

Sunday December 27<sup>th</sup>, The Feast of The Holy Family of Nazareth.

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

Well storm Bella certainly hit last night, but certainly not as bad as some parts of the country.

And today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth, which is always celebrated on the first Sunday after Christmas.

It's easy when we look at the beautiful crib, either here in Church or on Christmas cards which managed to hint at the religious celebration, it's easy when looking at the scene of the nativity to forget that in effect we are looking at a family scene, a family photo, as it were, taken at a very special moment. Mary, Joseph and Jesus were, of course, a very special family, unique. But as today's Gospel makes clear, they were also a real family, as real as any family in this Parish Community today. As a family, they prayed and worshipped together, Jews, who humbly followed the requirements of the Jewish religious customs. This involved following the ancient Jewish law which said that every first born son should be presented in the temple (as a thanksgiving for the wonderful gift of new life) and then 'bought back' from the Lord with the offering of money, or in the case of poor families, such as Mary and Joseph, with a couple of birds, and this is our Gospel today, Luke 2:22-40.

Whilst in the Temple, Mary and Joseph met two great elderly God fearing people, Simeon and Anna. Both of them had astonishing things to say about the child of this special family. They both speak of how they had longed for the coming of this child, and how he was the One the whole world was waiting for. Simeon also goes on to give a mysterious prophecy. As well as rejoicing that Jesus has come, he also speak of the pain that Mary would experience, like a sword piercing her heart. For this Holy Family we know in hindsight, as Simeon knew in prophecy, that there were to be heart rendering times ahead. Mary's yes to God which she spoke at the annunciation was to continue throughout her life, and bring her into bewildering, unknown situations.

The final statement of this Gospel is a fundamental statement about family life, 'Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.' The child grew to maturity, from childhood, to youth to manhood, nestled in the home at Nazareth. His parents did what all good parents try to do; they built up a home, taught him how to pray, set him a good example, and, above all, surrounded him with love. If that sounds ordinary, well perhaps it was. Quiet rightly so.

And yet, I'm sure, as St Luke, puts it, Mary and Joseph must often have watched their child, and pondered and wondered. But only their faith, the faith of this family which runs right the way through these readings, must have allowed them to hold on to the incredible truth that Jesus was not simply any boy from Nazareth, but the Messiah.

Like the crib scene, Jesus is as the centre of the Holy Family of Nazareth. And looking towards this family we are also given some indication of how Jesus can and should be the centre of our lives and our family lives. The prayer and religious observance of this family lead them to the truth that their Messiah is in their midst, and so it is for any family who wish to experience Jesus among them.

But if the Holy Family is looked to as the perfect family, we should remember that Jesus is present in every Christian home, not just so called perfect ones. He is there in the joy and happiness, the difficulties and frustrations, the growing children and ageing relatives, the highs and the lows, as well as among all the many different kinds of families: childless, single parent, extended. The photo of the family of Nazareth that is the crib shows us that Jesus and the Kingdom of his Heaven are not sought high above the clouds, but much nearer home. In our homes.

*Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, bless our family.  
Graciously inspire in us the unity, peace, and mutual love  
that you found in your own family in the little town of Nazareth.  
Mary, Mother of Jesus and Our Mother,  
nourish our family with your faith and your love.  
Keep us close to your Son, Jesus, in all our sorrows and joys.  
Joseph, Foster-father to Jesus, guardian and spouse of Mary,  
keep our family safe from harm.  
Help us in all times of discouragement or anxiety.  
Holy family of Nazareth, make our family one with you.  
Help us to be instruments of peace.  
Grant that love, strengthened by grace,  
may prove mightier than all the weaknesses and trials  
through which our families sometimes pass.  
May we always have God at the centre of our hearts and homes  
until we are all one family, happy and at peace in our true home with you.  
Amen.*

An so together let us sing the lovely carol 'O Little Town of Bethlehem.'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71ppzuPARXg>

Were the Feast of the Holy Family not taking over the day, the 27th is usually the Feast of St. John the Evangelist. John was the 'beloved disciple' of Jesus. He wrote his gospel and his three letters after the other three gospels had been written, probably around AD90. His Gospel is not a straight telling of the life of Christ but a series of theological meditations on various incidents. Little is known about his life, but according to tradition he was the only apostle who did not suffer martyrdom, dying on the Isle of Patmos.

*O Glorious Saint John,  
you were so loved by Jesus that you merited to rest your head upon his breast,  
and to be left in his place as a son to Mary.  
Obtain for us an ardent love for Jesus and Mary.  
Let me be united with them now on earth and forever after in heaven.  
Amen.*

So, who was paying attention to the Christmas Scriptures? Crack out the Christmas chocolates and try out this quiz... answers at the end of this Message.

1. Who said. 'Mary, do not be afraid; you have won God's favour'?
2. Why did the child leap in Elizabeth's womb?
3. What was the name of that child?
4. What name did the neighbours want to give Elizabeth's son?
5. Why did they want that name?
6. Who was the Roman Emperor who decreed a census should be taken?
7. Complete the sentence: 'Today in the town of David a saviour...'
8. To whom did the angel speak that sentence?
9. Who said 'My soul magnifies the Lord'?
10. To whom was it said?
11. Which of the 4 Gospels gives details about the shepherds at Bethlehem?
12. Which of the Gospels tells us about the wise men?
13. Who was the King who interviewed the wise men?
14. Which of the Gospels begins: 'A genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham'?
15. Who was the father of Joseph?
16. Which great Prophet is quoted with the words: 'A virgin will conceive...'?
17. Which of the Gospels gives us that quotation?
18. Where do we hear the words: 'With justice he will rule the world, he will judge the peoples with his truth'?
19. What town in Galilee did Joseph set out from?
20. What was a great throng of the heavenly host singing?

Just as I was about to send this Message I received a mail to say that Monsignor James Hook died yesterday. He was a lovely man, who I got to know when I was Parish Priest of Freckleton as he lived there. Great guy. *May he rest in peace and receive an eternal reward.*

I attach a picture of the beautiful wreath outside the Church. Sadly storm Bella has taken its toll on it, so I'm glad I got the picture yesterday!

Have a lovely Sunday.

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.

1. *The angel Gabriel*
2. *Mary the Mother of Jesus greeted Elizabeth*
3. *John the Baptist*
4. *Zechariah*
5. *It was his father's name*
6. *Caesar Augustus*
7. *Has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord*
8. *The shepherds*
9. *The Virgin Mary*
10. *To Elizabeth her cousin*
11. *According to Luke*
12. *According to Matthew*
13. *Herod*
14. *According to Matthew*
15. *Jacob*
16. *Isaiah*
17. *According to Matthew*
18. *The responsorial psalm: Psalm 95*
19. *Nazareth*
20. *'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to those who enjoy God's favour'*