

The Living Word

The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, Year B

31 December 2023

First Reading Gen 15:1-6. 21:1-3

Your own son shall be your heir.

The word of the Lord was spoken to Abram in a vision, 'Have no fear, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great'.

'My Lord', Abram replied, 'what do you intend to give me? I go childless...' Then Abram said, 'See, you have given me no descendants; some man of my household will be my heir.' And then this word of the Lord was spoken to him, 'He shall not be your heir; your heir shall be one of your own flesh and blood.' Then taking him outside he said, 'Look up to heaven and count the stars if you can. Such will be your descendants,' he told him. Abram put his faith in the Lord, who counted this as making him justified.

The Lord dealt kindly with Sarah as he had said, and did what he had promised her. So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the time God had promised. Abraham named the son born to him Isaac, the son to whom Sarah had given birth.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 104:1-6. 8-9. R.vv.7.8

(R.) The Lord remembers his covenant for ever.

1. Give thanks to the Lord, tell his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.
O sing to him, sing his praise;
tell all his wonderful works! (R.)
2. Be proud of his holy name,
let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice.
Consider the Lord and his strength;
constantly seek his face. (R.)
3. Remember the wonders he has done,
his miracles, the judgements he spoke.
O children of Abraham, his servant,
O sons of the Jacob he chose. (R.)
4. He remembers his covenant for ever,
his promise for a thousand generations,
the covenant he made with Abraham,
the oath he swore to Isaac. (R.)

Second Reading Heb 11:8. 11-12. 17-19

The faith of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac.

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going.

It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise would be faithful to it. Because of this, there came from one man, and one who was already as good as dead himself, more descendants than could be counted, as many as the stars of heaven or the grains of sand on the seashore.

It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He offered to sacrifice his only son even though the promises had been made to him and he had been told: It is through Isaac that your name will be carried on. He was confident that God had the power even to raise the dead; and so, figuratively speaking, he was given back Isaac from the dead.

Gospel Acclamation Heb 1:1-2

Alleluia, alleluia!

In the past God spoke to our fathers through the prophets;

now he speaks to us through his Son.

Alleluia!

Gospel Lk 2:22-40

(or Shorter form Lk 2:22. 39-40)

The child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom.

When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord – observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord – and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said:

'Now, Master,
you can let your servant go in peace,
just as you promised;
because my eyes have seen the salvation
which you have prepared for all the nations to see,
a light to enlighten the pagans
and the glory of your people Israel.'

As the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected – and a sword will pierce your own soul too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.'

There was a prophetic also, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.

When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.



Reflection by Fr Michael Tate

In today's Gospel, Mary, having given birth, is regarded as ritually unclean. She could not take part in public worship until she was 'purified'. This involved offering up a couple of pigeons which she and Joseph had to buy.

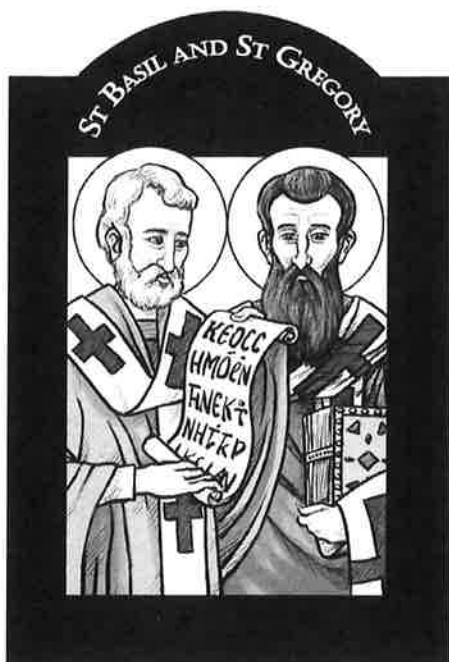
No wonder that, at the Cleansing of the Temple, Jesus shatters the cages in which the pigeons were kept! He was angry with a Temple system which saw Mary that way, which thought of all women giving birth that way. Indeed, his whole ministry is full of instances when women breach religious and cultural taboos in his presence, because of his presence.

This Feast of the Holy Family gives us the opportunity to thank God for our mothers who, like Mary, helped fulfil God's plan for humankind by birthing us into the world.

We could pause for a moment to pray that the Church changes rules and structures which confine women in cages built from ideologies foreign to the Gospel, lest those rules become swords which pierce Mary's soul.

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Wordsearch

Try to find these words:



children Egypt Judea night
Christ forgive mother sing
dream Herod Nazareth treasure

U S J I E C K F Q J U S W H B B E
K X D B K G H S V A F F S W A H X
Q Y V P Z P A I N Q Q J G S B W E
D D U V H F H A L T R F Q L J T T
T A H L A S Z V J D T U B G P Q I
P R T K Q A E D U J R L D T F F D
X N A F R Q O A B W X E R Z O X Y
B Q Z E R P V I B K V E N R H G W
W L T X O I J T H A A Z G T K Z Z
I H K L D Y S R S S A I X G G R Y
Y J C B T M N E U N V M O T H E R
M W G P H S O R D E T R E M A M M
V J S J H E E X E Z O H A G L L H
U V C Y S H R V G C B E G X Y D H
Y C H R I S T O Q E R V N I C P D
U T A E K B U R D D M W I B N D T
P G F R X U S S T K Q P S A L Z L

St Basil the Great was born in Caesarea, Cappadocia, c. 330, and befriended Gregory Nazianzen whilst attending school in Athens. In 357 he visited the chief monastic centres of the East and then settled as a monk at Annesi; monastic life of the Orthodox Church is still based on his principles. He was ordained bishop of Caesarea in 370. Basil empathised with the poor and downtrodden and was strongly opposed to the excesses of the wealthy. St Gregory Nazianzen was born near Nazianzen (Menizi in Turkey) in c. 330. The son of a bishop, he was ordained a priest by his father in c. 362, and then made a bishop in c. 372 by his good friend Basil the Great. In 379 he became bishop of Constantinople but resigned within a few weeks to devote himself to contemplation and the writing of theological works. St Gregory Nazianzen is one of the four great doctors of the Eastern church.

Crossword



Across

- 1: to have come into sight
- 3: the angel told Joseph to take Mary and Jesus to this place
- 7: a husband's partner
- 8: someone who comes from Nazareth
- 9: what we use our eyes for
- 11: to go back

Down

- 1: the name of Herod's son
- 2: the angel appeared to Joseph in a _____
- 4: the opposite of false
- 5: to assure someone of a definite outcome
- 6: this king wanted to harm Jesus

