

## FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY, CYCLE B

*Genesis 15: 1-6, 21:1-3 + Hebrews 11: 8, 11-12, 17-19 + Luke 2: 22-40*

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: December 28, 2014

Many people think of the Christmas mystery as a “*moment*” and focus solely on that one moment of the birth of the Savior. Most of the world thinks of Christmas only in this way, the celebration of the birth of a baby, who will become the Messiah. With this kind of mindset, Christmas is only one day to celebrate with family and friends, and then move on with the rest of one’s life.

For Catholics, the celebration of the Incarnation--- God taking our flesh in Christ His Son—is more than a momentous birth. Rather it is a wonder-filled story of the Son of God becoming fully human. This story takes time to tell and to reflect upon, which is why the Church gifts us with the Christmas Season, a sacred and joy-filled time stretching from Christmas Day until the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord. The Christmas Season is between 2-3 weeks long---this year it is 17 days.

For the Son of God comes to save us by more than simply being born human. He comes to save us by becoming fully human. This is the deepest blessing of Christmas—that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Holy Trinity, the Divine Word that existed before time, is born in order to become fully human! The Church in her wisdom gives us the time and the space during the days of the Christmas Season to ponder this supreme act of love--- the Son of God growing and maturing, like us, into a fully human person.

The closing line of today’s Lukan Gospel passage states this truth clearly:

*“The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and the favor of God was upon him.”*

This growing into his humanity, this process of becoming fully human, takes place for the Son of God in the best environment for this growth---in a family.

With the loving assistance of Mary and Joseph, Jesus grows from a newborn baby to an infant to a toddler to a child to an adolescent and then into an adult. His growth---physically, intellectually, and spiritually—is facilitated by a foster-father and mother who love him deeply, and by an extended family where he learns how to relate to other human beings.

Jesus grows physically and becomes strong by the providential love of his parents. Ensuring that their children have enough food to eat is a fundamental act of love, which is why parents suffer deeply when they do not have the means to feed their children.

Joseph and Mary provide food for Jesus' physical nourishment and growth, and they prepare it with love.

But Joseph and Mary also feed Jesus' desire to learn, for he, like all children, is curious about the world around him.

Jesus becomes filled with wisdom, because his parents and others pass along what they have learned.

The child Jesus asks questions and his parents help him find the answers.

Jesus also grows into his humanity by having his spirit fed by Joseph and Mary. His parents help Jesus grow in relationship with heavenly Father by teaching him how to pray.

Jesus' intimate image of God as "Abba" (Father) is the result of his parents teaching him about God's tender care and protection.

Mary's trusting faith which brought about Jesus' conception and birth (*"Let it be done to me according to your word"*) enables her to teach her son to pray, *"Father, your will be done."*

As Joseph and Jesus work together in the carpenter workshop or out on the job, Joseph shares with Jesus the stories of Sacred Scripture, how the God of Israel had saved His people from slavery in Egypt and exile in Babylon. How David defeated Goliath and how Daniel survived being tossed into the lion's den.

Joseph and Mary take Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem, not only as a newborn babe to dedicate him to God, but also on numerous other important religious feasts of the Jewish people, especially for the annual celebration of Passover.

Jesus' parents had to make sacrifices in order to remain faithful to their religious traditions.

For the trip from Nazareth in Galilee up to Jerusalem is no easy matter, but an arduous journey on foot that takes a number of days.

Nourished by the sacred texts of Scripture, engaging God daily in the interactive conversation called prayer, and regularly worshipping God at the temple Jesus grows spiritually strong.

Becoming fully human, the Son of God grows, day by day, month by month, year by year---physically, spiritually, intellectually---- thus making holy our own growth into the fullness of our humanity.

The Son of God saves us by becoming fully part of the human family. The Son of God redeems all humanity by becoming more than a member of a particular family in Nazareth but by becoming fully part of the human family. He is born as Son of Mary, and grows into a fully human being, in order to transform everything human into a potential encounter with the Divine. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Person of the Holy Trinity becomes fully part of the human family in order to make us see there are no nations nor borders, only one human family, of which we are all brothers and sisters in and through the One who is Fully Human, Christ Himself.

One of the seven principles of Catholic Social Teaching, called Solidarity, flows from our belief that God has joined himself forever to humanity through Christ Jesus. In fighting against injustice, our common humanity must be the starting point, understood through radical interdependence.

Solidarity means being vulnerable enough to get to know those who are suffering from injustice, to see the dignity of others as intimately connected to my own dignity. My dignity is wrapped up in your dignity being respected, and when your dignity is attacked, mine is as well. Solidarity opens our heart to feel the pain of the other and to allow that pain to change us, so that once we recognize in the other a brother or sister, we have seen something that cannot be unseen. Then we know in a very experiential way that we are in this together, as members of one human family under God. This is what it means to stand in solidarity with others.

Thus solidarity is something more than charity, where we can distance ourselves from the pain of others by giving them something (dollars or food or clothing). Solidarity is the gift of oneself, by choosing in love to stand alongside others, allowing them to know me and me to know them.

How the world would change if whites and blacks would sit down at the same table and listen to each other describe their fears and struggles, their hopes and dreams.

How much the world would change if native born Americans would sit down with immigrants and tell the stories of how their grandparents or great-grandparents came to this land and the hardships they endured to make this country a better place. And then listen to modern-day immigrants share their own stories of the challenges of making it to America and making a life here.

How the world might change if Muslims and Christians would sit down at the same table and Muslims share with Christians why they pray 5 times a day and Christians share with Muslims why they believe Jesus from Nazareth is the Savior of the World.

We would recognize our common humanity, our shared dignity.  
We might even recognize Christ dwelling in our midst, growing within us to maturity.

*Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi*