

Where
Franchise
→ Sacramental
Family
unity Dis

(Lk) → Simeon's Cf: Cherterton: "Fiction (great writing)"
means the common things seen by the
Uncommon People. | Simeon "My Eyes have seen"

Moms + Dad → Respect / Bonding =
Large Family
FASCINATION

GRACED TENSIONS

+ Extended Family

Feast of the Holy Family, December 27.
Readings: Sir. 3:2-6, 12-14; Col. 3:12-21; Lk. 2:22-40.

"Mary and Joseph brought Jesus up to Jerusalem so that he could be present to the Lord" (Lk. 2:22).

Christianity can be easily criticized for disrupting family life. Jesus Himself declared that He came, not to bring peace, but the sword (Mt. 10:34), so that "from now on, a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; father opposed to son, son to father, mother to daughter, daughter to mother, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law to mother-in-law" (Lk. 12:52-53). The tensions within first-century Palestinian and Greco-Roman families over members who adhered to the Way of Jesus smolder just beneath the surface of this saying.

It is paradoxical for the church founded by the Lord Who spoke these words to dedicate the Sunday within the Octave of

Christmas to the celebration of family solidarity. The first two readings voice fairly conventional reflections on family life. Jesus ben Sirach, no revolutionary, extols the traditional authority of parents over children. Paul, writing to the Colossians, had no idea how 20th-century women would respond to his urging first-century women to "be submissive" to their husbands! But, for all the banality of his thoughts on the family, Paul differs from Jesus ben Sirach on the grounds he urges for family unity: "Christ's peace must reign in your hearts, since as members of the one body you have been called to that peace" (Col. 3:15). Surely the Apostle would recognize today that male dominance in mar-

riage for many people would sabotage the possibility of experiencing Christ's peace.

First-century Christians whose faith in Jesus as Messiah and Lord divided them from kith and kin, along with Christians of later centuries whose Christian discipleship caused them tension with their families could find more comfort in the Gospel passage from Luke. Mary and Joseph bring the infant Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. Like Hannah and Elkanah, the parents of Samuel, they return God's gift: "This is the child for which I was praying, and Yahweh granted me what I asked of him. Now I make him over to Yahweh for the whole of his life. He is made over to Yahweh" (1 Sam. 1:27-28). The aged Simeon speaks on Yahweh's behalf in acknowledging the gift of Jesus, prophetically proclaiming both the good news ("a revealing light to the Gentiles") and the bad news ("sign that will be opposed") for His family.

Joseph and Mary enter into a family life very different from that of the natural social unit, caught up in the struggle that the total presentation of Jesus to God entails. Christian parents and children in every age can learn a lesson from this family built on grace.

Woman
Gifting

SOLEMN REVERENCE

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, January 1.
Readings: Num. 6:22-27; Gal. 4:4-7; Lk. 2:16-21.

"He was given the name Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived" (Lk. 2:21).

The new year opens with the Octave of Christmas, a solemn commemoration of Mary's mothering the Son of God. The liturgy of the Word, however, concentrates on the mystery of divine and human naming.

On the eighth day of life, the name of a newborn male Jew was made public and he was circumcised. With these rites he entered into the covenant God struck with Abraham (Gen. 17). The Son of Mary was given the name Yeshu (Jesus, in Greek), a common variant of Joshua. In itself the name was unexceptional, a very human name despite the theological significance

assigned to it by Matthew (Mt. 1:21). Luke's Gospel of the infancy has already referred to this Child by a more exalted title: Son of David, Son of the Most High, Lord. Mary herself, a model disciple, tries to comprehend everything she has heard about this Child. Luke tells us that she "treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart" (Lk. 2:19).

The divine name revealed to Moses, "I am who I am" (Ex. 3:13), both discloses and conceals the reality of God. Pious Jews have long avoided pronouncing even the third-person version of that name, Yahweh.

"The Lord" (*Adonai*), or even "The Name" (*Ha-Shem*), is substituted for the divine name in Jewish religious language. The High Priest (for instance, Aaron in the Book of Numbers) was privileged to name God in blessing the people of Israel, as the first reading demonstrates.

In a context of such reverential awe for God and God's Name, Jesus dared to call God "Father"—in Aramaic, *Abba*. Paul assures the Galatians that God has sent the Spirit of Jesus into your heart and mine, enabling us also to name God so intimately. In Jesus, we have the grace of becoming an only Child crying out to a loving Father.

On the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, the church also prays for world peace. In this Marian year, we learn about peace from the contemplative woman who stands in awe at the mystery of "the Name." Even on her Solemnity, she withdraws into the shadows and directs our attention to the newly named Child, the Child who Himself will call God "Father." Peace might well be found in the imitation of the selflessness of Mary, the mother of this Child.

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