

# LIVING FAITH

December 31, 2023

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH



## THE GOSPEL FOR TODAY: Luke 2:22; 39-40

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord...

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, 'Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had finished everything required by 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 favour of God was upon him.

## REFLECTING ON THE GOSPEL



This gospel story is not only about Jesus, Mary and Joseph; it is also about the family of God's chosen people, or even the family of humankind.

Simeon and Anna represent the whole people of God from Abraham and Sarah through the 2,000 years before the birth of Jesus. Jesus, brought into the temple which he will later call "my Father's house," belongs to the chosen people by law and by heritage. It is important that it was not the priests or the leaders of Israel who recognized Jesus; rather, it was two simple elders, two ordinary people, a man and a woman, who recognized and welcomed him. Simeon prayed in thanksgiving and spoke to Mary and Joseph, while Anna announced Jesus' presence to all who were awaiting redemption.

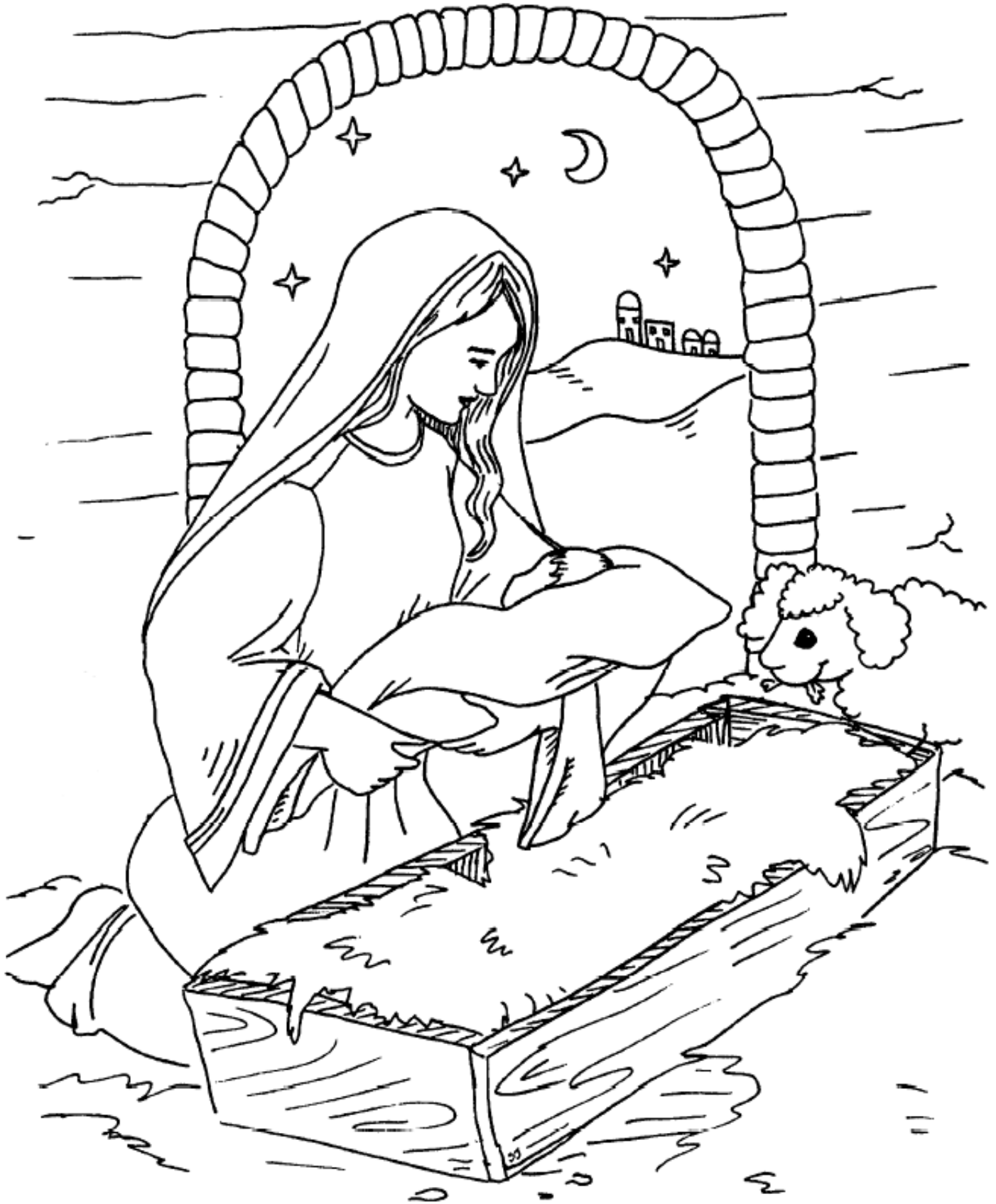
The story and its symbolism suggest an ever-growing web of relationships as each one who looks forward to Jesus and each one who recognizes him spreads the word – and it is carried from generation to generation. The feast of the Holy Family certainly celebrates families, but it also invites us to cherish and develop our ability to participate in any number of communities of love. We might say that today we celebrate the whole family of humankind, held in God's loving embrace across the ages.

