

**ctkAlive! Scripture Study**  
**Feast of the Holy Family: Jesus, Mary, Joseph**  
**2020—B Cycle**



Photo courtesy of [Alberto Casetta](#)  
on [unsplash.com](#)

*For your convenience and to broaden your benefit from this and all sessions in this series, you will find links to books, authors, and other references mentioned in the text.*

*Caution: Links to the internet are like rabbits dashing across a hunter's path. Instinct says, "Chase after that link!" Instead, we suggest waiting until you have followed the entire reflection. Then take all the time you wish to follow these interesting and educational links.*

*Exception: In the course of these reflections, you may have an opportunity to watch or listen to a relevant song or video.*

*Gender usage in writing: We are conscious of gender references to God in the Scripture texts. Often, attempts to rewrite these passages result in awkward sentence structures. We have left the biblical translations as they are but do our best to be inclusive in all other parts of the reflection.*

**Opening Prayer**

God, our Father,  
We are brothers and sisters in Jesus your Son,  
One family, in the Spirit of your love.  
Bless us with the joy of love.

Make us patient and kind,  
gentle and generous,  
welcoming to those in need.  
Help us to live your forgiveness and peace.

Protect all families with your loving care,  
Especially those for whom we now pray:  
*[Pause to remember family members and others by name].*

Increase our faith.  
Strengthen our hope.  
Keep us safe in your love.  
Make us always grateful for the gift of life we share.  
This we ask, through Christ our Lord.

[Prayer for the World Meeting of Families \(2018\)](#)

Source: [Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference](#)

## **Introduction to the Feast of the Holy Family**

“... all that is recorded of (Joseph) is that he protected Our Lady in Advent . . . that he was the first to protect the unknown, unguessed Christ in another . . . and he was the defense of the Infant Christ, when he was defenseless and threatened by Herod. A just man and a strong man. Love was in him like the crystal in the rock.”

[Caryll Houselander, \*The Passion of the Infant Christ\*](#)

### **Readings:**

Genesis 15: 1-6 and 21: 1-3 “Fear not, Abram! I am your shield; I will make your reward great.” (*Alternate reading: Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14*)

Psalms 105: 1-6, 8-9 “Give thanks to the Lord. Invoke his name.”  
(*Alternate reading: Psalm 128: 1-5*)

Letter to the Colossians 3:12-21 “Let the peace of Christ control your hearts.”

Luke 2: 22-40 The prophet Samuel said to Mary and Joseph: “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel.”

### **A Reading from the Book of Genesis (15: 1-6 & 21: 1-3)**

“The word of Yahweh was spoken to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great!’

“Abram said, ‘My Lord Yahweh, where are your promises? I am still childless, and all I have will go to Eliezer of Damascus. You have given me no children, so a slave of mine will be my heir.’

“Then the word of Yahweh was spoken to him again, ‘Eliezer will not be your heir, but a child born of you (your own flesh and blood) will be your heir.’ Then Yahweh brought him outside and said to him, ‘Look up at the sky and count the stars if you can. Your descendants will be like that.’

“Abram believed Yahweh who, because of this, held him to be an upright man.

“Yahweh was kind to Sarah, as he had said, and fulfilled his promise to her. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time Yahweh had promised. Abraham gave the name Isaac [*he will laugh*] to the son that Sarah bore him.”

### **Personal Reflection**

Around 4,000 years ago, at the beginning of Yahweh’s most “in person” work of salvation in human history, Yahweh wanted at least *one* person on earth to share the divine secret and know the depth of Yahweh’s designs or Abram’s descendants (and that of the whole human race). Abram was the first to believe in the *one* God, Yahweh, which means, “He Brings into Existence Whatever Exists.” Through such faith, God’s eternal decree lodged in the heart and mind of a single believer. From that moment, a mysterious complicity united Abraham (meaning “exalted father”) and Yahweh forever. This divine-human Covenant, once set free, will never

end.

(Perspective: The Stonehenge circle of monuments [below] in Southwest England has stood for 5,000 years.—*Photo by AJG in 2019*)



Yahweh spoke through an angel from the burning bush (Exodus 3: 1): “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great!” Thus began the divine-human covenant that still exists today and, like the ever-burning bush, will never end—no matter how dark the history of the world might seem at any given point along its path.

— *Can I recall a time when God “spoke” to me in some private but dramatic way? What was the occasion? What message did I receive?*

Abraham lived in a world in where he alone believed in Yahweh, the one true God.

— *When did I find myself in an environment in which I stood nearly alone in my faith? How did I fare in that environment? Did my faith grow stronger . . . or weaken from the absence of a believing community to support my faith?*

### **Responsorial Psalm (105: 1-6, 8-9)**

God’s faithfulness to his promise: the story of Israel.

*Blessed are those who fear the Lord  
And walk in his ways.*

Give thanks to Yahweh, call on his name;  
make known his works among the nations.

Sing to him, sing his praise,  
proclaim all his wondrous deeds.

