

## The Holy Family

Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, was born into this world to restore the image of God to wholeness, to give Himself as a sacrifice for the sin that warped and twisted the image of God. In so doing, He restored the family to what it was originally created by God to be. Over the past few months, we have been discussing family—how man and woman together are the image of God, how sin has broken that image, how that image can be restored in this day and age and what that means for the raising of children and for society.

This month, all over the land, there will be sermons preached on the coming of Christ and the birth of Jesus. Churches will be filled with beautiful music as we join in singing our favorite Christmas hymns. There is an excitement that comes as winter deepens. As the days grow shorter and darkness comes earlier, we grow in our anticipation of the joyous celebration remembering the baby born in Bethlehem so many, many years ago.

It seems most appropriate at this time that we look a little more closely at the family into which Jesus was born—the Holy Family. If there was ever a family that fulfilled the Creator's intent, it was certainly this one. In Mary, the mother of Jesus, we have a model of gracious obedience as the hand of God to care and nurture. In Joseph, we see a man who cared for his family and served faithfully as the voice of God directing them.

One theme that runs consistently through those passages of Scripture that we read every year at this time is that of obedience—simple, humble obedience to God. Mary's response to the angel, "See, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me as you have spoken." (Luke 1:38) Joseph's simple acceptance of God's will and His instructions, "...he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took his wife..." (Matthew 1:24); "And he rose and took the child and his mother..." (Matthew 2:14 and 2:21) These are the confident obedience of ones who trust God totally and who trust and care for each other.

Each entered into this incredible new life with doubts and questions but, as the Lord spoke to each by an angel, all doubts were settled and obedience and trust flowed forth from their hearts. We can see in Joseph and Mary an indication to us of both

the difficulties that can arise when we start a family and the confidence that can be ours in God to meet the need. Of course, none of us face that same thing that Mary did as she learned that she would become a mother while still a virgin having never been joined to a man but, I am sure that just as she had questions and doubts, any woman entering into marriage will be faced with her own, ones that may even press on her as heavily. Let Mary be the example of trust in God that makes obedience a joyful participation in His will. And, of course, few men preparing to take a wife will be confronted with that appearance of betrayal and great sin by the one he loves even before he has come to know her. Let Joseph be our guide to seeking the will of God and trusting in Him even when all appearances seem to tell us differently.

Out of their initial shock, fear and doubt, grew a deep love for one another and a deep trust. The bedrock foundation of this trust was their obedience to God. This obedience is shown throughout the first chapters of Matthew and Luke as they seek to obey the laws of both man and God registering in Bethlehem and making the prescribed offerings. We see it in Joseph's no-longer-questioning response to the angels that appear in his dreams to let him know what is really happening and to warn him of danger. We see it in Mary's quiet acceptance of such overwhelming events and prophecies. She "treasured up these things, pondering them in her heart." (Luke 2:19 and 2:51)

No matter what we are confronted with as we start a new family—and it will be a lot—we must look to God to guide us through the process and to sustain and protect this fragile new image of God. Unfortunately all too many families these days do not start with this foundation. I strongly urge everyone to resist the pressures that push one towards marrying someone who is not committed to walking in obedience to God in their marriage and throughout their life. While human love and a sense of responsibility can carry a couple a long way, if they have not both begun their marriage as an act of obedience to God, it will be built on the weakest and most treacherous of foundations.

Joseph is a wonderful example to those of us who are fathers. At the very start, we see a man who is righteous and thoughtful, who, when confronted with something that must have come close to crushing his soul, thought only of how to end the relationship in as loving a manner as possible.

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. (Matthew 1:18-19)*

Nor did he act in haste. He thought, he went to sleep in confidence. We see a man open to the Lord, a man who trusted God.

*But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:20)*

Having heard the Lord's instruction, he was obedient—not once but each time the angel spoke to him and, we can be confident, throughout his life. He took full responsibility for Mary and cared for her and the child, Jesus.

*And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus. (Matthew 1:24-25)*

Here was a man who exercised beautiful headship and authority in his family while resting secure in his own obedience and under the authority of God the Father. He provided, cared for and protected his wife and child. May we do as much.

In the same way, mothers have a beautiful example in Mary, a young woman of God who cared only for His will, who trusted Him completely and who rejoiced in His love.

*And Mary said: "My soul exalts the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; For behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me; And holy is His name. (Luke 1:46-49)*

As the burdens of marriage and motherhood may overwhelm, here is one who shows us in Whom our strength lies. We know that her life as a mother was anything but

easy. Indeed, the aged Simeon's prophecy to her, "And a sword will pierce through your own soul also" (Luke 2:35) was fulfilled in great pain and suffering. We know that there were times when she just did not understand and felt estrangement from her son (Luke 2:48-51; Matthew 12:46-50), but at the end, she stood faithful watch as the horrible events of her son's crucifixion unfolded, confident that even in death He would care for her. (John 19:25-27)

Let our marriages and our families be modeled on this most holy family. Let us look to the Son who was born into and nurtured by this family as our hope and our stay when it seems that all is lost.

Let us rejoice in this one, beautiful example of the restored image of God and the love of Him by whose blood it was restored. Let us rejoice in the Word made flesh and let us all have a wonderful Christmas.

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