

The Holy Family (Sunday within the Octave of Christmas)

(Year A)

<i>First Reading</i>	Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14
<i>Response</i>	Blessed is every one who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways!
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5
<i>Second Reading</i>	Colossians 3:12-17
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts; let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.
<i>Gospel</i>	Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Every year during the Octave of Christmas—during the eight day festival of Christmas, the feast of the Nativity—the Church celebrates a special feast of the Holy Family, where we remember the Holy Family and then we look at certain passages in the Bible that focus on the family. So today, for Year A, we’re looking at the Gospel of Matthew’s account of the Holy Family and the famous story of the flight into Egypt. And then we’ll go back and look at the Old Testament and the Psalm for today as well.

So we all know the story well, but let’s go back and look at it in Matthew 2:13-15, and then it skips down to verses 19-23. This is the Gospel for today:

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt have I called my son.”

And then it skips down here to verse 19:

But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” And he rose and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archela’us reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”¹

Alright, so why does the Church select this reading for the feast of the Holy Family? Well, obviously here, we get a window (through Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth and His infancy) into the story of the Holy Family from the perspective of St. Joseph. So you’ve probably heard this before, but it’s helpful to keep in mind just in case you haven’t, that if you look at the two Gospels of Matthew and Luke—Matthew which we read in Year A and then Luke which we read in Year C—they both contain narratives of the infancy of Jesus, of His birth and of His infancy.

But Matthew tells the account of Jesus’ infancy from the perspective of St. Joseph, whereas Luke gives the account of the story from the perspective of the Virgin Mary. So this is a story that—although it’s a famous story of the flight to Egypt—it’s unique to Matthew’s Gospel, and it gives us kind of a window into the life of the Holy Family after the famous celebration of His birth...after what we’ve just celebrated on the feast of the Nativity, the feast of Christmas.

So with that in mind, if we look here, there are a few points here about this Gospel that are worth highlighting. Number one, notice here that the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream. Now when we think of angels, we tend to think that they are pure spirits; they’re spiritual beings. And that’s true. That’s their nature. But as St. Augustine says, their nature is that of a spirit, but their purpose or their mission is that of a messenger.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

And in fact, the word angel in Greek, *angelos*, simply means “messenger,” someone who brings a message. So *euangeliōn*, good message—evangelize or *euangeliōn*, the good news, the Gospel—is someone who brings the good message. And *angelos* (an angel) is simply the person who gives a message. So here, what the angel is doing, is fulfilling a function of giving a message to St. Joseph, but he does it in the form of a dream. And the angel’s message from God to St. Joseph is:

“Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” (Matthew 2:13b)

So, who is the Herod here that is being described? Well, this is King Herod the Great, as he is known. Herod the Great was a very wicked king. He was basically a puppet king on behalf of Rome. So if you recall, at the time of Jesus’ birth, Rome the Empire—the Roman Empire—is in control of the entire Holy Land, both Galilee in the north and Judea in the south. And one of the ways the Romans would work is that they would set up kings who were from the native people—“kings” with a lowercase k, by the way. The only one true king is Caesar himself, is the emperor.

But there were these puppet kings, these lower level royalty who would rule at the behest or at the pleasure of the emperor, and Herod was one of these. He was an Idumean, so he’s not really actually a full-blooded Jew; he’s kind of half-Jewish. The Idumeans were descendents of the Edomites, who were the descendants of Esau. And if you remember the little rivalry between Jacob and Esau, you can imagine how that would go over with the full-blooded Jewish people.

So Herod—King Herod—in a sense was an invalid king. He was a king who was ruling on behalf of the pagans, and he himself wasn’t even fully Jewish. So in order to establish his credentials, Herod embarked on these massive building projects to kind of show that he himself was a glorious and true king. And the most famous of these was the building and the expansion of the temple in Jerusalem. Because there was a Jewish expectation that when the Messiah finally came, one of the ways you would know He was the Messiah is that He would build a temple. He would make a new temple, and it would be even greater than Solomon’s temple. So

guess what Herod sets about doing in order to prove his authentic kingship? He embarks on these massive building projects.

