

THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY, AND JOSEPH

Use a storytelling tone throughout this first section.

Elkanah = ehl-KAY-nah

Even before Samuel's conception, Hannah had promised him to the Lord. You need not dramatize her words, but do give them a slower pace, with a sense of impending separation.

nazirite = NAZ-uh-rit

Pause at the end of Hannah's declaration ("... as a perpetual nazirite"). Emphasize the phrase "Hannah brought him up" by keeping your pace restrained.

ephah = EE-fuh

Shiloh = SHI-loh

There are options for today's readings. Contact your parish staff to learn which readings will be used.

READING I As modern discussions make clear, it is not easy to define a family or the roles within it. Today's readings add the complication that more is expected of individuals who exercise extraordinary roles, whether it is the judge-priest-prophet-Nazirite Samuel, the God-become-human Jesus, or even ordinary Christians trying to live out their Christian identity in the world.

LECTIONARY #17

READING I 1 Samuel 1:20–22, 24–28

A reading from the first Book of Samuel

In those days Hannah **conceived**,
and at the end of her term bore a **son**
whom she called **Samuel**, since she had asked the **LORD**
for him.

The next time her husband Elkanah was going up
with the rest of his household
to offer the customary **sacrifice** to the **LORD**
and to **fulfill** his **vows**,

Hannah did **not** go, explaining to her husband,

"Once the child is **weaned**,

I will take him to appear before the **LORD**

and to remain there **forever**;

I will **offer** him as a **perpetual nazirite**."

Once Samuel was weaned, Hannah **brought him up** with her,
along with a three-year-old bull,

an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine,

and **presented him** at the **temple of the LORD** in Shiloh.

After the boy's **father** had sacrificed the **young bull**,

Hannah, his **mother**, approached Eli and said:

"**Pardon**, my lord!

1 Samuel. Despite their designation as "historical," the Books of Samuel interpret all historical events theologically. Consisting of a total of fifty-five chapters that describe the years 1070 to 970 ac, these books interpret the transition from the chaotic period of the judges to the kingdom of David. For the author of Samuel, it is God who raises up, inspires, and guides leaders, not historical or political circumstances, much less the person himself. This insight is key to understanding today's reading.

In the verses preceding today's reading, the reader is introduced to Samuel through his birth narrative. The chapter begins with a description of his pious family: his father Elkanah and his mother Hannah. Tormented by Elkanah's other wife, Peninnah, over her barrenness, Hannah prays at the shrine in Shiloh for a male child and vows that she will raise him as a Nazirite, dedicating him to the Lord's service. After an initial misunderstanding, the resident priest—Eli—blesses her and her prayer.

The tension here is between the gift of Samuel to Hannah and the return of that gift to the Lord. The fulfillment of God's promise is not without cost to this family. Pause again at the end of Hannah's statement before you proclaim the final sentence unhurriedly and deliberately.

Sirach = SEER-ak or Si-ruhk

The first section of this reading is poetic, with parallel images and a proverbial tone. Stress the parallel verbs here, showing the relationship between right actions and good results.

The tone shifts from poetic to didactic, and the language is less positive but nonetheless full of promise. Continue to linger over the verbs, building to the concluding assurance of "a house raised in justice." Emphasize the word "justice."

Today's reading begins with God's answer to her prayer: Hannah conceives and gives birth to a son. Highly theological, the reading pulls together many of the previous pieces of the story to show that this is more than a story of a family: it is a story of God's work in the world. First, Hannah stands in line with other barren women in Scripture whose sons furthered God's salvific plans. We can recall the examples of Sarah, the mother of Isaac; the unnamed mother of Samson; and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. Next, we see that the reading continues to focus on the

As you live, my lord,
I am the woman who **stood near you** here,
praying to the **LORD**.
I **prayed for this child**, and the **LORD granted** my request.
Now **I, in turn**, **give him to the LORD**;
as **long** as he lives, he shall be **dedicated** to the **LORD**."
Hannah **left Samuel** there.

