Reflecting
On Sunday’s Readings

December 2020

The following series is free, downloadable small-group materials based on each week’s Mass readings and the seasons of the liturgical year. Each study provides an introductory reflection on some aspect of the readings or on personal spirituality. Each of the readings is provided along with a few questions designed to engage the heart and stimulate the group’s discussion. These small-group materials will be provided on a continuing basis in monthly segments.

We would suggest the following 60-to-90 minutes format for the small group:

1. Open with a moment of quiet reflection and prayer.

2. Discuss the introductory reflection with a question or comment like, “What do you feel is important for us to grasp in this introduction?” or “What stood out to you from these opening paragraphs?” As the facilitator of the discussion be ready to share one or two things which were important to you from the introduction.

3. Have someone read the First Reading and ask several people to share their answers to the reflection questions. Effective group-dynamic techniques should be used to further stimulate the discussion and affirm the participation. (The booklet A Facilitator’s Guide: is available from Emmaus Journey to provide additional practical training for leading lively and informative small-group discussions.)

4. The Responsorial Psalm provides a reflective transition from the First Reading to the Gospel Reading, so have the Psalm read aloud. You may do this without additional comment, or you may want to draw their attention to something you feel is pertinent.

5. You can either read this week’s Second Reading next and ask several people to share their answers to the reflection questions, or cover the Second Reading after you cover the Gospel Reading. The Second Reading does not always have a clear connection to the other Sunday Mass readings, so do not feel like you need to force a connection. However, you can provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to draw a connection by asking, “How do you see that this passage ties into the theme of the readings?”

6. Move on to the Gospel Reading, repeating the process by asking several people to share their answers to the reflection questions.

7. Approximately equal time for discussion should be given to each of the sections: Introduction, First Reading, Second Reading and the Gospel Reading. Obviously, if one section is especially stimulating, you should give some additional time to discussing it.

8. Close the discussion with group prayer, using various prayer formats.

We trust that God will use these materials to make His Word more meaningful to you, both within the small group environment and during Mass as you hear Scripture read and taught. We would appreciate knowing if you are using the Reflecting on Sunday’s Readings, and would welcome your feedback, either through the Emmaus Journey web page form, or by direct e-mail.

Sincerely,

Richard A. Cleveland
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Reflecting On Sunday’s Readings

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT—December 6, 2020

Introduction: “If you can envision yourself living during the time of John the Baptist’s ministry, do you think you would have responded to his message to, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight”? Would you have stopped, turned from what you were doing and moved toward him to heed his call, or would you have simply noted his presence and continued on your way unaffected? Perhaps a more important question is how will you respond to the call to prepare for Christ’s coming during this Advent Season?

Jesus of course has already appeared in the flesh. This is what we celebrate as the First Advent of Christ, commonly called Christmas. And Jesus is going to appear a second time to complete his reign as Lord and ruler of all. This future appearing is commonly referred to as Jesus’ Second Coming, or Second Advent. This Second Advent is something we should look forward to with hope and anticipation as all of history submits to his rule and reign. In between these two historical events there are many individual advents of Jesus as he appears in the lives of people and comes to reside there. These personal appearances in our lives as Savior and Lord should be recognized and recalled with equal gratitude and celebration. The Advent Season provides an opportunity when this spirit of hope, expectation, and preparation can be renewed as we recall with gratitude, celebration and hope all three advents of Jesus.

Preparing the way of the Lord can be likened to preparing the soil of a garden to receive new seed. The hardness of the ground must be broken up into loose receptive soil. Weeds must be pulled up and removed, and a place prepared so that the seed can be received and take root and thrive. John the Baptist used the term repentance to speak of this spiritual preparation to welcome Jesus’ reign as Savior and Lord. Because of misuse the term “repentance” has received somewhat of a bad rap. Repentance is not mental, emotional, and spiritual flagellation, rather, repentance is turning from the direction we were going and turning toward God’s call of love and forgiveness. It is moving toward the one who calls, with your arms and heart opened wide to receive and be received.

Preparing the way of the Lord implies a readiness to change which in the words of Dietrich Von Hildebrand “might even better be termed readiness to become another man.... To do so, he is not required literally to relinquish everything in the sense of the evangelical counsels: this would be in answer to another, more particular call. He is merely required to relinquish his old self, the natural foundation, and all purely natural standards, and open himself entirely to Christ’s action — comprehending and answering the call addressed to all Christians: ‘Put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth.’”