But because he was an invalid king—he was illegitimate—he was also extremely paranoid about losing the throne and about losing his power. So we know from other sources, like Josephus, that Herod had his own children and his own wife murdered because of his paranoia about threats of assassination or treason from within the royal family.

So Herod was a wicked, violent, murderous, dangerous figure. And so we actually know here that the angel's message to Joseph makes a lot of sense, because once Herod learns and hears the rumor about the birth of an infant king, of a boy king, he is going to feel the political threat implicit in people starting to talk amongst the authentic Jewish people—amongst the people of Jerusalem and Judea—that a king has been born. You know, someone who's going to have a right to the throne. Someone who is actually going to be of the house of David, as opposed to this impostor king, Herod the Great—"great" there in scare quotes.

So, the angel, knowing what is going to happen in advance...of course God knows. God sends the angel to Joseph to say, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt...and stay there because Herod is going to try to destroy the child." So sure enough, Joseph obeys the Word of the Lord. He takes Mary and the boy—Jesus, the baby Jesus—at night. And he goes to Egypt, and he stays there until the death of Herod the Great.

Now, we don't have any information about this period of time where the Holy Family is in Egypt. We just don't know—which of course, in the history of the Church, led to all kinds of speculation and the growth of various traditions about what Joseph did and what Mary did and things that happened while they were in Egypt. All of those are extra-biblical. This is what we get in the Bible. It just says he went to Egypt, and as we'll see in a second, it says he comes back.

But we can imagine that this would have been a very treacherous and difficult journey for Joseph and Mary and the baby. Any couple that has recently had a baby knows that traveling with a newborn is not a—shall we say—it's not a pleasant

experience. It can be very nerve wracking. I remember—just personal experience—our third child Hannah was born right in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. And we had been displaced; we didn't have a home. We were living in some family's house in Baton Rouge, outside of the city of New Orleans. And then another hurricane—Rita—came up, and she was a category 5, which we had just had a little experience of category 4 with Katrina.

So we had decided, we're getting out of here...we're not going to stay. So we packed all the kids in a van. Actually, we had to buy a van, because we had a car—we didn't have enough space in the car. So we had to buy a van, throw the kids in the van, and we drove to Tennessee to spend time with other family. And of course, the van broke down on the way there, just to make it interesting. And we had our daughter, was like 10 days old or something like that, I don't know exactly—I'm sure my wife would remember the exact date.

Anyway, traveling with a newborn though is precarious. You're concerned for the wellbeing of the mother. You're concerned for the wellbeing of the child. And if that's the case in contemporary times, how much more would that be the truth in the time of St. Joseph, when it was always dangerous to get on the road. There were brigands. There were robbers that would lie in wait for travelers, especially when you weren't in a caravan like at passover time. The implication—we don't know this for sure—but the implication of the text is that Joseph, Mary, and the baby take off by themselves.

So that would have been a really dangerous journey to go all the way down to Egypt...which remember, in the first century AD—although Egypt is part of the Roman Empire too, so it's pagan in context—we do know from other sources that there was a large Jewish community in the first century AD in Alexandria, Egypt. There were synagogues in northern Egypt. So we can imagine maybe St. Joseph sought out some refuge there amongst some of his own people—we just don't know. What we do know is that it would have taken a lot of faith and trust in the message from the angel for Joseph to pack up and go to not just a foreign country, but essentially a pagan country as well, in a completely different culture and try to make his way with his young wife and his newborn child. But he has to, otherwise his baby will be executed at the hands of the wicked King Herod.

Now, Matthew at this point in the account of the Gospel, steps in and he tells us the reason this happened was the fulfillment of Scripture:

This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt have I called my son.” (Matthew 2:15b)

Now, that quotation there is from the book of Hosea. And in Hosea chapter 11:1, Hosea is speaking of the son as Israel, the collective people of Israel, and of the exodus of Israel from the land of Egypt—which took place of course at the time of Moses. So sometimes interpreters are puzzled by the application of this verse to the Holy Family, because in its original context, Hosea is not talking about the king of Israel—the Messiah, the Son of God—he’s talking about the people of God being brought out of Egypt.

