

## The Word of God This Week

Set time aside each day this week with other members of your household, with other members of your parish or alone to listen to and reflect on the living Word of God. Use these passages from the Lectionary that are assigned for Liturgy this week. Reflect on how the Lord is inviting you to a deeper union with him.

### TODAY\*

**Sirach 3:2–7, 12–14**  
**Colossians 3:12–21**  
**Matthew 2:13–5, 19–23**

### MONDAY\*\*

**John 20:1A, 2–8**  
*"... he saw and believed."*

### TUESDAY\*\*\*

**Matthew 2:13–18**  
*"... it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness..."*

### WEDNESDAY

**Luke 2:22–35**  
*"This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many..."*

### THURSDAY

**Luke 2:36–40**  
*"... and the favor of God was upon him."*

### FRIDAY

**John 1:1–18**  
*"And the Word became flesh and lived among us..."*

### SATURDAY\*\*\*\*

**Luke 2:16–21**  
*"... and he was called Jesus..."*

\*Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

\*\*Feast of Saint John

\*\*\*Feast of The Holy Innocents

\*\*\*\*The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God

## Refugees in Egypt

The story of the Holy Family's escape to Egypt is told only by Matthew who was intent on establishing Jesus' Jewish roots. The Gospel of Matthew often connects the life of Jesus with the Hebrew Scriptures, portraying Jesus as the new Moses and showing how he fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies.

In this Gospel story, an angel appears to Joseph in a dream, just as one had appeared to announce the birth of Jesus. Joseph is faithful and willing to sacrifice his own desires for the safety of his wife and son. And so he takes them to Egypt.

The readings chosen for the feast of the Holy Family assure us that like families today, Jesus' family also dealt with troubles. Like other Jewish families of their time, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus were victims of the harshness

of Herod's rule. Joseph made difficult decisions to protect his family, and Mary endured hardships not only at the moment of her son's birth, but also during the early years of his life.

At the time of Jesus' birth, Egypt was a place of refuge for those fleeing from danger in Palestine. It was outside the dominion of King Herod, but both Egypt and Palestine were part of the Roman Empire, so travel between

them was easy and relatively safe. And when Herod died, and the time came for the Holy Family to leave Egypt, symbolically, it was like the Exodus experience of Israel.

Families today can see that the Holy Family did not enjoy any special privileges and that, like us, dealing with hardships and changes was part of their reality.



## The Faith of the Church

Jesus, the Word of God, became flesh in a poor family and was born in a humble stable. Soon after his birth, the family fled into Egypt as refugees. Mary and Joseph shared in the condition of many families today; they lived a simple life, and together they raised their son in the traditions of their religion. Jesus grew up obedient to his parents like any other Jewish child (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 525, 530, 531).



## Questions of the Week

Often, we tend to spiritualize the birth and early years in the life of Jesus as a time of celebration with angels singing and shepherds keeping watch in the fields. Today's reading reminds us of the hardships the holy family experienced.

### Adults

*Do I treat refugees and exiles today the same way I would treat the Holy Family? How?*

### Children

*Have I ever been in a strange place where I did not feel at home? What happened?*

## Responding to God's Word . . .

Most Catholics look at the Holy Family as unique and gifted by God with special blessings. Some even think that Mary had it easy during those early years because Jesus, being the Son of God, could help her with her chores in almost "magical" ways. Nothing is further from the truth.

The Incarnation, the mystery of the Word made flesh, means that in Jesus, God assumed our humanity fully, with all the suffering and limitations that it brings. Mary and Joseph suffered uncertainty and discomfort at the time of the birth of their son. Soon after, they became exiles in a foreign

country in order to escape Herod's persecution and the dangerous conditions of life in Palestine.

Egypt served as a place of shelter, for awhile, but not to abide in. Eventually, the family settled in Galilee in a small town called Nazareth. Nazareth was held in low esteem; even the Jews questioned whether anything good could come from it.

But the Holy Family can be a model for us, not because they were special, but because they went through all the obstacles and adversities that many families suffer today, yet they always remained faithful to God.

## SUGGESTIONS

Use one of these suggestions or one of your own to respond to God's Word this week.

**In the home.** Discuss among family members your experiences and relationships with any immigrants.

**In the workplace or in school.** Reach out to a foreigner or recent arrival. See if there is any way in which you can be of assistance.

**In the community.** Find out if there are any immigrant families in your area that may need help. Reach out to them.



## Meditation Moment

TV film directors sometimes follow a quiet scene with a noisy, violent scene. The Church does this in today's liturgy. It follows the quiet birth of Jesus with the violent stoning of Stephen. This helps to remind us that Christmas is not only the first day of Jesus' life but also the first day of his long, painful journey to Calvary. It also reminds us that we too must be ready to suffer for our faith—as Jesus and Stephen did.

### For reflection . . .

*The story of Stephen invites me to ask: How have I suffered for my faith in the past? How willing am I to suffer for it in the future?*

OFFER YOURSELF AS A  
LIVING SACRIFICE TO GOD.

ROMANS 12:1

FROM *VISION* BY MARK LINK, SJ

## Protect Our Families, O God!

God our Father,  
You created us as a family  
to be in relationship and  
communion with you and with one  
another. Protect our families from  
physical and verbal abuse; make us  
faithful and forgiving just as you  
are faithful and forgiving. Protect us from  
the anger and violence of our society  
and help us to always reflect in our  
lives the same love that united the  
Holy Family. Teach us respect and  
appreciation for our differences.  
and make us one in you.  
Amen.

Carry this thought in your heart as a  
guide for your faith journey this week.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 5:11

## Profile in Faith

**Saint Barbara**  
(CA. A.D. 306)

Barbara was the daughter of a heathen who kept her prisoner in a tower.

When she told her father she was a Christian, he denounced her and had her tortured and beheaded. Although some believe the story is only legend,

Barbara continues to be a popular saint.

Her feast day  
is December 4.

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