

Christmas:

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

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Preparation

Background for Scripture Readings

First Reading

- The command to honor father and mother is the law that Sirach praises in today's reading.
- The idea of atonement for sin by honoring a parent is a feature new to biblical teaching. Earlier it was taught that atonement is accomplished through sacrifice.
- Life and family harmony are the rewards promised to those who show respect for both parents.

Second Reading

- Paul's theme in the second reading is a baptismal one. We are chosen and have put on Christ.
- The exhortations in the letter are a "household code."
- Paul urges all family members to relationships that are "in the Lord." (18,20)

Gospel

- Today's Gospel is part of Matthew's infancy narrative.
- The focus of Matthew's infancy narrative is to show that Jesus is the new Moses and the new Israel called out of Egypt.
- The story of the Holy Family is not only the story of Joseph and Mary and the boy Jesus. The Church's story of God's redeeming love continues on in the Feast of the Holy Family.

Breaking Open the Word

Leader Instruction

Catechist Reflection Guide for the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

First Reading: Sirach 3:3-7, 14-17a—Kindness to a father will not be forgotten.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalms 128:1-2, 3, 4-5—Happy are those who love the Lord and walk in his way.

Second Reading: Colossians 3:12-21—Let the word of Christ dwell in you.

Gospel: Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23—The flight into Egypt

Invitation to prayer (30 seconds)

Ask the children to quiet themselves and sit comfortably. Have them take three deep breaths while you prompt them to relax as they breathe in God, our Father who loves us, Jesus Christ, his Son, our brother, and God's Holy Spirit who lovingly guides us.

Listening for a word or phrase to speak to your heart (3-4 minutes)

Ages 5-6: Draw children's attention to the illustration of the Holy Family. Help children sound out the names of the Holy Family. In your own words or using a children's lectionary or Bible tell the story of the flight into Egypt.

Ages 7-8: Read the Gospel passage or tell the story of the Flight into Egypt in your own words.

Ages 9-11 and Ages 12-14: Read the Gospel passage. Ask young people to listen for a word or phrase that seems to be God's word for them today. Spend about 30 seconds as they choose a word or phrase. Ask them to silently repeat that word or phrase and to write it on their heart.

Loving God through his word (3-5 minutes)

Ages 5-6: Point out that Joseph always listened to God's messenger and did what God wanted him to do. Recall that Mary did the same when she said she would be Jesus' mother. People and families are holy because they do what God wants them to do. Read aloud the text and have children draw the picture of their family. Pray the closing prayer.

Ages 7-8: Read aloud the conversation starters and have children comment on each one. Point out that Joseph always listened to God's messenger and did what God wanted him to do. Recall that Mary did the same when she said she would be Jesus' mother. People and families are holy because they do what God wants them to do. Pray the closing prayer.

Ages 9-11: Have young people share their word or phrase. Allow young people a quiet time to reflect on Joseph's actions. Organize the large group into smaller groups and have the groups respond to the questions on the handout. Choose a few volunteers to summarize the small group's sharing. Pray the closing prayer.

Ages 12-14: Have young people share their word or phrase. Give young people some quiet time to reflect on Joseph's actions in the Gospel story. Use the text as a conversation guide with the large group. Pray the closing prayer.

Living the Gospel words through the week (3-5 minutes)

The handouts describe one or two ways children and young people can live this reflection on the Gospel through the week at home, school, or play. If appropriate, have them add one or two more personal choices to act on this week.