

A Holy, Human Family

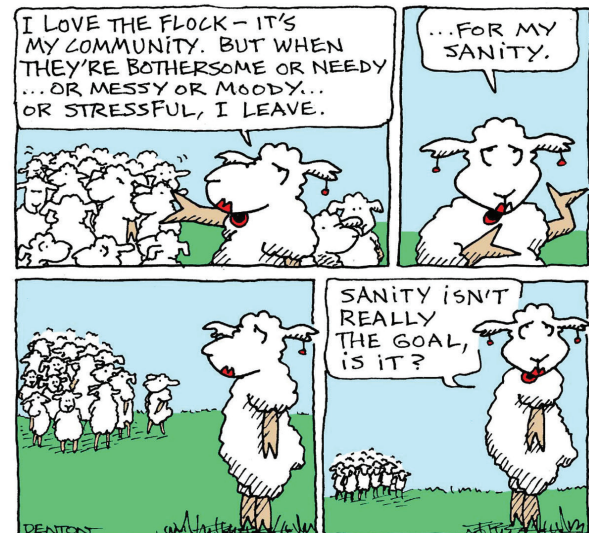
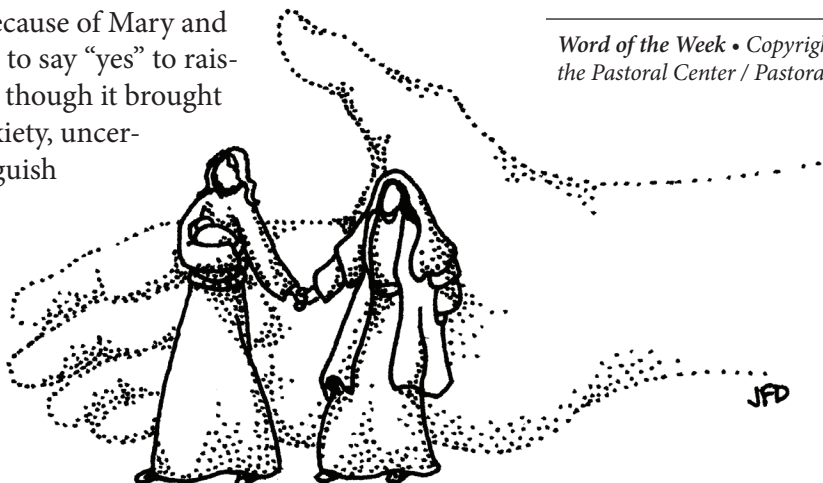
This Week's Readings at Mass

- Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14 • Duties toward parents
- Colossians 3:12-21 • The practice of virtues
- Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23 • The flight to Egypt

With the story of Jesus' birth still fresh in our minds on this first Sunday after Christmas, the church uses the opportunity to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family with all of the readings focused on families. The Gospel readings are from Matthew this year, so the focus this week is on Jesus' earthly father, Joseph. (When we read from the Gospel of Luke, the focus is on his mother, Mary.)

If the story of Jesus' birth warmed our hearts with its tale of the star over Bethlehem and the magi who traveled long distances to worship and bring him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, the story today takes a terrible turn. Mary and Joseph have no time to savor his birth or let the wonder of the magi's visit sink in because suddenly their baby's life is in danger. Like millions of refugees throughout history, they must flee their home country on short notice with just a vague sense of a distant destination. Because they trust the guidance the angel gave Joseph in a dream, they save their son's life.

Tragically, however, many families lost sons to Herod's cruelty when he ordered all baby boys killed in his efforts to kill Jesus. (These verses are omitted from the Gospel passage today.) So the Feast of the Holy Family is not "The Feast of the Perfect Family in a Perfect World." The Church celebrates this family today because of Mary and Joseph's willingness to say "yes" to raising God's son, even though it brought them great fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and even anguish because of the evil one man, Herod, wreaked on so many families. They were a



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"Put on love. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body."

Sheepish Question:

When have I been less than understanding with members of my own family or faith community?

holy family, but they did not escape any challenges of being a human family.

Questions of the Week

- 1 Does it change anything for you to think about Jesus' family in terms of being a refugee family like so many millions today and throughout history? How so?
- 2 Mary and Joseph changed course unexpectedly when they needed to in order to protect Jesus' life. When have you had to change direction suddenly? Can you see the hand of God at work in that change?

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