

SUNDAY PLUS

Treasure the family

Love is the rock

by Catherine Pepinster

The Gospels at Mass in Christmastide mirror family life that is familiar to us all: the excitement at the birth of a child, the joy of the parents, the special bond between mother and baby – but also the difficulties of family life too.

Luke here recalls Jesus as a young boy and suggests the panic his parents must have felt when they lost him. And when they do find him, he is doing his own thing, asserting his independence. Mary scolds her son, exasperated like so many mothers have been before or since, and angry that he has been in the Temple with no thought of his parents' anxiety.

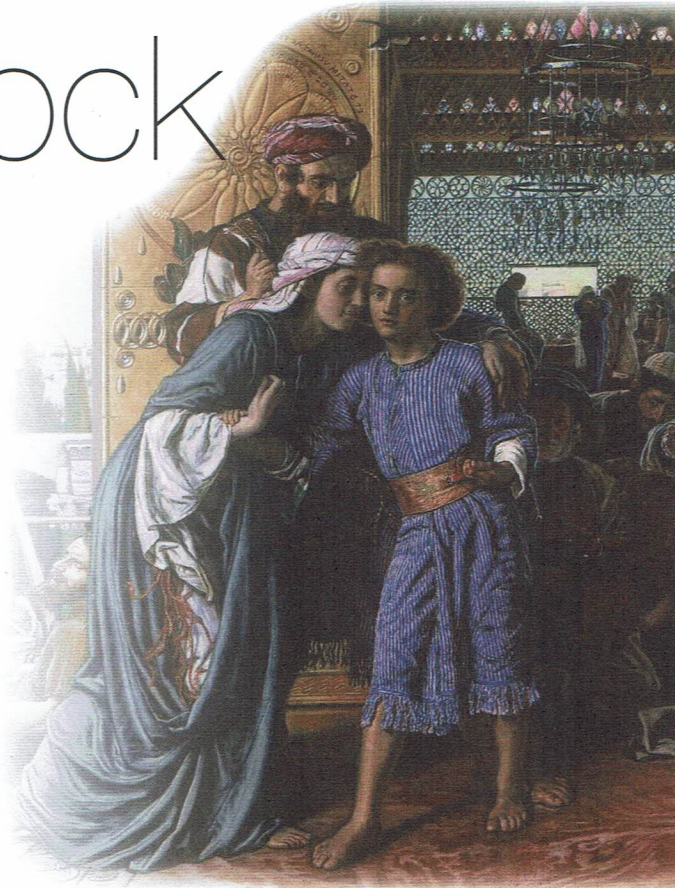
Luke's account, though, also indicates that Jesus is not just any other difficult adolescent. This is a moment of transition, not only from infancy towards adulthood, but towards his mission. He is talking with

the learned men of the Temple, and soon he will be teaching the crowds. He has become busy with his Father's affairs. This is a key moment, revealing both Jesus the human being and Jesus the divine.

Mary, like other mothers, stores what has happened in her heart: this most significant moment in the Temple and also the days when they get home again. Family life can seem able to sustain anything that life throws at it but it is often fragile, shaken to the core. Even Our Lady needs memories to sustain her and make sense of what is to come. Above all, it is love that is the rock to hold onto.

Catherine Pepinster is a former editor of The Tablet and the author of The Keys and the Kingdom - the British and the papacy from John Paul II to Francis, published by T&T Clark.

Image/ William Holman Hunt, The Finding of the Saviour in the Temple (detail)



Tough Love

by Liam Sheridan

At this time of year, many of us get together with family to share and celebrate. Scripture continually implores us to be peacemakers and to treasure those who gave us life, or spring from us. Yet not everyone has enjoyed a happy family and Christmas can be a difficult time for many who have suffered loss or ill-treatment.

Our readings today help put this requirement into perspective in two ways. First, all earthly loyalties are subject to our ultimate submission to God. Hannah, like Jesus himself centuries later at the Temple, knew that serving God was a greater priority than a family being in the same place at all times and at all costs. Secondly, whatever our earthly situation, believers form

part of God's eternal family. He is no distant Almighty. Instead, our loving Father has lavished love on us as his children – and shown us what true love means.

Liam Sheridan is a lawyer and father of three.

Loving Lord, watch over, bless and protect my family. Give them health, happiness and safety. Let us grow closer to you and to each other with every day that passes. Thank you for our joys of 2018. Be with us in 2019. Amen.

Special family treasures

by Dr Liam Waldron

Images of the Holy Family usually present us with a scene of domestic happiness. We see loving parents watching adoringly over their child, Jesus, who in turn seems the perfect child in every way. Yet today's Gospel tells us that, like most families, worry and anxiety was part of the life of the Holy Family too. The anxiety Jesus' parents experienced when they could not find their child is something that all parents understand.

Parents wish for their children to be happy. Families with a beloved child with a disability, however, often feel the sadness of exclusion as their child struggles to make and keep friends.

A family where there is intellectual disability often has great treasures

of love, insight, compassion and understanding as a result of having a child with a disability.

We are all children of God, irrespective of ability, and as a Christian community we are called to share the burdens of family life with each other, knowing that we are deeply loved by the God who created us all.

Dr Liam Waldron is the co-author of Intellectual Disability: caring for yourself and others, available from Redemptorist Publications: www.rpbooks.co.uk

“ I thank God for parents who strive to live in love and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way.

Pope Francis

Today:
1 Samuel 1:20-22, 24-28
1 John 3:1-2, 21-24
Luke 2:41-52

Monday:
1 John 2:18-21
John 1:1-18

Tuesday:
Numbers 6:22-27
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:16-21

Wednesday:
1 John 2:22-28
John 1:19-28

Thursday:
1 John 2:29 – 3:6
John 1:29-34

Friday:
1 John 3:7-10
John 1:35-42

Saturday:
1 John 3:11-21
John 1:43-51

Next Sunday:
Isaiah 60:1-6
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12