

## THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH - C

This feast is celebrated on the Sunday within the octave of Christmas and the gospel reading gives us the story of the parents not knowing where their child is, a heart rending moment in any family. The parents will gradually come to learn the true destiny of their child. The first reading tells the story of Hannah and how God played a part in the conception of her son, Samuel. In the second reading we are reminded what love God has lavished upon us, all ultimately flowing from the birth of his son, Jesus.

The **First Reading** is from the first book of Samuel one of the historical books. Israel is now settling in the Promised Land with each tribe running its own affairs. When the Philistines invade the land, through the present day Gaza strip, the tribes of Israel of necessity come together under monarchical government with Saul as their first king. He is not successful (see 1Sam. ch13-15) which leads the way to David's anointing as king. Saul continues as king with David fighting many battles for him until his death recorded at the end of the first book of Samuel. In the second book of Samuel there are two accounts of David being anointed, the first as king of Judah (2Sam. 2.4), the second as king of Israel, the northern kingdom (2Sam. 5.3). The reading, 1.20-22,24-28, is all about Hannah and her child, Samuel, who became a prophet in Israel. To have a thorough understanding of the reading we need to read this beautiful story from the beginning of chapter one. Briefly Hannah was the second wife of Elkanah but she was made barren by God. In faith she prayed so long to God to give her a boy child whom she would dedicate to God that the priest, Eli, thought she was drunk. Realising her sincerity Eli sent her home with God's blessing, she conceived, gave birth to a son and called him Samuel. Hannah waited until her child was weaned before bringing him to the temple of the Lord at Shiloh (the Jerusalem temple had not yet been built) where she 'made him over to the Lord.' The beginning of Samuel's life has parallels with Jesus.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 83.2-3,5-6,9-10, is a pilgrimage song praising God as host in his Temple bringing happiness and forgiveness to pilgrims to the holy city. The words of the psalm are fairly self-evident and they reflect on Samuel who in the first reading is given to God to live in his temple.

The **Second Reading** is taken from the first letter of St John. There are three letters attributed to John the first being the most important, possibly written at the same time as the gospel. This letter was written to the Christian communities of Asia (Turkey) because they were suffering near disintegration due to some early heresies which were afflicting the Church. In the introduction the writer says he wants to share what he has 'seen and heard', his experiences, with his readers. He picks out three main points 1. To live in the light of Christ and he lists four conditions to live such a life. 2. To live as God's children with three conditions necessary, and 3. He speaks of the source of love and faith. Love is from God so we must love, and faith in Christ Jesus is necessary to overcome the world. The letter ends with two supplementary points. The reading, 3.1-2,21-24, is taken from the second main point where we are exhorted to live as God's children. The opening verses, which are the first part of our reading, sets out the position quite clearly; we are already God's children, but the future has not yet been revealed when we shall see him as he really is. The second part of the reading comes from the second condition, we will see him as he really is if we keep the commandments, especially that of love. The reading covers the last part of the condition. If our conscience does not condemn us we can be fearless in petitioning God because we live the life God wants of us; we believe in his Son Jesus Christ and we show love to our neighbour. Whoever keeps God's commandments 'remains in God and God in him' This really spells out for us the whole purpose of the Incarnation; that we should learn to live lives acceptable to God and come to see him as he really is.