But the way Matthew’s applying the verse is according to what scholars call typology. In other words, he’s evoking the memory of the exodus from Egypt of the whole people of Israel at the time of Moses as a way of helping us to see that the birth of Jesus isn’t just a fulfillment of prophecies of the coming of the king, but it’s also the inauguration of a kind of new exodus. And that’s something we’re going to see as we walk through the Gospel of Matthew. Throughout the course of Year A, one of the key themes of the Gospel of Matthew is going to be the fulfillment of the prophecies of a new exodus—which basically amounts to the expectation that Jews had in the first century AD—that when God would save His people at the time of the Messiah, that it would be similar to the way He had saved His people at the time of Moses in the exodus from Egypt. There are going to be parallels between the two.

So the parallel here is, just as God called Israel out of Egypt and identified the people of Israel as His son...in Exodus 4:22, God says, “Israel is my first born son. Therefore, Pharaoh, let my people go.” So the whole reason for the exodus from Egypt is that Israel, the people of Israel, is God’s adoptive son. And God says to Pharaoh, “If you don’t let my son go, then your sons will die”...which is exactly what happens in the Passover.

So think about that—why is Matthew echoing that? Well, any first century Jew would know the reason for the exodus in part was because there was a wicked pagan king—the pharaoh—who was slaughtering the innocent sons of the Israelites at the beginning of the book of Exodus. And so God raises up Moses, the deliverer, to set them free. So the same thing’s happening now with a different king. Now we’ve got a half pagan wicked king—Herod—who’s trying to destroy all of the Israelite boys in Bethlehem so that he can execute the redeemer, the deliverer, the new Moses, which is the baby Jesus.

And just as Moses’ family—Miriam and his parents—saved the first redeemer, Moses, from the hands of the wicked king Pharaoh who was slaughtering the infants...so too now Joseph and Mary—the Holy Family—are going to save the new Moses, the infant Jesus, from the hands of the wicked King Herod. So there’s a kind of recapitulation of the events of salvation history from the Old Testament to the New Testament. They’re not identical. That’s how typology works. There’s similarity and difference. I think it was Mark Twain who said, “History doesn’t repeat itself, but it does rhyme.” And that’s how typology works as well. It’s not repetition, it’s recapitulation. It’s fulfilling the old and then making it new as well.

So the flight to Egypt here isn’t just (on a human level) something undergone by Joseph and Mary. It’s a fulfillment of prophecy. It’s one more sign that this baby, Jesus, isn’t just any ordinary baby. He’s the new Moses who’s going to inaugurate a new exodus, who’s going to set His people free—not from slavery to Egypt and Pharaoh, but from slavery to sin and death.

Alright, so now the passage for today, it skips over the Mass for the infants, because, hey, we’re in Christmas, right? So we’re trying to focus on a little bit of joy here. And so we go down to verse 19, and now it fast forwards to when Herod the Great dies. So when Herod dies, another angel appears to Joseph while he’s in Egypt—in a dream—and says once again:

“Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead.” (Matthew 2:20)

Now I can't help but point out here, again, just in terms of first century Jewish context, that if you were a Jewish reader of the Gospel...which most scholars think that—and early Church fathers actually say—that Matthew's Gospel was written for the Hebrews, as they say...Jews who were hearing the Gospel and coming to accept Jesus as the Messiah. And so it's written for Jewish Christians...or actually maybe even to evangelize, to share the Gospel with Jews who might not realize or believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

Any first century Jew (Christian or otherwise), if you heard about a Joseph that was in Egypt and had a dream, you would think about Joseph, the son of Jacob—one of the twelve sons of Israel, who was very famous for having two dreams. In Genesis 37, he has the famous dream of the sun and the moon and the stars bowing down before him, which represent his mother, his father, and his eleven brothers, coming to bow down before him as the king. And then he also is a famous dream interpreter. When the Pharaoh has those two dreams about the fatted calves and the thin calves and the fruitful corn and the barren corn, Joseph is called upon to interpret those dreams, and he does because he is close to God.

So there is a sense in which, just like Jesus was kind of a new Moses, there's a sense in which St. Joseph is a kind of new Joseph—although, as we'll see in other videos, I'll show how Jesus is the ultimate new Joseph, because He's going to go through similar events that Joseph himself goes through. But there's at least a slight echo here of the figure of Joseph who listens to the dreams that are sent to him by God.