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,” and opening yourself “entirely to Christ’s action” is still the message of Advent. Will you simply acknowledge the presence of the call and pass on, busily pursuing other things? Or will you stop and turn, opening wide your heart to Jesus, welcoming his appearing in your life?


First Reading — Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

1 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. 2 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. 3 A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. 5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” … 9 Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” 10 Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. 11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young

1. Identify the messages Isaiah is heralding.

2. What mountainous, uneven, rough places in your life would you like to have smoothed?
Responsorial Reading — Psalms 85:8-13 (9-14 NAB)
8 Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints, to those who turn to him in their hearts. 9 Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land.
10 Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. 11 Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.
12 Yea, the Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. 13 Righteousness will go before him, and make his footsteps a way.

Second Reading — 2 Peter 3:8-14
8 But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up.
11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! 13 But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.
14 Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

3. On a scale of 1—10, with 1 being sheer joy, and 10 being sheer terror, how do you feel about the above passage and the return of Jesus? Why?

4. How does God want you to feel about his return? What would make you feel better about it?

Gospel Reading — Mark 1:1-8
1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, “Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way; 3 the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight”— 4 John the baptiser appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And there went out to him all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, and had a leather girdle around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

5. What attitudes are essential for preparing a way for the Lord?

6. What is the relationship between the baptism of repentance, baptism of water and baptism of the Holy Spirit?

7. What do we mean when we speak of “remembering our baptismal vows”

Reflecting On Sunday's Readings

THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT—December 13, 2020

Introduction: Christmas lights are one of the most delightful aspects of the holiday season and to me were even more impressive in the early 1950's. Growing up in Portland, Maine in the early '50’s every store front, it seemed, was decorated with colorful lights and animated Christmas displays. As the days of December crept closer and closer to Christmas, more and more homes became festooned with colorful Christmas lights, usually made even more luminous by a fluffy coating of snow. Inside, homes were aglow with well-lighted Christmas trees placed in front of the most prominent windows. Though my dad never joined us, choosing instead to stay home alone, part of our holiday ritual on Christmas eve was to pile the other seven of us into the old Chevy and drive downtown and throughout the various neighborhoods oohing and aahing over the lights. What is it about the lights that attract us so?

“The Light” was one of John the Baptist’s earliest phrases used to describe Jesus. Perhaps that is from where the practice derived of decorating our homes with Christmas lights. In any case, Jesus selected this phrase later in his ministry to describe himself, saying, “I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life,” (John 8:12). Surprisingly, those who listened did not have enough interest in being enlightened to ask Jesus to give them this light, instead they challenged his right to make this statement. We are reminded of this week’s Gospel reading, wherein John the Baptist announces, “Among you stands one whom you do not know.” The light was there with all God’s brilliance, but they couldn’t see it, or perhaps like my Dad with Christmas lights they didn’t want to see it.

Jesus is the Light of the world. The formerly broken hearted, those previously held captive, those once bound, and those who have had reason to mourn, who have seen him know this to be true. They know the Light of the world transformed the darkness of their lives, and they will readily testify of the joy he brings. But is it possible, even though we set aside four weeks during Advent to prepare to celebrate Christ’s birth, to not only miss seeing the Christmas lights, but also to miss seeing the Light? Is it not possible to be out and surrounded by Christmas displays and yet sit at home in our heart, and miss seeing THE Light of Christmas, to miss out on really seeing Jesus?

There are three weeks left of Advent, still time to contemplate Jesus, and the significance of his coming. Still time to ooh and aah over the brilliance of God’s love displayed in his Son.

“Insignificant man, escape from your everyday business for a short while, hide for a moment from your restless thoughts. Break off from your cares and troubles and be less concerned about your tasks and labors. Make a little time for God and rest a while in him.

“Enter into your mind’s inner chamber. Shut out everything but God and whatever helps you to seek him; and when you have shut the door, look for him. Speak now to God and say with your whole heart: I seek your face; your face, Lord, I desire.

“Lord, my God, teach my heart where and how to seek you, where and how to find you.”

Perhaps you are finding it difficult to bring his light into your life. Please don’t stand there asking the wrong question, as did the priests and Pharisees. Rather ask for an early Christmas gift, the Light of his presence. If necessary, ask a trusted Christian friend for help in allowing Jesus to light up your life.


First Reading — Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11

1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; … 10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

1. What activity of God in your life causes “righteousness and praise to spring forth” in you?
Responsorial Reading — (Psalm) Luke 1:46-50, 53-54

46 And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; 49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. … 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy.