## TALKING WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS



- Talk together about your family tree, tracing the youngest generation back through parents, grandparents, great grandparents.... How far back can you go? Notice how each generation contains exponentially more people.
- You grandparents or parents, tell or re-tell some of your family stories to the youngest generation.
- What part has religion or spirituality played in your family history?

FOR CHILDREN  
A CHRISTMAS IMAGE FOR YOU TO COLOUR



## THE CHURCH TEACHES FAMILY LIFE IS HOLY: A LETTER FROM POPE FRANCIS

One might ask: does the Gospel continue to be a joy for the world? And also: does the family continue to be good news for today's world? I am sure the answer is yes! And this "yes" is firmly based on God's plan. The love of God is His "yes" to all creation and at the heart of this latter is man. It is God's "yes" to the union between man and woman, in openness and service to life in all its phases; it is God's "yes" and His commitment to a humanity that is often wounded, mistreated and dominated by a lack of love. The family, therefore, is the "yes" of God as Love. Only starting from love can the family manifest, spread and regenerate God's love in the world. Without love, we cannot live as children of God, as couples, parents and brothers.

I wish to underline how important it is for families to ask themselves often if they live based on love, for love and in love. In practice, this means giving oneself, forgiving, not losing patience, anticipating the other, respecting. How much better family life would be if every day we lived according to the words, "please", "thank you" and "I'm sorry". Every day we have the experience of fragility and weakness, and therefore we all, families and pastors, are in need of renewed humility that forms the desire to form ourselves, to educate and be educated, to help and be helped, to accompany, discern and integrate all men of good will. I dream of an outbound Church, not a self-referential one, a Church that does not pass by far from humanity's wounds, a merciful Church that proclaims the heart of the revelation of God as Love, which is Mercy. It is this very mercy that makes us new in love; and we know how much Christian families are a place of mercy and witnesses of mercy, and even more so after the extraordinary Jubilee.

*From the Vatican, 25 March 2017*



# THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY WHAT MAKES A FAMILY HOLY?



## A FAMILY PRAYS

...I would like to ask you, dear families: Do you pray together from time to time as a family? Some of you do, I know. But so many people say to me: But how can we? ...But in the family how is this done? After all, prayer seems to be something personal, and besides there is never a good time, a moment of peace... Yes, all that is true enough, but it is also a matter of humility, of realizing that we need God... all of us! We need his help, his strength, his blessing, his mercy, his forgiveness. And we need simplicity to pray as a family: simplicity is necessary! Praying the Our Father together, around the table, is not something extraordinary: it's easy. And also praying for one another! The husband for his wife, the wife for her husband, both together for their children, the children for their grandparents... praying for each other. This is what it means to pray in the family and it is what makes the family strong: prayer.

## POPE FRANCIS WHAT MAKES A FAMILY HOLY?



## A FAMILY KEEPS THE FAITH

How do we keep our faith as a family? Do we keep it for ourselves, in our families, as a personal treasure like a bank account, or are we able to share it by our witness, by our acceptance of others, by our openness? We all know that families, especially young families, are often "racing" from one place to another, with lots to do. But did you ever think that this "racing" could also be the race of faith? Christian families are missionary families. ...They are missionary in everyday life, in their doing everyday things, as they bring to everything the salt and the leaven of faith! Keeping the faith in families and bringing to everyday things the salt and the

## A FAMILY EXPERIENCES JOY

Dear families, you know very well that the true joy which we experience in the family is not superficial; it does not come from material objects, from the fact that everything seems to be going well... True joy comes from a profound harmony between persons, something which we all feel in our hearts and which makes us experience the beauty of togetherness, of mutual support along life's journey. But the basis of this feeling of deep joy is the presence of God, the presence of God in the family and his love, which is welcoming, merciful, and respectful towards all. And above all, a love which is patient. God alone knows how to create harmony from differences. But if God's love is lacking, the family loses its harmony, self-centredness prevails and joy fades. But the family which experiences the joy of faith communicates it naturally. That family is the salt of the earth and the light of the world, it is the leaven of society as a whole.

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