

## CHRISTMAS: HOLY FAMILY

*Genesis 15: 1-6; 21: 1-3*

*Hebrews 11: 8, 11-12, 17-19, Luke 2: 22-40*

On this Feast of the Holy Family the Gospel passage tells us much about Jesus' family. The text demonstrates that Jesus was born under the Jewish Law. No wonder later on Jesus would make it clear that he had come, not to abolish the law but to fulfil it. He and his family observed it and had great respect for it. After eight days he was circumcised, the sign of the Covenant with God. Forty days after birth, his mother underwent purification where he was presented in the Temple, and we see that his parents gave the offering two pigeons which was an offering required by the poor, rather than -- a lamb for richer people.

While this is happening, the focus quickly switched to two older people: Simeon and Anna who found themselves in the right place and the right time. This is what happens to people of intense and ongoing prayer.

Even though these two were from different backgrounds, but they had a few things in common:

- a) both were driven by a life of faith,
- b) both were models those who were watching and waiting
- c) both of them recognised and gave thanks
- d) both of them uttered words of hope.

Whereas Simeon saw Jesus as '*a light of revelation to the Gentiles*', Anna spoke about the child '*to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem*'.

The actions of these two elderly people are very significant for us as we reflect on the Holy Family today.

Firstly, we see that Simeon "*took him (baby Jesus) in his arms.*" In the original biblical language this expression of taking the baby in his hands described what the priests of the Old Law did as they accepted the gifts offered by the faithful for use in the temple sacrifices. This is what the priest continues to do at the offertory when he raises the bread and chalice at Mass. Christmas is not a one-day event. That's why we often say that if you want a dog for Christmas remember that a dog is not just for the one day of Christmas. You have the responsibility to take care of it. Having celebrated the feast of his birth we have the responsibility to hold that baby in our hands as a sign that we are committed to accept the gift offered to us by God. It is time to take Jesus in our arms. The liturgies following soon after Christmas send a very strong message that Christmas is not just a one-day event. The day after Christmas we celebrate the feast of St Stephen the first martyr. The birth of Jesus in our midst is not only calling for acceptance but it is calling for bearing witness. Tomorrow is the Feast of the Holy Innocents, those simple lives, who without realising bore witness to Christ. The day after we have the feast of St Thomas Becket, another martyr who bore witness to Christ. Christmas must translate into bearing witness to Christ.

Secondly there comes Anna on the scene. She praised God and spoke about the role the child would play in the redemption of us all. Our role is nothing less than praising God.

As people who are set to take him into our hands we are called to speak about the child and not to remain silent. Like Simeon and Anna may we, not only recognise Jesus but we be the voice that proclaims him