

**First Reading**

*Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3*

(or the first reading from Cycle A: Sirach 3:2-7,12-14)

God fulfills his promise to Abraham, and Sarah gives birth to a son.

**Responsorial Psalm**

*Psalm 105:1-6,8-9* (or the psalm from Cycle A: Psalm 128:1-5)

A prayer of thanksgiving to God for his faithfulness to his covenant.

**Second Reading**

*Hebrews 11:8,11-12,17-19* (or the second reading from Cycle A: Colossians 3:12-21)

Paul examines Abraham's example of faith.

**Gospel Reading**

*Luke 2:22-40* (or shorter form: Luke 2:22,39-40)

Mary and Joseph present Jesus at the Temple in accordance with the Law of Moses.

**Background on the Gospel Reading**

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Family. This celebration is assigned to the Sunday within the octave of Christmas. The Gospel for today is taken from the Gospel according to Luke and is part of Luke's Infancy Narrative.

Today's Gospel describes the presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple and shows Joseph and Mary as devout Jews, following the prescriptions of the Law of Moses. The Gospel alludes to several aspects of the Law of Moses: circumcision, the dedication of the firstborn son to the Lord.

Today's Gospel notes that Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth, in accordance with the Mosaic Law. At that time, he was called Jesus, the name he was given by the angel Gabriel. On the 40th day after Jesus' birth, Mary performed the appropriate purification rites and made her offering at the Temple. Although the Law of Moses required an offering of a lamb, those who could not afford a lamb could substitute two turtledoves or two pigeons. In this scene, Luke identifies Joseph and Mary as being poor, and indeed throughout Luke's Gospel, Jesus will show special concern for the poor.

Another Jewish rite referenced in this Gospel is the dedication of the firstborn son to the Lord. In remembrance of the feast of Passover, when the firstborn children of the Israelites in Egypt were saved from death, the Law of Moses prescribed that all firstborn males of Israel should be consecrated to the Lord. In this tradition, Mary and Joseph present the infant Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, Luke reports that Mary and Joseph encounter two devout Jews, Simeon and Anna, who recognize the infant Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel's hope for redemption. In Simeon's words we find a prediction of Mary's witnessing of Jesus' death on the cross.

### **Family Connection**

Today's celebration of the Feast of the Holy Family highlights the importance of family in our religious life. We know that Mary and Joseph's faithfulness to God enabled them to cooperate in God's plan for our salvation by accepting the responsibility to raise God's Son, Jesus. From his parents, Jesus learned how to be a faithful believer in his Jewish tradition. Simeon's prophecy about Mary's sorrow alerts us to the importance of a family's commitment to one another, a commitment that is expressed in both good times and bad.

Gather as a family and recall times when your family showed its commitment to one another in good times and in bad. Recall times when your immediate family was supported by members of your extended family. Note that today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family, and we see in the family of Jesus an example for our own family life. Joseph and Mary expressed their faithfulness to God through their observance of the Law of Moses. Simeon prophesied the grief that Mary would experience at the foot of Jesus' cross. One of the blessings of family life is our commitment to one another, sharing good times and supporting one another through difficult times. Conclude in prayer together thanking God for the grace expressed in your family's commitment to another. Write a prayer together, thanking God for your family life and asking God to strengthen your family's commitment to one another. Pray this prayer together.