Or:

READING I Sirach 3:2–6, 12–14

A reading from the Book of Sirach

God sets a father **in honor** over his children;
a mother's **authority** he confirms over her sons.
Whoever **honors** his father **atones** for sins,
and **preserves** himself from them.
When he **prays**, he is **heard**;
he **stores up riches** who **reveres** his mother.
Whoever **honors** his father is **gladdened** by children,
and, when he **prays**, is **heard**.
Whoever **reveres** his father will live a **long** life;
he who **obeys** his father brings **comfort** to his mother.
My son, take **care** of your father when he is **old**;
grieve him **not** as long as he **lives**.
Even if his mind **fail**, be **considerate** of him;
revile him not all the days of his **life**;
kindness to a father will not be **forgotten**,
firmly planted against the debt of your sins
—a house **raised in justice** to you. >>

highly religious nature of the family. They engage in the annual pilgrimage, make vows, offer sacrifice, and trust in God's answer to prayer. Indeed, the child's name, *shemu'el* (Samuel), is explained by the phrase *she'iltiv* (I asked the Lord for him), later rephrased as *sha'ul me-'el* (requested from God). Thus, the circumstances of his birth and the faith of his parents foretell Samuel's greatness. This child, who is the answer to a vow, bridges the periods of the judges and the kings. Dedicated from his birth, he serves a priestly role at Shiloh, as a Nazirite. Chosen by God, he is the

prophet who mediates between God and Israel's first kings.

Sirach. One of the longest books of the Bible, Sirach reflects Israel's wisdom tradition. Dating from around 180 BC, in a Jerusalem that already knew the strong influence of Hellenism, Sirach is a collection of instructions for moral behavior and codes of ethics typical of Judaism of the second century BC.

Today's reading describes a society where children were the only social security that parents had. Sirach, therefore, directs children to honor, respect, and care

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 84:2–3, 5–6, 9–10 (see 5a)

R. Blessed are they who dwell in your house, O Lord.

How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!

My soul yearns and pines for the courts
of the LORD.

My heart and my flesh cry out for the
living God.

Happy they who dwell in your house!
Continually they praise you.

Happy the men whose strength you are!
Their hearts are set upon the pilgrimage.

O LORD of hosts, hear our prayer;
hearken, O God of Jacob!

O God, behold our shield,
and look upon the face of your anointed.

Or:

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 128:1–2, 3, 4–5 (1)

R. Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways!

For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork;
blessed shall you be, and favored.

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine
in the recesses of your home;
your children like olive plants
around your table.

Behold, thus is the man blessed
who fears the LORD.

The LORD bless you from Zion:
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.

READING II 1 John 3:1–2, 21–24

A reading from the first Letter of Saint John

Beloved:

**See what love the Father has bestowed on us
that we may be called the children of God.**

And so we are.

The reason the world does not know us
is that it did not know **him**.

**Beloved, we are God's children now;
what we shall be has not yet been revealed.**

After you say the word "Beloved," look up and pause. This reading is filled with promise, not only for its original recipients, but also for us today. The hope-filled tone of this reading is why we often hear the first part of today's reading proclaimed at funeral masses.

for their parents. While this reflects the common wisdom of the age, Sirach also draws on Judaism's spiritual tradition. Alluding to the commandment to honor father and mother "that you may have a long life in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12; see also Deuteronomy 5:16), Sirach motivates the reader to act with honor, reverence, obedience, consideration, and kindness with the promise of a religious reward. In a world that had no concept of a blessed afterlife, the best one could hope for was a long life. And this is what Sirach promises—riches,

children, and a long life. But beyond this, there are spiritual benefits to consider. Pious fidelity to parents also leads to atonement for sin and a favorable hearing of prayer. In the final section of the reading, Sirach combines both material and spiritual hope. He addresses the challenge of caring for elderly parents in their weakness and senility and promises that such fidelity will be "firmly planted against the debt of your sins—a house raised in justice to you."

READING II

1 John. Emerging from the community that produced

John's Gospel, 1 John (together with 2 John and 3 John) responds to that community as it experiences conflict and schism. Some in the community question whether Jesus was both human and divine. Others doubt whether true faith is necessarily expressed in love for the brothers and sisters. Still others wonder if it is safe to interact with those who hold divergent views. Although the letter offers only indirect insight into the divergent views, the message of true faith is unambiguous, as the author clarifies the Christological and ethical proofs required to claim union with God. Christologically,

The central section focuses on our confidence in God's promises, a confidence that arises from our obedience. Slow your pace for the phrase beginning with "because we keep."

