



We tend to think of Mary and Joseph as mild, gentle people who held their peace regardless of the circumstances – but look at Mary’s words in today’s Gospel. They might be a serious, placid question as to why Jesus stayed behind, but they might equally be the furious and relieved explosion of a terrified mother who had found her missing child. For his part, Joseph had shared Mary’s fears as they searched – and had heard Jesus’ dismissive claim about being “busy with my Father’s affairs”. Ouch! That journey back to Nazareth must have been uncomfortable for Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

WRINKLED FAMILIES

Family life is not a smooth journey. Even the Holy Family had their ups and downs. Yet a family creates and nurtures unbreakable bonds of love. That’s why so many parents go to incredible lengths on behalf of their children. It’s why so many children try their utmost to ensure a secure and peaceful old age for their parents. Mary and Joseph cared for the young Jesus but even from the cross the adult Jesus thought of his mother and asked his friend to look after her for the rest of her life.

Pope Francis declared, “I prefer wrinkled families, with wounds, with scars, but that continue going forward because these wounds, these scars, these wrinkles are the fruit of fidelity in a love that was not always easy. Love isn’t easy. It isn’t easy, no. But the most beautiful thing that a man and a woman can give each other is true love, for a lifetime.” Family life is to be treasured.

Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

The shepherds went in haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the Infant lying in a manger.

FIRST READING 1 Samuel 1:20-22. 24-28

PSALM Psalm 83

RESPONSE They are happy who dwell in your house, O Lord.

1. How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord, God of hosts. My soul is longing and yearning, is yearning for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my soul ring out their joy to God, the living God. **R.**
2. They are happy, who dwell in your house, for ever singing your praise. They are happy, whose strength is in you; they walk with ever growing strength. **R.**
3. O Lord, God of hosts, hear my prayer, give ear, O God of Jacob. Turn your eyes, O God, our shield, look on the face of your anointed. **R.**

SECOND READING 1 John 3:1-2. 21-24

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia! Open our heart, O Lord, to accept the words of your Son. Alleluia!

GOSPEL Luke 2:41-52

COMMUNION ANTIPHON Our God has appeared on the earth, and lived among us.

**Next Sunday’s Readings:**  
 (England & Wales) Ecclesiasticus 24:1-2. 8-12  
 Ephesians 1:3-6. 15-18  
 John 1:1-18  
 (Scotland) Isaiah 60:1-6  
 Ephesians 3:2-3. 5-6  
 Matthew 2:1-12



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BONDS OF LOVE

The exhausted couple stumbled into the hospital in the remote northern region of Zambia, carrying Mwila, their desperately ill eight-year-old son. Chota and Beatrice had walked for three days, taking it in turns to carry Mwila on their backs. They didn’t stop to eat or sleep: their child’s life depended on his parents reaching the hospital.

The family reached Lubwe Mission Hospital, then in the care of the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood, in the early evening darkness. It took time but eventually Mwila, barely conscious, lay with a bag of intravenous fluid attached to his right arm. Chota and Beatrice kept their vigil. Beatrice sat beside Mwila’s bed until she fell asleep on the uncomfortable wooden chair, still holding his hand. Meanwhile Chota stretched a piece of cloth on the floor and slept under the bed.

Most families can recognise the loving anxiety and care of Chota and Beatrice for their child. Parental love is independent of time, culture, nationality and social status.

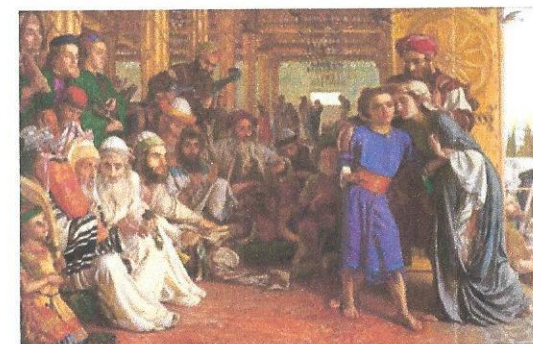
Last year, Major Chris Brannigan walked seven hundred miles barefoot from Land’s End to Edinburgh as a fundraising exercise on behalf of his daughter Hasti, who suffers from a rare genetic disorder. “I’ve been deployed on operations twice before, I see this as my third tour of duty, to fight to create a treatment for my daughter and other children like her,” he said, adding, “It’s a tough challenge but I’m doing this for my little girl, to give her hope for the future... It’s what any parent would do to ensure the best for their child.” When, thirty-seven days later, Chris completed his agonising walk, he declared, “I think it’s all a dad wants really, to know he’s done everything he can for his little girl, so it’ll be a huge relief and also I’m going to get to go home.”

Step back to the awful moment when Mary and Joseph realised that the adolescent Jesus, in the way of children of his age then and now, had “done his own thing” – and hadn’t warned them of his plans to remain in Jerusalem. It needs little imagination to understand their irritation, anxiety and fears as the two adults retraced their steps. Where would Jesus stay? How would he find food and drink? Might he have lost his way in the wilderness? What had happened?

Hope in the darkness



Sister Janet Fearn FMDM reflects on the journeys of family life.



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THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH  
 YEAR C  
 DIVINE OFFICE WEEK I