

## Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson

### 31st December 2023 - The Holy Family

Readings (Year B): 1st: Genesis 15:1-6,21:1-3. 2nd: Hebrews 11:8,11-12,17-19. **Gospel:** Luke 2:22-40.

Family is the story from which we all originate. Each of us has our own story, our own family, which we know only too well can be both a loving and yet quite a mixed story to say the least. Many think that looking at the Holy Family it must have been ideal, and far removed from our own family story.

Yes, God chose a humble and simple family by which to come into our midst. It is good to reflect that the Son of God wanted to be in need of the warmth of a family like all children.

Certainly not an easy start for them though. Both Mary and Joseph were visited by the angel and to reassure them: both heard and needed to hear 'do not be afraid.'

The gospels paint a picture of a troubled family, with relationships often tense and fraught under the pressures they face. We find a betrothed man feeling deceived; a young woman puzzled and confused; the arrival of shepherd strangers at the birth; three visitors coming via Herod and leaving Joseph fleeing with his family into exile in Egypt.

Within the welcoming walls of the House of Nazareth, Jesus' childhood we imagine unfolded in joy surrounded by the maternal attention of Mary and the paternal care of Joseph, in whom Jesus was able to see God's tenderness.

Then as a child at 12 who strays from his family in a big city, lost for 3 days; a son who is misunderstood by his mother and then later the wider family who doubt the sanity of this 'wayward son...and so the list goes on.

Some considered Jesus to be an "illegitimate" or extra marital child. St Luke mentions that Jesus was 'thought' to be the son of Joseph. St John records too that Jesus' opponents, outraged by his claims that God is his Father, pointedly draw attention to the question of his earthly parentage by asking "Where is your father?" then they add "We were not born of prostitution" (John 8:41)

John and Luke obviously did not agree with such gossip and rumour, but plainly considered the issue important enough to bring to their readers attention.

Like all family stories there were the ups and downs of all family life.

Joseph died probably before Jesus began his public ministry. Clearly though, here was a family where God was number One and everything was evaluated in the light of faith.

Today's gospel makes it clear that Mary should see her son in a wider context than her own family. Simeon prophesies that Jesus' role in the world will bring great suffering upon the family of Mary and Joseph. Then Anna speaks dramatically about the deliverance of Jerusalem.

Simeon relates this to the salvation of the whole world, making it clear that Mary will have to learn to be more than just his mother. Normal family life will have to be sacrificed for the sake of her son's mission. The Holy Family was much larger than Mary, Joseph and Jesus in Nazareth: it was and is inextricably linked to the rest of the world and to God's plan to restore justice, peace and hope.

St Boniface spoke about the Christmas tree, wood in his day that most homes were made of.

He saw in it the importance of a home:

Home where the family is: which like the love of God inspires our love for one another in God's family.

A love of God which reaches out beyond its doors to others.

A love which is ever green, alive and endures.

A love reaching up to God.

And a love, like the light, shining in welcome to all.