This letter is primarily focused on the love of God. Even here, as the author reminds us of God's commandment, the commandment is that our belief in Christ should bear fruit in love. Stress the words "believe" and "love."

Colossians = kuh-LOSH-uhnz

In the opening section, you can highlight the qualities of the Christian by leaning on the adjectives, beginning with "chosen," and the nouns, beginning with "compassion."

Everything Paul is instructing us to do is grounded in the truth that we do these things because the Lord has done them for us first. Emphasize this connection.

anyone who claims to have the Spirit from God must acknowledge that "Jesus Christ [has] come in the flesh" (1 John 4:2). As for the ethical proof, today's reading begins by establishing the Christian's identity in God.

As in John's Gospel, where the evangelist declares that those who accept Jesus become children of God (John 1:12), 1 John emphasizes that believers receive the gift of divine adoption. Through the Father's love, they are called children of God. This grace is tied to their belief and explains why the world does not recognize them—because it does not believe in or know the Son.

We do know that when it is **revealed** we shall **be like him**,
for we shall **see him as he is**.

Beloved, if our **hearts** do not condemn us,
we have **confidence in God** and receive from him
whatever we ask,
because we **keep his commandments** and **do what**
pleases him.

And his commandment is **this**:
we should **believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ**,
and **love one another** just as he commanded us.

Those who keep his commandments **remain in him**,
and **he in them**,
and the way we **know** that he remains in us
is from the **Spirit** he **gave** us.

Or:

READING II Colossians 3:12–21

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians

[Brothers and sisters:

Put on, as God's **chosen ones**, **holy and beloved**,
heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness,
and **patience**,

bearing with one another and forgiving one another,
if one has a grievance against another;
as the **Lord** has **forgiven** you, so must you **also do**.

And over all these **put on love**,
that is, the bond of **perfection**.

And let the **peace of Christ** control your **hearts**,
the peace into which you were also called in **one body**.

And be thankful. >>

Having established the core identity of Christians, the author makes two points. First, he notes that although they are already God's children, the parousia will involve more change: they "shall be like him" and "see him as he is." Second, the author exhorts them in their present reality to "have confidence," especially in keeping the commandments as they live out their identity. In the Johannine tradition, there are two primary commandments: to believe in the name of Jesus Christ and to love one another as Jesus commanded. Their faith informs their behavior, and their behavior

supports their faith; Christ remains in them, and they remain in him.

Colossians. It seems that Colossae's Christians were so unsettled by divergent voices that they were returning to former ways and practices, especially ascetical rites, practices, and fasting laws. To settle their minds and hearts, and to provide a clear path forward, Paul (or a later disciple writing in his name) reminds them of two important aspects of the faith. First, he focused on Christ and his salvific act. Second, he focused on baptism, which

Paul develops the connection between the “word of Christ” and Christian living, making his call to gratitude even more apparent. admonish = ad-MON-ish

The final section of the reading is difficult to proclaim, as it may trouble modern listeners. Your voice will not be able to communicate all of the theological nuances associated with this passage, so choose a balanced tone that simply reports Paul’s description of family dynamics.

Luke tells this story not to portray Mary and Joseph as neglectful parents, but rather to show theological themes that he will develop later. Therefore, your tone should not be one of blame or undue agitation.

The action of the narrative builds here, so you might work up to a slightly faster pace, but not so fast that the assembly can’t keep up.

incorporated them into Christ and his saving action.

These two focuses help us to understand today’s reading, as does understanding the broader message of chapter 3 (from which our reading comes). At the beginning of chapter 3, Paul sums up the message he had made earlier in Colossians, explaining the power of the risen Christ in the life of the believer. He then presents a list of vices to be overcome and constantly battled against (Colossians 3:5–9), as well as a list of virtues to be nurtured (3:12–17; part of today’s reading). Between these lists is a

Let the word of **Christ** dwell in you **richly**,
as in all wisdom you **teach** and **admonish** one another,
singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs
with **gratitude** in your hearts to **God**.
And **whatever** you do, in word or in deed,
do **everything** in the name of the **Lord Jesus**,
giving **thanks** to **God** the **Father** through him.]

