

## Closing Prayer

Loving God,  
guardian of our homes,  
when you entrusted your Son  
to the care of Mary and Joseph,  
you did not spare them the pains  
that touch the life of every family.

Teach us to rely on your word,  
that in our trials as in our joys  
we may be clothed in gentleness and patience  
and united in love.

Make us ever thankful  
for the blessings you give us  
through Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
in the splendour of eternal light,  
God for ever and ever.

*Opening prayers · The Holy Family, Year A<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.*

## The Holy Family

*Sunday between Christmas and New Year, or 30 December*

### Principal Service readings

Isaiah 63.7-9

God's mercy remembered

Psalm 148

Praise the Lord from the heavens and from the earth

Hebrews 2.10-18

He has become like us in every respect, and so is able to help those being tested

Matthew 2.13-23

The escape into Egypt and the Massacre of the Innocents

### Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,  
speak to our hearts in the stillness,  
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,  
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;  
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

### Gospel Reading

#### *The journey to Egypt and return to Nazareth*

<sup>13</sup>After the wise men had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' <sup>14</sup>Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, <sup>15</sup>and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.' <sup>16</sup>When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. <sup>17</sup>Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

<sup>18</sup>'A voice was heard in Ramah,  
wailing and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'

<sup>19</sup>When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, <sup>20</sup>'Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead.' <sup>21</sup>Then

Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup>But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. <sup>23</sup>There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazorean.'

Matthew 2.13-23 NRSV<sup>1</sup>

## Comments and Questions

An angel appears in a dream to Joseph again, as had happened about Mary's pregnancy. Joseph follows the instructions both times. His decision is reinforced by the quotation from Hosea 11.1: 'Out of Egypt have I called my son.'

Herod's attempt to murder the baby Jesus and his slaughter of the little children is in keeping with what is known about Herod from other sources, such as the historian Josephus. Herod was determined to get rid of any rivals to his rule as 'king of the Jews'. The model for Herod's action is supplied by Pharaoh's decree to kill all the male children (Exodus 1.15-22).

'A voice is heard in Ramah', quotes Jeremiah 31.15 (other Jeremiah quotations appear in Matthew 16.14 and 27.9). The voice is Rachel, wife of Jacob, and so mother of the people of Israel. Ramah is halfway between Bethel and Jerusalem. Rachel is reported to have died on the way to Ephrath (Genesis 35.19), which is identified as Bethlehem.

On Herod's death, his kingdom was divided among his three sons: Archelaus, Herod Antipas, and Philip. Archelaus was given control over Judea, Samaria, and Idumea. His rule was characterised by cruelty and political chaos until the Romans stepped in (A.D. 6) and appointing their own governors (the most famous of which was Pontius Pilate).

Nazareth was an agricultural village, not far from the Via Maris, the main trade route to Egypt. The word 'Nazorean' has three possible derivations: (1) from the place name Nazareth; (2) from *nazir*, as one devoted to God; (3) from *neser*, meaning 'branch' and used with

reference to the Messiah (see Isaiah 11.1). The readers were likely expected to bear in mind all three connotations.

## Quotations

### 1

Jesus, the future Son of Man, was to be schooled in the art of exile in one of the world's oldest spiritual cauldrons. He was to journey through the ancient land of the Pharaohs, confront its gods, and do battle with what one observer calls the "chemistry of doubt."

*Fleeing Herod: a journey through Coptic Egypt with the Holy Family* / James Cowan. 2013

### 2

Today, a few days after Christmas, the Church contemplates the Holy Family. At the school of Nazareth every family learns to be a workshop of love, unity and openness to life. In our day a misunderstood sense of rights sometimes troubles the very nature of the family institution and of the conjugal bond. People who believe in the importance of the family based on marriage should join forces at all levels. The family is a human and divine reality that should be defended and promoted as a fundamental social good.

Pope John Paul II. – Angelus, 28 December 2003

## Related topics

*For further study:*

Christian family; incarnation; manifestation; charity; salvation-soteriology

<sup>1</sup> *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.