*Blessed are those who fear the Lord  
And walk in his ways.*

Glory in his holy name;  
let those who seek Yahweh rejoice.

Look to Yahweh and be strong;  
seek his face always.

*Blessed are those who fear the Lord  
And walk in his ways.*

Remember his wonderful works,  
his miracles and his judgments,  
you descendants of his servant Abraham,  
you sons of Jacob, his chosen ones!

*Blessed are those who fear the Lord  
And walk in his ways.*

He remembers his Covenant forever,  
his promise to a thousand generations,  
the Covenant he made with Abraham,  
the promise he swore to Isaac.

*Blessed are those who fear the Lord  
And walk in his ways.*

*(Alternate Psalm 128: 1-5)*

### Personal Reflection

*“Remember his wonderful works, his miracles and his judgments. . . .”*

For most of us, keeping God’s favors to us in *constant* memory presents a problem. We tend to have a short memory span, especially when we have “gone off the rails” of our spiritual lives.

— *When in my life did I skid “off the rails”—lost my spiritual bearings? What caused my personal “train wreck” to happen? When and how did I regain/restore my relationship with God?*

There’s hope: Throughout these weekly reflections, we have quoted the saintly but “unsainted” Caryll Houselander and recommended her wonderful writings. In her young adulthood, Caryll left her Catholic faith behind for *ten years* before she found her way back. During that absence she fell into a tragic love affair with the notorious double agent and conman Sidney Reilly. (You might enjoy reading , [Ace of Spies: The True Story of Sidney Reilly](#), 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.

“He remembers his Covenant forever.” God has an impeccable memory.

— *When have I blamed God for leaving me? What were my life circumstances at that time? How long did it take me to reset my faith?*

### **From St. Paul’s Letter of to the Colossians (3: 12-21)**

“Clothe yourselves, then, as is fitting for God’s chosen people, holy and beloved of him. Put on *compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience* to bear with one another, and *forgive*, whenever there is any occasion to do so.

“As the Lord has forgiven you, forgive one another. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. May the peace of Christ overflow in your hearts; for this end you were called, to be *one* body.

“And be thankful. Let the word of God dwell in you, in all its richness. Teach and admonish one another with words of wisdom. With thankful hearts, sing to God psalms, hymns, and spontaneous praise.

“And whatever you do or say, do it in the Name of Jesus, the Lord, giving thanks to God, the Father, through him.

“Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as you should do in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not get angry with them. Children, obey your

parents in everything because that pleases the Lord. Parents, do not be too demanding of your children, lest they become discouraged.”

### **Personal Reflection**

Among 21<sup>st</sup> century Catholic women, in particular, the final paragraph of this reading presents one of Paul’s most problematic teachings. The passage needs to be read within the context of the Graeco-Roman world in which the people of Christians of Colossus lived. In fact, Paul preaches the same set of ethics to all: men, women, free people, and slaves. All must be just, loyal, and respectful of others, even when others display their human faults. Paul calls upon the Colossian community to work for a change of ethics and practice and to defend the rights of all. Both men and women need to lead the struggle for equality and live our self-chosen commitments according to the Spirit of Christ.

*(See the book recommendation towards the end of this reflection.)*

— *What has been my personal assessment of St. Paul’s attitude toward women? How does my current thinking differ from my earlier understanding of this subject?*

“Be thankful. Let the word of God dwell in you, in all its richness. . . . With thankful hearts, sing to God psalms, hymns, and spontaneous praise.”

— *How has my gratitude to God changed or shifted during this extended year of shelter-in-place? How would I describe this change/shift?*

“As the Lord has forgiven you, forgive one another.”

— *Who can I not forgive, whether in my past or present life? What happened to cement that resistance in my heart? If I have forgiven that hurt, when and how did I find strength to let go of my “hardness of heart”?*

### **Proclamation from the Gospel according to Luke (2: 22-40)**

“When the day came for the purification according to the law of Moses, (Mary and Joseph) brought the baby up\* to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord: ‘Every firstborn male shall be consecrated to God.’ They offered a sacrifice, as ordered in the law of the Lord: a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

“There lived in Jerusalem, at this time, an upright and devout man named Simeon; the Holy Spirit was in him. He looked forward to the time when the Lord would comfort Israel; and he had been assured by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Messiah of the Lord.

“So, he was led into the temple by the Holy Spirit at the time the parents brought the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law. Simeon took the child in his arms, and blessed God, saying, ‘Now, O Lord, you can dismiss your servant in peace, for you have fulfilled your word, and my eyes have seen your salvation, which you display for all the people to see. Here is the light you will reveal to the nations, and the glory of your people Israel.’

“(Jesus’) father and mother wondered at what was said about the child.

“Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, ‘Know this: your son is a sign; a sign established for the falling and rising of many in Israel, a sign of

contradiction; and a sword will pierce your own soul, so that, out of many hearts, thoughts may be revealed.'

