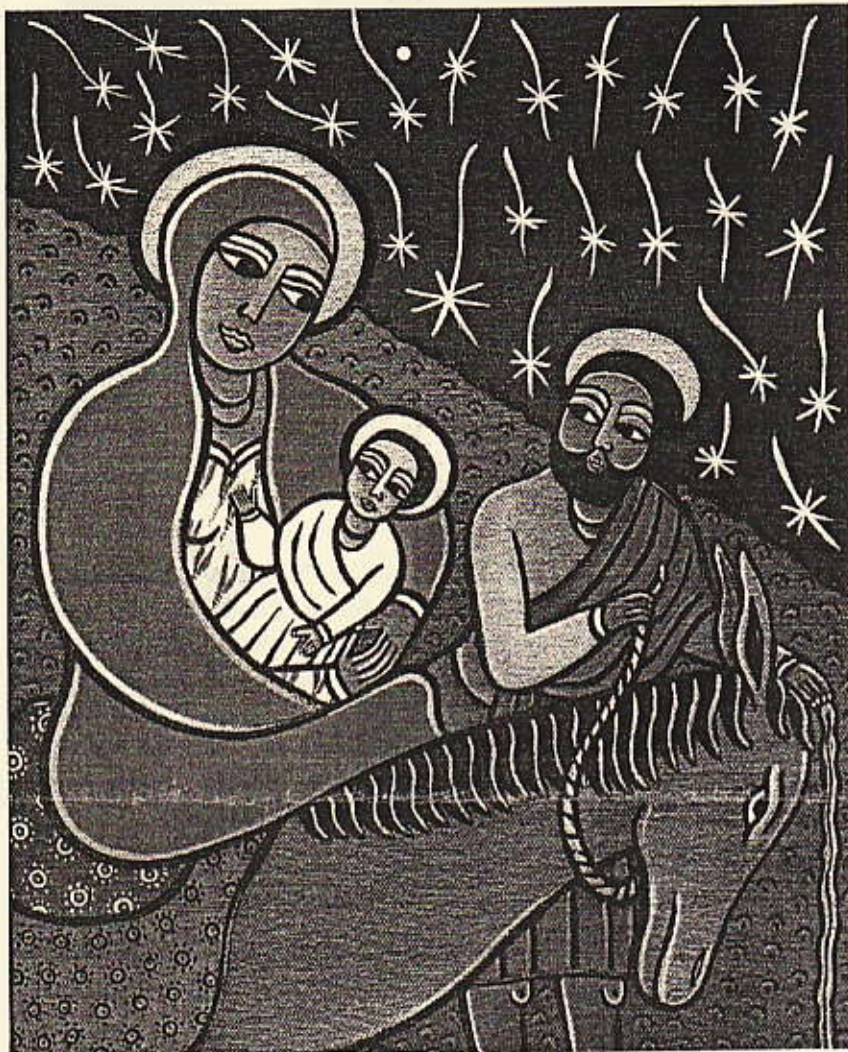


Feast of the Holy Family



Prayer for the New Year

God our Father,
we come to you as the year ends,
and thank you for all its blessings:
*[Name God's greatest gifts to you this
past year.]*
As we begin 2011, we lay these hopes
before you:
[Name what you'd like to see this year.]
You who care for the vast universe,
as well as for our household needs,
only you know which of these
will be best for us.
Help us to enter the year,
like the Holy Family,
with trust in your plan and confidence
that, like any loving parent,
you will give us what we most need
and help us to bring good out
of any suffering.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Sunday, December 26, 2010 The Family—a School of Love

Today's Readings: Sirach 3:2–7, 12–14; Colossians 3:12–21; Matthew 2:13–15, 19–23. The first thing we must understand is that a *holy* family isn't a *perfect* family. Today's Gospel corrects any delusions about Jesus' family being the conventional perfect model. If a sentimental writer were describing his childhood, the family would stay pleasantly secure in a cozy cottage. Jesus would chat amiably with the animals and perform a miracle whenever Mary or Joseph needed help. *Presto!* A clean kitchen or a full water jug.