So Joseph here takes the child and his mother and he goes to the land of Israel. There again is a new exodus theme, because what did Israel do in the Old Testament at the time of the exodus? They left Egypt, and they journeyed to the land of Israel. So there's a sense in which the baby Jesus is like a new Israel in person. He is the new Israel of the new exodus, and he too goes from Egypt to the Holy Land...although this time it doesn't take forty years to get there. So there's a difference.

But what happens here is interesting. Matthew, who is telling this story from the perspective of Joseph, says:

But when he heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there...

Alright, so who is Archelaus? Archelaus was one of the sons of Herod who wasn't killed, obviously. And he was a successor to Herod. So Herod was ruling over the southern territory of Judea, and after Herod the Great dies, his son Archelaus is made his successor. And Archelaus, like his father Herod, was also a wicked and cruel tyrant — who eventually actually was deposed, I think around 6 AD or so by the Romans, just because he was a terrible ruler. So he ended up losing his office, but at the time of the infancy of Jesus, he's still in power. So when Joseph is heading back to Judea, he's going to go back to Bethlehem—presumably here, or to the south—and he hears that Archelaus, the son of Herod is in power. Well, it's like out of the frying pan, into the fire. This isn't going to be any better than it was under Herod the Great. So instead of going to the territory of Archelaus, he goes north to Galilee, and he goes to the city of Nazareth. And he takes Mary and he takes Jesus there. And notice again, it said:

...being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. (Matthew 2:22b)

So we have three dreams here—the departure to Egypt, the return from Egypt, and now the withdrawal to Galilee. So Joseph is constantly being guided directly by God—directly by God but through the angel who was speaking to him in his dreams. So he goes and he dwells in a city called Nazareth. And again, notice, on one level you might assume, well, on a human level it makes sense that he would go to Nazareth, because that's Mary's town. That's Mary's hometown, as we learned from the Gospel of Luke. The angel Gabriel appeared to a woman, a virgin who was in the city of Nazareth. Her name was Mary.

So on a human level, that makes a lot of sense, but Matthew sees something more profound in that Joseph goes to Nazareth. He sees a fulfillment of Scripture. Once again, he says:

...that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, “He shall be called a Nazarene.” (Matthew 2:23)

So this is going to be something distinctive of Matthew’s Gospel. He frequently, when sees a connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament, he’ll say, “This happened in order that this Old Testament passage might be fulfilled.” A prophecy and fulfillment in the early Church is one of the motives of credibility for believing that Jesus isn’t just some guy claiming to be the Messiah, but that His life bears witness to providence—to the plan of God being fulfilled in His actions and His deeds, even when He’s a baby...even when He’s not the one coordinating those events. God’s hands are still coordinating it through the Holy Family—through Joseph and through Mary.

So Matthew here—it’s interesting—on the one hand, he’s saying Scripture’s being fulfilled. On the other hand, nobody knows what Scripture he’s talking about. Because if you take it literally, there isn’t an actual text in the Old Testament that we know of in the Jewish Scriptures that says the words, “He shall be called a Nazarene.”

So most scholars think here that Matthew is summarizing several texts from the Old Testament that depict the Messiah using the imagery of a branch. Because in Hebrew, the word for branch is *netzer*. It’s the word that’s at the root of the name Nazareth. So in its Semitic meaning, the name Nazareth literally could mean “branch town.” So what Matthew’s recognizing here is that if you look at the Old Testament...so for example, Isaiah 11. This would be the most famous example of the imagery of a branch. In Isaiah 11:1, Isaiah says—and I’m paraphrasing here from memory, kind of like Matthew does here—that a shoot shall spring forth from the stump of Jesse.

And that imagery there is of Jesse, who is David’s father, the father of a kingdom. Their house has become a stump. Instead of a great tree, it’s been cut down. This is what happened at the time of the Babylonian Exile. But if you ever cut a tree down in your backyard and left a stump, what you’ll know is, it doesn’t necessarily mean it’s dead. If you cut it down to the stump, a shoot or a branch can come out of the

stump and make a whole new tree, if you don't pay enough attention to it or if you don't keep cutting it down.