Second Reading — 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

16 Rejoice always, 17 pray constantly, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit, 20 do not despise prophesying, 21 but test everything; hold fast what is good, 22 abstain from every form of evil.
23 May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

2. Explain the connection between our responsibility (verses 16-22) and God’s action on our behalf (verses 23-24).

Gospel Reading — John 1:6-8, 19-28

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. 8 He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. …

19 And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” 20 He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” 21 And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” And he answered, “No.” 22 They said to him then, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” 23 He said, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” 26 John answered them, “I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know. 27 even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.” 28 This took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

3. How do you identify with John the Baptist’s goal or purpose in life?

4. What would you say about the Light if you knew that another’s’ decision to believe depended on your testimony?

5. What can we learn from John the Baptist about making Jesus known to others?

6. Elaborate on the analogy of Jesus as the Light. What is it about him that is like light?

**Introduction:** “Don’t miss the message,” seems to be the telecommunication warning of our day. Homes are jam-packed with devices to ensure that even the most trivial message gets through. Homes have multiple telephone lines, message recorders, call waiting, call forwarding, cell phones, email, internet, fax machines, pagers and various other devices for making sure nothing is missed. It makes you wonder what messages are suddenly and routinely so important that everyone is so afraid of missing them.

God’s messages are the ones that are really important. In this week’s readings God sends a message to us using four different delivery systems to make sure we get it. In 2 Samuel 7, God sends the message through his prophet Nathan to David. The message was an important promise that God would establish an everlasting kingdom, not just a temporary, man-made kingdom, and that he would do it through a descendent of King David. This promise was critically important because this descendent would also usher in the means of a personal relationship with the Father based on loving forgiveness.

Years later, God sends another message through a different means, by the angel Gabriel. In this instance it is not delivered to a king but to a lowly maiden, Mary. God’s message to Mary is that she was especially chosen to bear this promised descendent of David, who is coming to establish God’s kingdom. In this message she is given additional insight that this descendent of David was to be the Son of the Most High, the Son of God. What a message! Thankfully, we don’t have to miss it for God recorded it on the pages of his eternal sacred Scripture.

As Mary received the angel’s message, she then became a unique message bearer herself. For Mary did not simply deliver this message from God, as did Nathan the prophet, or Gabriel the angel, instead she delivered both the final message and the final messenger, as it says in Hebrews, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.” (Hebrews 11:1,2) Jesus is both the final, most thoroughly revealing message of God’s love, and the quintessential messenger. And Mary, full of grace, delivered both God’s Message and God’s final Messenger, her son and our Savior, Jesus.

“And if after the announcement of the heavenly messenger the Virgin of Nazareth is called ‘blessed among women’ (cf. Lk. 1:42) it is because of that blessing with which ‘God the Father’ has filled us ‘in the heavenly places’ in Christ. It is a spiritual blessing which is meant for all people and which bears in itself fullness and universality (’every blessing’). … At the same time, it is a blessing poured out through Jesus Christ upon human history until the end: upon all people.” *

God went to a lot of trouble in the days before telecommunication to ensure that we didn’t miss the Christmas message; sending it through a prophet, an angel, a lowly maiden, and finally an only Son. Many are missing the message; some are waiting for a messenger to bring them the message. Having heard and received both Jesus and his message, we now have the privilege to carry both to people within our sphere of influence. Are we? Stop for a moment and gaze at the people within your natural environments. Who there needs to hear the real meaning of Jesus? Communicating the message of Jesus is the Christmas spirit.

*Mother of the Redeemer*, an encyclical by Pope Paul VI, (8).

**First Reading — 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16**

1 Now when the king dwelt in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies round about,
2 the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.”
3 And Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that is in your heart; for the LORD is with you.”
4 But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, 5 “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? … 6 Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel; 7 and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. 8 And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, 9 from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. 10 When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. … 12 I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of
men, with the stripes of the sons of men; … 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.’”

1. What is different about the way David uses the term “house” and the way God uses it?

2. What does this incident reveal about the nature of God?

**Responsorial Reading — Psalms 89:1-4, 26, 28 (2-5, 27, 29 NAB)**

1 I will sing of thy steadfast love, O LORD, for ever; with my mouth I will proclaim thy faithfulness to all generations. 2 For thy steadfast love was established for ever, thy faithfulness is firm as the heavens. 3 Thou hast said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: 4 ‘I will establish your descendants for ever, and build your throne for all generations.’” … 26 He shall cry to me, ‘Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.’ … 28 My steadfast love I will keep for him for ever, and my covenant will stand firm for him.

