

Homily for the Feast of the Holy Family

December 29-30, 2018

Readings: Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; Colossians 3:12-21; Luke 2: 41-52

Preacher: Mary Lu Coffey

Merry Christmas! This wonderful feast of Christmas goes on for an octave of days. We are flooded with memories of Christmases past and hopes for the ones to come. I remember the year our beautiful daughter Eileen was born on December 31—a bright light in our family these 50 years later. I smile when I remember baking with our disabled grandson, watching him count out the raisins for the gingerbread people. And I am saddened remembering the first Christmas Mom wasn't with us.

We celebrate on these holy days an amazing mystery! God—our mighty God—has become a tiny babe. God has pitched a tent in our world—flesh and bone taking shape just like ours —“born of human estate” and subject to all the challenges of our human life.

After the amazing announcement by an angel of his coming birth to his loving and tender and very young mother, he was born into the very poorest of conditions. The young couple was forced from their home to follow the harsh requirement of registration in the place of their birth. The roads were very crowded, the inns were full, and the loving parents birthed their baby son in a place where animals were kept, with all the smells and noise of the barn.

It wasn't long before the little family was forced from their home again

because the ruthless king, fearing that he would lose his power over the troubled land, ordered the murder of all the male children under the age of two. And so Mary, Joseph and the babe became refugees, driven from their homeland, seeking asylum in a place where they would be safe, dependent on the hospitality of people along the way.

Today's gospel passage fast forwards us twelve years. The family had returned to their homeland and the time had come for them to make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. They traveled in a crowd, people and animals together for safety. At the temple the ritual was done, the story was told, the meal was celebrated, and they were on their way home when they discovered that Jesus was not with them. Frantically, they made their way back to Jerusalem and found Jesus in the temple in the midst of the teachers. He was listening to them and asking questions. And they were amazed at him!

And Jesus told his astonished parents that he had to be in his Father's house. Was he growing into a sense of who he was and what he was to do? In any case he returned home to Nazareth with them. The gospel writer tells us he was obedient to them and advanced in wisdom and grace before God and men!

It's a beautiful and probably very familiar part of the Christmas story. But what does this mean for all of us? I began Advent with a booklet from Pax Christi posing the question, "what then are we to do?" As we near the end of the end of this beautiful season I think there is an answer—for sure a simple and probably incomplete one. "What then are we to do?" We are to ask questions, to listen and reflect. We are to look for Jesus in our families,

in our communities of faith, in those we encounter in daily lives. Like Mary we are to ponder all this in our hearts. We are to consider what we have seen and heard. We are to measure those things against our gospel teachings. We are to begin our days calling on God's love and guidance, and we are to end each day reflecting on where we have been. Where have we seen God and how have we responded? What do we wish we had done differently? What shall we do again? And we begin and end again each day, opening ourselves to our God, listening, reflecting, responding. We too will grow in wisdom and grace.

And as St. Paul reminds us, "whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."