So what Isaiah is saying there is that one day there's going to be a king that comes forth from the family of David, just like a shoot coming from a stump...just like a branch on a tree. And other prophets, like Zechariah, will use this image of the branch as a name for the future king of Israel, the Messiah. So in other words, Matthew (who is Jewish) recognizes that by bringing the baby Jesus, by Joseph bringing the baby Jesus to "branch town," to Nazareth, Joseph is also fulfilling the prophecy of the Davidic branch. So this baby isn't just a new Moses who's going to inaugurate a new Exodus, he's also a new David who's going to bring about a new kingdom. In other words, He is the long awaited Messiah of Israel.

And all of this is happening through the activity and the operations, the choices made by Joseph, who is himself—as you know from the Gospel of Matthew 1—a member of the royal family, because we have his genealogy. One of the reasons Matthew begins his Gospel with that genealogy—that everyone finds so boring when they're listening to it—is to show us not just that Jesus is from the line of David, but that Joseph is from the line of David. In other words, Joseph is more of a rightful heir to the throne of David than Herod ever was. He's part of the royal family. And it's going to be his adopted son, Jesus, who's going to sit on that throne...who will take the throne of the kingdom of David, which will of course be transfigured and transformed into the heavenly kingdom of God.

Alright, just a little bit there about that very rich passage on the flight to Egypt. Maybe that's more than you ever wanted to know, but it's a really important passage for the feast of the Holy Family. And I'm giving attention to it too, because we often give St. Joseph a rather short shrift. He doesn't get as much attention as he deserves, and so I want to make sure we give him his due here. It shows us that not only does Jesus fulfill prophecies during His public ministries, but His father, Joseph (His adoptive father), is also a fulfiller of prophecy through the choices and the actions he makes with the Holy Family.

Alright, so that's the Gospel for today. If we go back to the Old Testament, every year on the feast of the Holy Family, we're going to have the same Old Testament

reading and the same psalm and the same second reading. So this is one of those feasts...there will be certain feast days where the Old Testament, the psalm, and the second reading are going to stay the same every single year, but the Gospel changes in Year A, B, and C. So we'll look briefly here at the Old Testament readings for today for this year.

In the book of Sirach 3:2-6, the Church chooses here one of the most famous texts of the Old Testament on the family. Beautiful text that says this:

For the Lord honored the father above the children,
and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons.
Whoever honors his father atones for sins,
and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure.
Whoever honors his father will be gladdened by his own children,
and when he prays he will be heard.
Whoever glorifies his father will have long life,
and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother;

And then it skips down to verse 12:

O son, help your father in his old age,
and do not grieve him as long as he lives;
even if he is lacking in understanding, show forbearance;
in all your strength do not despise him.
For kindness to a father will not be forgotten,
and against your sins it will be credited to you...

There's a lot going on there that we can all pray with. This is one of those passages in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament—books like Proverbs and Psalms and Sirach—which are universal in their application. They tend to talk about universal human experience. Very different from the laws of Moses, like in Leviticus or Exodus, which are very specific to the people of Israel. The wisdom literature is universal. All of us can identify here with the command to honor our father and to glorify our mother.

And what Sirach is basically doing is expanding on the Ten Commandments, the fourth of which is “Honor your father and your mother.” And what Sirach is saying here is, not only should we do that out of obedience to God, but when we honor our father and when we glorify our mother, we actually atone for our sins.

It’s interesting. There are not a lot of actions in the Bible that are explicitly said to atone for sin. Usually, if you want to atone for sin, what do you have to do? You have to go to the temple, you have to get a lamb or a goat or a bull, you have to sacrifice it, and you offer it as a sin offer to atone for sin. But there are certain other kinds of actions that we would characterize as ethical or moral...but which in the Old Testament are described as having liturgical power, as having atoning power for sin. And honoring your father and glorifying your mother are precisely those two.