Wives, be **subordinate** to your husbands,
as is proper in the Lord.
Husbands, **love** your wives,
and avoid any bitterness toward them.
Children, **obey** your parents in everything,
for this is pleasing to the Lord.
Fathers, **do not provoke** your children,
so they may not become discouraged.

[Shorter: Colossians 3:12–17 (see brackets)]

GOSPEL Luke 2:41–52

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

Each year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the feast
of Passover,
and when he was **twelve** years old,
they went up according to festival custom.
After they had completed its days, as they were **returning**,
the **boy Jesus remained behind** in Jerusalem,
but his parents **did not know** it.
Thinking that he was in the **caravan**,
they journeyed for a **day**
and **looked** for him among their relatives and acquaintances,
but **not finding** him,
they **returned** to Jerusalem to **look** for him.

reference to baptism (3:10–12), described as a baptismal garment: you “have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator” (3:10). Today’s listing of virtuous attitudes continues to use that image of a garment as Christians clothe themselves in the way Christ lived, loved, and taught. Vices are to be avoided and discarded because Christ has made Christians new creations. The love and peace of Christ binds all things, and the word of Christ dwells in them; thus, their actions should reflect that, and all other rites and rituals become irrelevant.

Following the list of virtues is a set of household codes that have only a loose connection with the previous discussion. Similar to other codes from the era, these are not specific to Christianity. The codes included in today’s reading address the relationships between wives and husbands, and children and parents. Each relationship identifies who rules and who is being ruled. Those who are ruled are to submit to the rule imposed as is “proper in the Lord”/“pleasing to the Lord.” At the same time, those who rule are cautioned to moderation. These codes may have been

Ease back to a slower pace, and then come to a brief pause after Mary says “Son.”

Jesus’ matter-of-fact response is poignant—he understands but they do not fully grasp all that his identity as the Son of God entails. Allow that tension into your voice.

Luke reminds the reader of Mary’s role in salvation history by focusing on her openness to receive God’s word and reflect on it. Don’t let this become lost in the story’s resolution.

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers.
 When his parents saw him,
 they were **astonished**,
 and his mother said to him,
 “**Son**, why have you **done** this to us?
 Your father and I have been **looking** for you with **great anxiety**.”
 And he said to them,
 “Why were you **looking** for me?
Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”
 But they did not understand what he said to them.
 He **went down** with them and came to Nazareth,
 and was **obedient** to them;
 and his mother kept **all these things in her heart**.
 And **Jesus advanced in wisdom** and age and favor
 before God and man.

used apologetically, to answer those who accused Christians of deviant behavior.

GOSPEL Luke is the only evangelist to offer an account of Jesus’ youth. In his account, he revisits many themes that he already developed in his Gospel. He highlights the role of Jerusalem and its temple as places that are intimately tied to Jesus’ destiny. He emphasizes the piety of Mary and Joseph in making the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He adds to the mysteries that Mary keeps in her heart. He also continues to parallel the accounts

of John the Baptist and Jesus, stating that Jesus “advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man” (see Luke 1:80).

The story follows a pattern found in stories of other great individuals who, in their youth, gave hints of future greatness. What is puzzling is why—why did Jesus do this? Why did his parents not understand? In responding to Mary’s question, Jesus says that it is necessary (*dei* in Greek) to be in his Father’s house; that is, to be about his Father’s business. The verb *dei*, which is known as the divine imperative and is a common Lucan feature, indicates that

something is God’s will. Thus, Jesus’ actions reflect his deference to God’s will. As for his parents, it seems that, despite all the events that have preceded this, they are still mystified by Jesus’ words and actions. Some of this is likely natural, but it may also foreshadow another Lucan dynamic: the fact that many of Jesus’ faithful followers do not understand him. Rather, like Mary, they must grow in wisdom through long reflection. S.L.