

## **Holy Family (Cycle C)**

1 Sam 1:20-28; 1 John 3:1-24; Lk 2:41-52

A group of biblical scholars were involved in a heated discussion about how Jesus of Nazareth got his name.

How did he become known as the Messiah, or Christ. One of the scholars argued that the name was a Greek corruption of Aramaic, and purists and fundamentalists ought to use the name Joshua.

Another argued that Joshua was Hebrew, not Aramaic, to which a third argued that Hebrew should be used because Jesus was said to be the King of the Jews.

The debate went on and on and became more and more sophisticated and obtuse.

Finally, an old man known for his wisdom intervened. He informed the group that he knew how Jesus was named.

“When Jesus was born,” he said, “a star shown in the sky, and three wise men from the East travelled to Bethlehem.

They had travelled for days, suffered great deprivation, and when they finally got to Bethlehem they got lost trying to find Mary and Joseph and the baby.

Finally, they made it to where the Holy Family was staying, and by then they were in rather foul moods, but when they approached the door, they saw the mother with child, and one of them exclaimed, “look its...” and just then he tripped and hit his head on the wall, and he yelled: "Jesus Christ!"

“And that” said the old man, “is how the baby was named.”

Well, I guess we can trust that the scholars got a little off track.

Jesus is the Greek version of the Aramaic “Yeshua” which is also “Joshua” in Hebrew. Back then people were given names for a special purpose. In our first reading, Hannah named her son, Samuel which means in Hebrew “God Heard” because she prayed for a child and God heard her prayer. Hannah loved her child, but when he was old enough, she dedicated him to the temple where he went to live. Samuel grew up without a mother and father and was

raised by the temple priests. This was not what one would call a traditional family. When Zachariah and Elizabeth had a baby in their old age, they named him, “John” meaning “God is gracious” because like Hannah they were happy over the miraculous birth of their child. John grew up with parents old enough to be his grandparents or even his great-grandparents. Certainly, this was not what one would call a traditional family. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he said that the child that she would bear would be called “Jesus” which means “God saves”. Once again, a name was given that had great meaning. Mary was a young girl engaged to be married who was found to be pregnant before she was with her husband-to-be. Recent archaeological digs have shown that Nazareth at that time was probably about 50 families, so Mary’s condition must have been the talk of the town. In any case, Joseph defied tradition and married her. We further believe that Mary and Joseph had no marital relations and no further children, though some traditions dispute that. In any case,

they certainly did not have what one would call a traditional family. They also had their problems. They travelled quite a bit when Mary was pregnant and after the baby was born. They suffered many hardships, and the child, when he was 12 disappeared for several days until his parents tracked him down. The father died fairly early and left the mother to raise the child alone. The child when he grew up quit the family business to become an itinerant preacher who was later executed for capital crime. One could look at the Holy Family (up to the crucifixion) and say that this was a troubled and dysfunctional family.

The same could be said for Hannah and Elkanah, who gave their son up at an early age, or Zechariah and Elizabeth, who many people these days would say should not have had the baby. What kind of life could they offer a child at their old age?

However, I think that all of these descriptions are wrong. Too many people have too much to say about what makes a perfect family. Instead, we need to look for the core of what makes up a

family. All of us come from some sort of family. Maybe we had two parents, maybe foster-parents, maybe step-parents, or only one parent, maybe we were raised by relatives, maybe we were adopted, or maybe we were raised in an orphanage. But in all of these situations, we grew up in some sort of family.

And in all of these situations, what makes a good family is a bond of love that holds the members of the family together. It doesn't matter who makes up the members of the family, what matters is love. The basis of any family is the bond of love.

Now, sometimes, that bond of love in our families can be shattered by abuse, by divorce, by addiction or death, but when that happens there is another family bond that exists for us. It is the bond of love that comes from Jesus and binds us to him as members of his family. In Jesus there is healing for those hurts that seem as if they cannot be healed. Those hurts caused by those whom we have trusted but who in the end have betrayed us.

At one point in his ministry Jesus was speaking to a group of people when he was told that his mother and the rest of his relatives were outside looking for him.

Jesus turned to the group around him; he pointed to the group and said: “Here are my mother and brothers”. This is a sign to us that we are members of his family if we listen to him.

Jesus also said, “Come to me you are burdened or heavy laden and I will give you rest.”

Jesus is there for all of us who are hurting.

So in the end, it is as John tells us in our Second Reading:

“See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God.”

Love is our bond, and “Beloved” is what we are called.