So this is one of those things that of course we have to learn as children, but also carries out on into our adulthood. So if you see in the second section of the Old Testament reading there, it talks about when our parents get old. And care for elderly parents—in this case, it’s focused on the father—even when your father, his mind is starting to go, that we still have to practice that respect to our parents that is implicit in the commandment. So although of course, obviously, obedience to the parents is going to be something that only lasts as long as you’re within their home—when you’re an adult, you move out on your own—respect for the parents and honor of the parents is something that goes all the way to the end of their life, including old age and perhaps the eclipse of the rational powers of our parents as they get older. Even in ancient times, just as today, despite all our medicines, many people may experience dementia and other...Alzheimer’s disease and other kinds of maladies that are associated with old age.

And it can be a temptation to pull away from parents, to not care for them, or even to mock them or get frustrated with the effects of aging. And Sirach here is very clear that we are not to grieve our parents as long as they live, and that:

...kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and against your sins it will be credited to you... (Sirach 3:14)

So it's very interesting here that the honoring of parents is an act of righteousness which atones for sin. It's very powerful. The Bible says that about a few things. Honoring your parents is one of them, and also the giving of alms to the poor is another thing that atones for sin. So something to be wary of there, be cautious about, because there can be a temptation to be harder on our parents than we are on anyone else. And the Bible says the exact opposite. We're supposed to honor them above everyone else.

Alright, so that's a little wisdom from Sirach that you can take with you. The psalm for today is a beautiful psalm, Psalm 128—one of our my favorites. It's just a portrait of the Holy Family. It's actually...this psalm is the psalm that Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (On Love in the Family), he opens the apostolic exhortation with this imagery of Psalm 128, with the picture of the family in Psalm 128. And it says this:

Blessed is every one who fears the Lord,
who walks in his ways!
You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.
Lo, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.

The Lord bless you from Zion!
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life!
May you see your children's children!
Peace be upon Israel!

Beautiful, beautiful passage there. Again, notice the psalm here, although it applies to everyone, it—kind of like the Gospel of Matthew—it's written from the perspective of the father. It's kind of addressing fathers in particular and describing the happiness of a father both in terms of the fruitfulness of wife. It says:

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house... (Psalm 128:3a)

So what does a vine do? It bears much fruit. And:

...your children will be like olive shoots around your table. (Psalm 128:3b)

What does the olive tree do? It gives oil. So the great vine and the olive tree were two of the most precious plants in the agricultural life of Israel, so that is how he describes the family. Your wife is like the grape vine, and your children are like olive shoots around your table. That's the blessing of the Lord in the Old Testament.

So it's beautiful here, because in a day when the family is so broken and in a culture—the culture of death—in which children are described as burdens and which the abortion of children (the killing of the unborn) is something that is legal in many places and even celebrated by some, we see that the Scriptural view of the family is precisely the opposite. Children are not a burden; they are a blessing. And the home here, the family happiness, is described as being rooted in the fear of the Lord. In other words, it's through God and the fear of the Lord—which means obedience to God—that blessing comes into the family.

So this...although St. Joseph obviously only has one child, this beautiful psalm, you can imagine it being applied to the Holy Family. Ooh, that just came to me. Who's more fruitful if you think about it, than the Blessed Virgin? Think of all the fruits of her obedience. So she says yes to God in the Annunciation. What's the fruit of that? The salvation of the whole world. And the second thing that just dawned on me is that the children are like olive shoots around the table. Where as we will see in other passages, if you look at the Gospels when we get to Passion week and whatnot, there's a connection between Jesus and the olive tree. He's going to go into the garden of Gethsemane during His passion, and the garden of Gethsemane was an olive orchard. So what's going to be the fruit of the passion of Christ? Again, the salvation of the whole world.

So it's a beautiful psalm here for today, already in a sense starting to point us forward to the passion of Christ—getting us to look ahead, just like the massacre of the infants does and the flight to Egypt. Ultimately, the true exodus will take place on the cross and the resurrection.

