

The Holy Family

After the wise men had left, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up’, he said, ‘and take the child and his mother into Egypt, because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him’.

What a nightmare for a young couple with their new-born baby! Parents listening will remember their joy at the birth of a child. They will also recall the stresses and strains, and the huge adjustments needed to welcome this new person into their lives.

So what was it like for Joseph and Mary, already coping with the amazing circumstances surrounding Jesus’ birth? What did they talk about on their enforced journey to an alien land. Where would they live? Would Joseph be able to get work? When would they ever be able to come home again?

To many people today this is all too familiar – uncertainty, lack of security, living away from home. It is thought-provoking to realise that the Holy Family had to endure some of the same social, political and economic pressures that people endure today.

What sustained them, amid so many difficulties?

Without a doubt, their faith in God was their primary source of support and hope. Mary had already, with deep faith, said ‘Yes’ to the angel’s invitation to become the mother of Jesus: ‘Be it done unto me according to your word’. Joseph, too, had come to understand something of what had happened; he knew that he had been chosen to be the foster-father to the promised Messiah. Their decision to marry was a choice as deeply rooted in faith as in love.

On the day they exchanged their marriage vows they made the three-fold promise that is made by all who accept the vocation to marriage:

- a promise to be faithful to each other;
- a promise to be faithful to God, recognising God’s gift of love and promising to witness to this same love in their marriage;
- a promise to be faithful to the community: through their commitment to each other they hope to be able to offer support and friendship to others.

In a world where marriage and family life meet great challenges, it is good to remember that for this family – Jesus, Mary and Joseph – holiness was learned in the midst of turmoil and tumult.

Their trust in a loving God, in all the ups and downs of their family life, was the foundation of their holiness, their peace, their joy.

Their trust in one another sprang from their deep faith and hope in a God, whom Jesus has taught us to call 'Father'.

Their example invites us to find God in our own family circumstances, whatever they may be, and to trust in God's care for us.

Today's feast invites us:

- to thank God for the gift of marriage;
- to acknowledge gratefully the witness of the profound friendship of so many married couples, who show something of the great love within the Trinity – for that is the extraordinary nature of the sacrament of marriage;
- to thank all parents for the great generosity and selflessness in giving us our new generations.

Today's feast calls us:

- to pray for vocations to the sacrament of marriage;
- to pray for all who are preparing for marriage, that they may truly understand the sacredness of their vocation;
- to pray for all married couples, that they may be strengthened in their commitment to each other and to God;
- to invite married couples to play some part in marriage preparation and in marriage support – for who is better qualified?

In a special way this feast of the Holy Family is a feast for all of us. Everyone is called to be a member of God's holy family. St Paul describes us as 'God's chosen race, his saints'. And in his letter to the Ephesians, he reminds us that God has adopted us as sons and daughters. God longs to be involved with us, and to be invited into our homes.

As the New Year begins let us welcome God's presence and be newly enriched by God's gifts of faith, hope and love.