**Second Reading — Romans 16:25-27**

25 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith — 27 to the only wise God be glory for evermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

3. What is the opposite of “obedience of faith”?

**Gospel Reading — Luke 1:26-38**

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” 29 But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. 30 And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” 34 And Mary said to the angel, “How shall this be, since I have no husband?” 35 And the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. 36 And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. 37 For with God nothing will be impossible.” 38 And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

4. What do you believe about angels?

5. What do Mary’s three responses tell you about her?

6. Which of these promises concerning Jesus is most meaningful to you? Why?
Introduction: “Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed...It is right and just to entrust oneself wholly to God and to believe absolutely what he says.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 150).

This week we celebrate Holy Family Sunday. The Christmas story, the coming of Jesus the Son of God to earth to secure our redemption, is at the very least a testament of faith. As descendants of Abraham and Sarah, Jesus, Mary and Joseph have a rich heritage of faith. The Scriptures say, speaking of Abraham, “He did not doubt God’s promise in unbelief; rather, he was empowered by faith and gave glory to God and was fully convinced that what he [God] had promised he [God] was also able to do.” (Romans 4:20, 21) These four elements, the promises of God, being empowered by faith, being fully convinced, and God’s ability to do what he promised, make up the core of living by faith.

The predictions that a Messiah would come to Israel required lasting faith, because there was not immediate fulfillment. It involved continuing to believe that the promise came from God and that God would at some point provide a Messiah. The Holy Family demonstrated faith throughout the entire incarnation process. Mary exercised faith by believing that she was not delusional but that a real angel brought her a real message from the real God. It took faith to say, “Yes!” to God’s will, especially in the face of possible social and religious ostracism, by agreeing to bear a child who was conceived before the marriage process was completed. Joseph needed deep faith to accept these bizarre circumstances as coming from God’s hand. Then once the child was born it took faith to accept the homage of the shepherds, the magi, Simeon, Anna, and others. It took faith to ponder these things and raise this ordinary, yet extraordinary Christ child. Imagine how much faith it took.

“The Virgin Mary most perfectly embodies the obedience of faith. By faith Mary welcomes the tidings and promise brought by the angel Gabriel, believing that ‘with God nothing will be impossible’ and so giving assent replied: ‘Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word’...It is for this faith that all generation have called Mary blessed.

“Throughout her life and until her last ordeal when Jesus her son died on the cross, Mary’s faith never wavered. She never ceased to believe in the fulfillment of God’s word. ...” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 148, 149).

Today as descendants of faith of the Holy Family it requires us to live by faith if we are to also be holy families for Christ. We too are faced with the questions, “Will we listen and learn the promises of God? Will we really believe they are from God?” and “Will we believe that they are true and right, and authoritative in our lives for today?” Like the examples of Abraham and Sarah, and Joseph and Mary, in this week’s readings, many of these promises fly in the face of human reasoning and require us to abandon a “seeing is believing” approach to life. Likewise, as seen in this week’s Scriptures, believing faith has a sure reward for which we also can wait expectantly.

This Holy Family, by their faith, cooperated wonderfully in God’s plan of redemption, are in fact a model we should emulate. And perhaps the greatest lesson to emulate is that they were intimately acquainted with the person and promises of God, as we should be also.

First Reading — Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

1. What do interpersonal family relationships tell us about our spiritual relationship with the Lord?

2. For the Lord honored the father above the children, and he confirmed the right of the mother over her sons.

3. Whoever honors his father atones for sins, and whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure.

4. Whoever honors his father will be gladdened by his own children, and when he prays he will be heard.

5. Whoever glorifies his father will have long life, and whoever obeys the Lord will refresh his mother; ...
Responsorial Reading — Psalm 128:1-5
1 Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways! 2 You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.
3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. 4 Lo, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. 5 The LORD bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life!

Second Reading — Colossians 3:12-21
12 Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, 13 forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

2. Which characteristic listed above do you think is the primary strength, and which is the greatest weakness, of your immediate family?

22 And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. 27 And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to the Lord 28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, 29 “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; 30 for mine eyes have seen thy salvation 31 which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel.” 33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; 34 and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.”
36 And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, 37 and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.
39 And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

3. What lessons can we apply from this snapshot into the lives of the Holy Family?

4. What do you think Mary and Joseph intended when they went to the temple “to present” Jesus to the Lord? How should this concept of presenting your child to the Lord, influence parents’ today?

5. How could verse 40 be used as a blueprint for a child’s development?