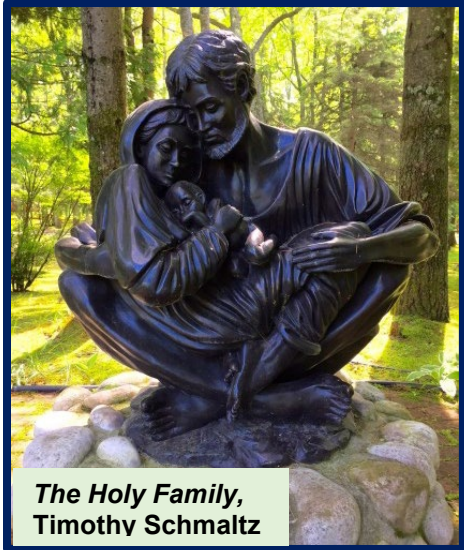


## REFLECTIONS ON THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY ~ 26 DECEMBER 2021

### The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale

Today is the feast of the Holy Family, a celebration of the life of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus and a reminder to us that there are many shapes and sizes of families. Some families have two parents, some one parent, some live with other relatives or in foster families. Some children are orphaned at an early age; some keep their parents for long years. Some live in blended families. Some live in multigenerational families. Some live in broken families.



It is no surprise that the ordinariness of the coming of the Incarnate One, Jesus the Christ, would include his mother – a teenager who became pregnant before she was married, Jesus who was born in a stable, his father Joseph who was a carpenter in Nazareth, the family of three who became refugees in Egypt, the family of three who followed closely their faith traditions, the pre-teen boy Jesus who caused his parents deep fear. The life of this family is reflected in the lives of families throughout our world today. Here in the Scriptures, this family holds the Incarnate One in its care, nurtures him, teaches him his faith and his Scriptures, and prepares him to become the adult who changes the face of the Earth.

Every family on Earth is called to be “holy.” No family is perfect. All struggle from time to time, yet they hold each other in love and in hope. Some are subject to circumstances that cause fear, anxiety, dysfunction, pain, and suffering. Some are overwhelmed by these struggles. Others grow through them.

In our Christian tradition, our first image of God is as Trinity – a community of three called by many names including Father, Son, and Spirit. In the Old Testament, God is imaged sometimes as father, sometimes as mother. Jesus is presented as “the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being” (Heb 1:3). There is no doubt that Jesus learned from Mary and Joseph his Scriptures – they were going to the temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Passover when Jesus was lost. Their fidelity to the Jewish tradition formed the person which Jesus became.

Recall the ways in which you are the reflection and imprint of your parents – in what ways are you like your mother? In what ways are you like your father? How did they lead you in the first steps in your faith? In what ways by your actions or looks, do you remind yourself of one or the other of them?

Our readings in today’s feast also remind us of the great family of humankind who live in the household of God, “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! Blessed are those who live in your house, ever singing your praises” (Ps 84:1, 4). The theme of this past year’s Season of Creation was “A home for everyone? Renewing



the *oikos* of God.” By centering on the concept of *oikos* (the Greek word for home), we focused on the integral nature of the many relationships that hold the web of life together. The logo was the tent of Abraham and Sarah who welcomed the three strangers to their tent, not knowing one was the Lord (see Genesis 18). The tent is a symbol of the call to live the care of creation as an act of radical hospitality, safeguarding a place for all creatures – human and otherwise – in the common home, *oikos* of God.

Today’s liturgy celebrates in a special way two mothers, Hannah and Mary. Hannah acts in ways most unexpected for a woman of her time – she makes the decision to pray to God for a son; when she weans her son Samuel, she makes the decision to “lend him” to the Lord; she brings Samuel herself to the house of the Lord at Shiloh and determines what the sacrifice will be during the ceremony. Her prayer found in 1 Sam 2:1-10 begins with the words, “My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God” (1 Sam 2:2)  
Her song will be echoed by Mary in her *Magnificat*.



**Samuel dedicated by Hannah**

In the Gospel of Luke, we read the story of the visit of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover. Unknown to his parents, the twelve-year old Jesus remains behind listening to the teachers in the temple, asking them questions. He is lost to his parents for three days, before they find him, reprimand him, and bring him home. We are told, “Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in favour with God and human beings” (Lk 2:52). This echoes the words spoken about Samuel, “The boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favour with the Lord and with the people” (1 Sam 2:26).

Both stories feature a childless woman, a prayer answered in the temple, a boy dedicated to God’s service from before his birth. And both Jesus and Samuel demonstrate, even in their childhood, an uncommon aptitude for their roles of prophet, priest, and teacher: Jesus astonishes in the temple, while Samuel hears God’s call at a time when “the word of the Lord was rare in those days” (1 Samuel 3:1).



The Gospel story ends with those most profound and poignant words, “Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart” (Lk 2:51-52). Both Jesus and Mary learned from this troubling moment in Jesus’ life. Mary, in the challenges and in the struggles of her life as

mother and wife, takes time for contemplation, for “treasuring these things in her heart.” Let us like Mary find the time to treasure in our hearts what happens to us in our lives every day, especially those which seem most challenging and difficult.

The letter to the Colossians reminds us, no matter what the shape or size of our family, that our families are all called to “clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Col 3:12). We are invited to “forgive each other. . . clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. . . let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. . . be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God” (Col 3:13-16). The wonder is that all of us are called to live this way – even when we fail, we are invited back to this way of compassion, love, gratitude, and peace.

As our new year unfolds, let us help our chosen families be “holy.” Let us make the places that we now call home places of radical hospitality. The Irish spiritual writer, [John O’Donohue](#), describes such a home:

May this house shelter your life.  
When you come in home here,  
May all the weight of the world  
Fall from your shoulders.

May this home be a place of discovery,  
Where the possibilities that sleep  
In the clay of your soul can emerge  
To deepen and refine your vision  
For all that is yet to come to birth.

May it be a house of courage,  
Where healing and growth are loved,  
Where dignity and forgiveness prevail;  
A home where patience and spirit is prized,  
And the sight of the destination is never lost  
Though the journey be difficult and slow.

May there be great delight around this hearth.  
May it be a house of welcome  
For the broken and diminished.  
May you have the eyes to see  
That no visitor arrives without a gift  
And no guest leaves without a blessing.

May the place you call home be a place of shelter for you, a place of courage and healing, a place of dignity and forgiveness, a place where patience and spirit is prized, a place of welcome for those who feel broken or diminished, a place of blessing, a holy place which is home to a holy family.



***The Holy Family, Jesus MAFA***