

THE HOLY FAMILY

10.30 am Joint Family Mass Presentation

Good Morning, and a very happy Sunday in the Octave of Christmas.

Did you all have a good time? With lots of lovely food and loads of presents?

Were you all warm and safe at home with your families?

Most, if not all of us here today are very fortunate that we had all of those things I have just mentioned.

But we must remember that there are some people who have nothing and no one, and that must be so awful, especially at this time of year.

My husband and daughter went for a walk on Christmas afternoon and it wasn't until sometime after they had come back that Sarah remembered to mention to me that one of the homeless men who comes into church during the week had been sitting at the corner of our road with just 2 packets of crisps! He muttered 'Happy Christmas' to them as they passed. I was a little upset because if they had told me in time I could have offered him some food and a hot drink. He had moved on by the time they told me.

Well, there are many homeless and lonely people on our streets and also hidden away in scruffy hostels, some are immigrants and refugees who have come here but are not welcomed and this morning's story tells of one such family – The Holy Family – Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus.

Here we see Mary, Joseph and the Babe still in the stable – can you imagine what it must be like to give birth in a draughty, dirty stable with no modern equipment, no comfortable bed, no doctors and midwives fussing. That is what it was like for Mary, and remember she was also a young girl, maybe 13 or 14.

Can any of you remember the name of the wicked person in the Gospel story, who was going to kill all the little boys under 2 years old?

Well, we heard that God spoke to Joseph in a dream and he had to get Mary and Jesus out of the country – and fast.

Can you remember where they went to?

Well, now Isobel is going to guide you on a journey to Egypt and you are going to take Mary, Joseph and Jesus with you. It will be a dangerous journey, so be very careful. You will be travelling in what was known as a caravan – which was a group of people, not a thing you pull along behind your car and park somewhere for you holiday!

In those days travel was slow and dangerous and it would have taken a long time to get to Egypt, they would have joined a caravan of other travellers and travelled in a large group, at the pace of the slowest traveller.

The countryside was rocky and robbers would hide amongst the rocks and come and attack travellers, so they would have to travel in large groups for safety. As they got nearer to Egypt they would have to cross the Sinai Desert, so would have to ensure they had enough to eat and drink.

Finally they arrived in Egypt where they were relatively safe, and they joined what is called the *Diaspora*, which was a community of Jews who had settled in Egypt – we don't know where exactly.

There is a tradition that the devotion to the Holy Family started in Egypt in the middle of the first century, so it is a very old tradition.

Mary, Joseph and Jesus stayed in Egypt for some time until the bad King Herod died, then God told Joseph in another dream that he was to take Mary and Jesus back to Palestine.

God told Joseph to go up into the north of the country, to a wild area called Galilee, where a lot of less conventional people lived!

Now while I have been talking about the Holy Family escaping into Egypt as refugees, I wonder if you have been thinking about the same things that are happening now, in various parts of the world. Especially at this time we think of the refugees fleeing Syria and having to live in cold and squalor in a refugee camp in tents. It is cold and many of the children have no shoes, it is difficult to keep clean and warm, and some families have lost a mother or father or child. They are fleeing bad people who are killing each other. So little has changed in the Holy Land and around that area.

Remember the Christians in Palestine who are being pushed further and further into a smaller area.

Let us also remember illegal immigrants who flee terrible conditions in their own countries, sometimes with only the clothes they are wearing and face terrible odds to get to a place of safety. This is usually after paying enormous sums of money to travel in often unsafe, overcrowded boats etc. They will probably never see their own country or family again.

We must remember that The Holy Family were for a time refugees, illegal immigrants, and we must pray for people like this in these days, not condemn or ignore them.

Mary, Joseph and Jesus were fortunate to be able to return to their country and live in safety.

Let us give heartfelt thanks for the Holy Family and for our own families and warm comfortable homes, and let us reach out to those who are strangers and alone and without the comforts that we have. **Amen**

Liz Badman, Parish Reader (Licensed Lay Minister)