"There was also a prophetess named [Anna](#), daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. After leaving her father's home, she had been seven years with her husband; and since then, she had been continually about the temple, serving God, as a widow, night and day in fasting and prayer. She was now eighty-four.

"Coming up at that time, she gave praise to God, and spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.

"When the parents had fulfilled all that was required by the law of the Lord, they returned to their town, Nazareth in Galilee. There, the child grew in stature and strength, and was filled with wisdom: the grace of God was upon him."

### Personal Reflection

"Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother . . . 'Know this . . . a sword will pierce your own soul. . . .'"

— *Moms and Dads, when have your children's attitudes and/or behaviors felt like a sword had pierced your soul? How have you responded to heartbreaking decisions made by your child(ren)? Has your heart healed yet? If it has, how did that healing come about?*

Anna, called here a prophetess (yes, there existed [women prophetesses](#) in Israel's history—and they exist today), not only recognized the specialness of Mary and Joseph's child, she also became a vocal predecessor of the twelve Apostles.

— *Over the course of my life, how have I shared the "good news" of Christ's presence in my life, in the world, and his generous blessings to all? If I am one of those timid Catholics who keep my beliefs to myself, how do I explain my timidity? What might I do to be more open about my faith (without becoming obnoxious)?*

(Note: Follow this link to learn about faith-based [CBE International](#) and its gender-equality message and mission.)

### The Week Ahead

This week, we celebrate the Holy Family—Jesus, Mary, and Joseph

— *Do I consider my family a "holy family"? How would I describe what my "yes" or "no" answer means in the way I live my everyday life?*

— *How different was this Christmas compared to past celebrations? What efforts did I make to continue family traditions, even if I had to modify them somewhat?*

— *How will I keep the spirit of Christmas alive in my home and in the broader community after the holidays have come and gone?*

### Journaling Prompts

*What insights have I gained from reflecting on this weekend's liturgical readings?*

Write about your feelings and lived experience of these issues.

Suggested prompt:

— *After reflecting on this weekend's scriptures, what impresses me the most?*

We mustn't simply be grateful "recipients" of God's good gifts. We also need to "give back."

— *How will this week's Scriptures and current societal events impact the way I think, live, love, and "give back" during the week ahead?*

### **For Inspirational Viewing / Reading**

Books:

[Where God Was Born](#) by [Bruce Feiler](#) (author of [Abraham](#))

A daring adventure through the Bible's greatest stories.

*(I've read both books and found them enlightening and enjoyable. I gave each my highest reading rank.--AJG)*

[Paul Among the People: The Apostle Reinterpreted and Reimagined in His Own Time](#)

By [Sarah Ruden](#)

Sarah Ruden is a leading translator of the ancient literature of the West. In a career spanning both essential Greek and Roman Classics and sacred literature, she has set new standards for accuracy, stylistic integrity, and accessibility.

*(I've read this book, which clarifies much of the current misunderstanding about Paul's teaching about women. I gave it, too, my highest reading rank.--AJG)*

Videos:

**A [homeless man](#) walks into a church . . . .**

The feast of the Holy Family is about the humility of our Lord and Savior. When Mary and Joseph and their baby son, Jesus, entered the crowded temple, only Simeon and Anna paid them any attention. This real-life video is a cautionary tale about "parish families" for all congregations. Although the actual site is not identified, it looks a lot like a large Catholic high Episcopal church. (3.5 minutes)

Source: [Awesome Videos](#)

[The first thing Mother Teresa did every morning](#) (2.5 min.)

Source: [Franciscan Media](#)

Music:

["Let me be your Bethlehem"](#) composed by [Danielle Rose](#), performed by [GsusBandNYC](#).

### **Preview of Next Session**

The Epiphany of the Lord to the Magi

Isaiah 60: 1-6 "Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem, your light has come!"

Psalm 72: 1-8, 10-13 "He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor: the lives of the poor he shall save."

Ephesians 3: 2-3, 5-6 "It has now been revealed . . . that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body and copartners in the promise of Christ Jesus."  
Matthew 2:1-12 "Behold magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem."

### **Closing Prayer**

#### **Prayer to St. Joseph**

Hail, Guardian of the Redeemer,  
spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary.  
To you God entrusted His only Son;  
in you Mary placed her trust;  
with you Christ became man.

Blessed Joseph, to us too,  
show yourself a father  
and guide us in the path of life.  
Obtain for us grace, mercy, and courage  
and defend us from every evil.  
Amen

by Pope Francis

*from "[Heart of a Father](#)," on the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the proclamation  
of St. Joseph as patron of the Universal Church, given December 8, 2020*

### **Questions?**

Send any questions or comments you might have to [algarrotto@comcast.net](mailto:algarrotto@comcast.net)

The Sunday readings are from [Christian Community Bible: Catholic Pastoral Edition](#)

© 1999, Bernardo Hurault and Patricia Grogan, FCJ. Imprimatur:  
Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

Questions and Commentaries © 2020 Alfred J. Garrotto  
(follow this link to my spiritual novel, [Bishop Myriel: In His Own Words](#))