So I'd just like to close today—in honor of St. Joseph on the feast of the Holy Family—with a quote from St. John Paul II. A lot of people don't know it, but St. John Paul II wrote an apostolic exhortation on the person and the mission of St. Joseph. The Latin title is the Guardian of the Redeemer, *Redemptoris Custos*—the custodian of the Redeemer. And I'll end with these words from St. John Paul II about St. Joseph and the life of the Church:

And so Jesus' way back to Nazareth from Bethlehem passed through Egypt. Just as Israel had followed the path of the exodus "from the condition of slavery" in order to begin the Old Covenant, so Joseph, guardian and cooperator in the providential mystery of God, even in exile watched over the one who brings about the New Covenant.... One hundred years ago, Pope Leo XIII had already exhorted the Catholic world to pray for the protection of St. Joseph, Patron of the whole Church.

Since that time—as I recalled at the beginning of this Exhortation—the Church has implored the protection of St. Joseph on the basis of “that sacred bond of charity which united him to the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God,” and the Church has commended to Joseph all of her cares, including those dangers which threaten the human family. Even today we have many reasons to pray in a similar way:

And here he's quoting Pope Leo XIII. So John Paul II's quoting Pope Leo XIII in this prayer to St. Joseph:

“Most beloved father, dispel the evil of falsehood and sin...graciously assist us from heaven in our struggle with the powers of darkness...and just as once you saved the Child Jesus from mortal danger, so now defend God's holy

Church from the snares of her enemies and from all adversity.” Today we still have good reason to commend everyone to St. Joseph.²

Okay, so notice there what John Paul II did. I just want to highlight three things, and then I’ll bring it to a close. First, he highlights Joseph’s role as the guardian of the Redeemer. And I think this is often something we don’t think about enough. We often think of Joseph as the breadwinner...his labor as a carpenter providing for the Holy Family. And that’s totally true. But that wasn’t his only role. Before, in a sense, he was breadwinner for the family in Nazareth, he was their guardian. He was their protector. He was the custodian of the Holy Family. He kept them alive. He kept them safe in the face of the threat of King Herod.

So I think that’s the first point. The second point here is that precisely because of his role of protector, Joseph takes on the role of guardian or protector of the whole Church. So you may have wondered, why do we call St. Joseph the patron of the universal Church? Well, because remember, the Church is the body of Christ. And who was the first guardian of the body of the Incarnate Christ? Well, it was Joseph. So just as Joseph protected the infant Christ in the flight from Egypt, so now he protects and he guards the entire Church. So that Leo XIII and then John Paul II following him, have entrusted the Church to the protection of St. Joseph, because if he was good enough to protect Jesus from King Herod, he’s also strong enough and powerful enough in his intercession to protect the whole Church.

And then third and finally, I would just say that Joseph then becomes a model for every father of every family. Too often, we think of the father’s role only as breadwinner—like Joseph, working and providing for the family. We don’t often enough think of the father as the protector of the family from the forces of evil and from the forces of wickedness in the world. And we live in a beautiful world. Yes, it’s a wonderful world, but it’s also a very wicked world. There’s also a lot of evil in the world that attempts to destroy the family and to destroy, especially destroy children—to corrupt their minds, to corrupt their hearts. And the father’s role, just like Joseph’s role, is to be the guardian...is to be the protector. Not just the

² John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation On the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph, *Redemptoris Custos*, no. 14, 31

breadwinner, but the protector of the family from the evil influences and the evil forces in the world that seek to destroy the family. And the way a father does that is the same way St. Joseph did it. It's by listening to the voice of God. So when Joseph hears the Word of God, he obeys it.

So I just take this day as an encouragement to all fathers out there. You might think, "Dr. Pitre, I hadn't had an angel appear to me in a dream lately." Okay, well, you don't have to, because God has said quite a bit in this little book called the Bible. So He's given us the Scriptures. He's given us His Word. So in imitation of St. Joseph, what we can do is read the Word of God, obey the Word of God, and in doing that, bring spiritual guardianship and protection to our families.

In closing, one last point. You might be wondering, "Well, hold on, Dr. Pitre...what about the second reading? I noticed you skipped over that difficult passage for today. 'Wives, be subject to your husbands.'" But I didn't skip it. We do address it, though, in another video. Because it's a little more of a complicated topic, and it takes a little more depth, we didn't want to pack all this into one video. So if you check out the video on St. Paul and on the second reading for today, I'll go through the reading from Colossians and Paul's teaching on wives and husbands and children and their role within the family as an imitation of Christ's love for the Church.