not perfect nor totally immune from such trials that is perhaps all the more reason to believe that God’s saving presence is also ‘with us’.

Brendan Byrne, SJ

FIRST READING

Sir 3:2–6, 12–14

A reading from the Book of Sirach

Whoever fears the Lord honours his parents.

The Lord honours the father in his children, and upholds the rights of a mother over her sons.

Whoever respects his father is atoning for his sins,

he who honours his mother is like someone amassing a fortune.

Whoever respects his father will be happy with children of his own,

he shall be heard on the day when he prays.

Long life comes to him who honours his father, he who sets his mother at ease is showing obedience to the Lord.

My son, support your father in his old age, do not grieve him during his life.

Even if his mind should fail, show him sympathy, do not despise him in your health and strength; for kindness to a father shall not be forgotten but will serve as reparation for your sins.

■ **The word of the Lord.**

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Ps 127:1–5. R. cf. v.1

R. Happy are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

1. O blessed are those who fear the Lord/ and walk in his ways! / By the labour of your hands you shall eat. / You will be happy and prosper. **R.**

2. Your wife like a fruitful vine/ in the heart of your house; / your children like shoots of the olive, / around your table. **R.**

3. Indeed thus shall be blessed/ the man who fears the Lord. / May the Lord bless you from Zion/ all the days of your life! **R.**

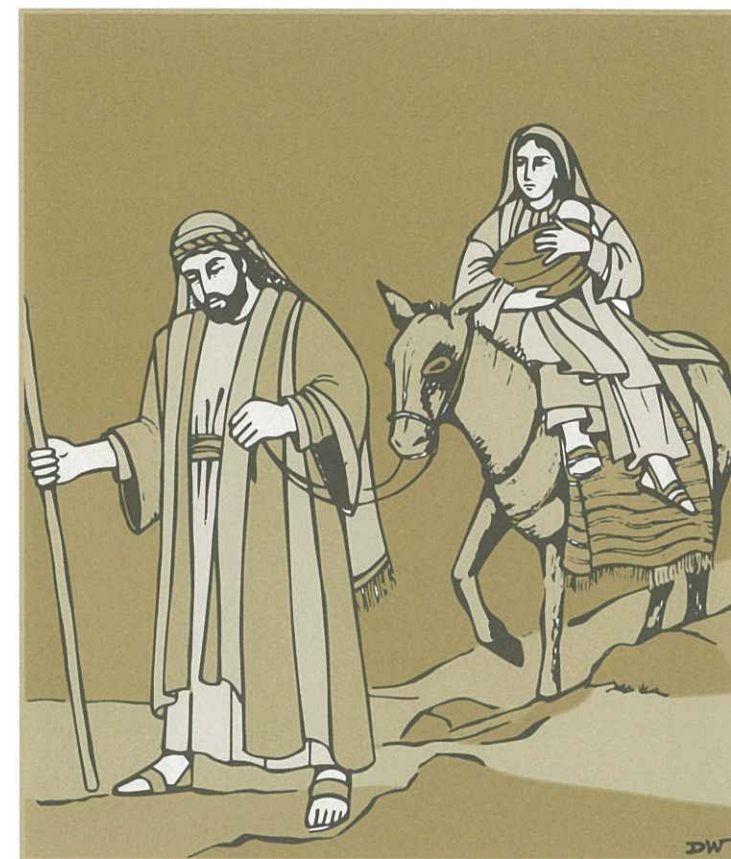
SECOND READING

Col 3:12–21

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Colossians

Concerning the Christian life in the world.

You are God’s chosen race, his saints; he loves you and you should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility,



gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, to keep them together and complete them, put on love. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together as parts of one body. Always be thankful.

Let the message of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you. Teach each other, and advise each other, in all wisdom. With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs to God; and never say or do anything except in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Wives, give way to your husbands, as you should in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and treat them with gentleness. Children, be obedient to your parents always, because that is what will please the Lord. Parents, never drive your children to resentment or you will make them feel frustrated.

■ **The word of the Lord.**