Instead, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph share the dismal lot of harried refugees across the centuries: a hasty departure, a fearful journey, exile in a land where the language, foods, and customs are foreign. Even their return home is overshadowed

by the reigning tyrant. If Herod had been mean and brutal, might his son be like his father?

By being part of a *truly human* family, not an idealized one, Jesus blesses our own families, with all their messy grit. He shows us that the family—not the classroom, church, or retreat house—is the primary school of love and forgiveness. In ways that are charming, foolish, or violent, families make mistakes. They are sometimes innocent victims of oppression, like Herod's. None of that seems to bother Jesus. He could have become human and lived his earthly life in a palace, synagogue, or military post. Instead, he came to a struggling family, with all the graces and scars that entails. Thanks be to God!



This Week at Home

Monday, December 27

Feast of Saint John

Today's feast honors the writer of the Gospel according to John, who is also the disciple to whom Jesus entrusted his mother as he hung on the cross (John 19:26–27). In the light of this action and yesterday's feast, find something wonderful to compliment or encourage in every family member. Be creative; look hard; thank each for his or her role. Today's Readings: 1 John 1:1–4; John 20:1a, 2–8.

Tuesday, December 28

Feast of the Holy Innocents

Today we remember the children slaughtered by King Herod in a futile attempt to kill Jesus. Read their story in today's Gospel. Then consider: Where does the murder of the innocents continue today? Where do wars victimize children? What circumstances or policies continue their poverty? If you are able, make a donation to a local shelter for battered women and their children or an international fund such as Catholic Relief Services (<http://crs.org/>). If money is tight after the holidays, go to The Hunger Site: <http://www.thehungersite.com/clickToGive/home.faces?siteId=1>. One click will trigger a sponsor's donation and costs you nothing. Today's Readings: 1 John 1:5–2:2; Matthew 2:13–18.

Wednesday, December 29

Memorial of Saint Thomas Becket

This famous saint was murdered in 1170 at Canterbury Cathedral. After a youthful friendship with King Henry II of England, the king recognized Thomas's skills and made him his chancellor. When Henry wanted more power over the Church, he made Thomas Archbishop of Canterbury. But Thomas, as Archbishop, upheld the Church's authority, even knowing this would mark the end of their friendship. Henry raged against Thomas to his loyal barons and they murdered the Archbishop in his cathedral. People immediately venerated Thomas for his belief that there is a higher authority

than the state. Henry fasted and did penance for his shameful act, and Becket's tomb became an important shrine for pilgrims. In fact, just such a pilgrimage prompts the storytelling in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. Today's Readings: 1 John 2:3–11; Luke 2:22–35.

Thursday, December 30

Stress Relievers

If your family is tired from all the Christmas festivities, do something different together. Small things done together with love make the Lord present. They needn't be expensive: sledding or skating and hot chocolate, a library visit for a book read aloud or a movie seen together, a walk at sunset to watch the first stars come out, extra snuggle time before bed. Children may remember these experiences more than toys. Today's Readings: 1 John 2:12–17; Luke 2:36–40.

Friday, December 31

New Year's Eve

Look back over 2010 prayerfully. Review your calendar from the past year, month by month, noting highs and lows, appointments kept, and the time given in service. (Yes, driving grandma or the kids to the doctor counts.) Thank God for special gifts, for all that you did—and all that you were for others. Today's Readings: 1 John 2:18–21; John 1:1–18.

Saturday, January 1

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

To honor Jesus' mother today, look at the ways different cultures portray her in art. It's remarkable to see her as a citizen of the world: wearing a kimono or kente cloth, holding her child in the various styles of women around the world. You may wish to use a book like Michael O'Neill McGrath's *Blessed Art Thou* (Franklin Park, IL: World Library, 2004), or another book about Mary from your local library, or view images on a Web site such as The Asian Christian Art Association: www.asianchristianart.org. As you do this, play a favorite Marian hymn or sing one used in your parish. Today's Readings: Numbers 6:22–27; Galatians 4:4–7; Luke 2:16–21.



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Keeping the Seasons
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