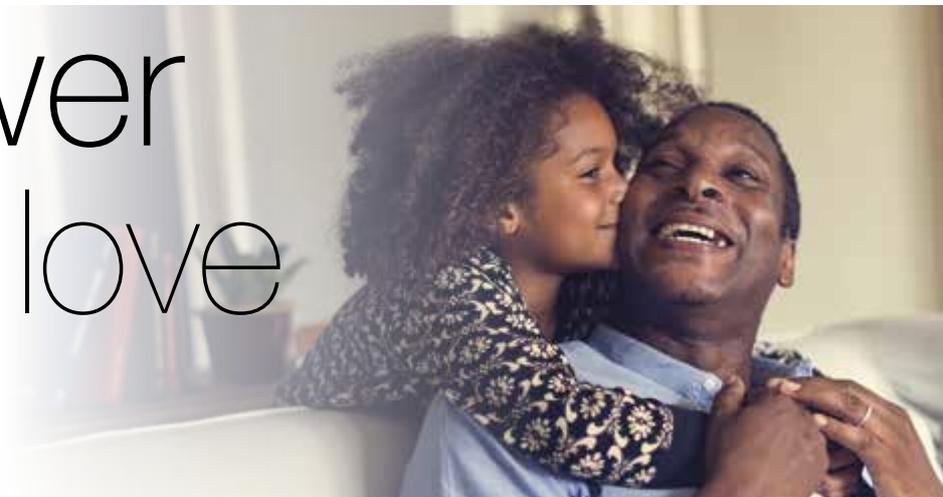


SUNDAY PLUS

Family through thick and thin

A Year of the Word

The power of family love



by Gráinne Treanor

Christmas is all about children, not just because of the excitement of sleigh-borne gifts, twinkling lights and school nativity plays, but because it is the Christian celebration of the birth of the promised Messiah.

Today's readings tell of the birth of extraordinary figures in circumstances that were at once ordinary and extraordinary. Isaac was born to Sarah and Abraham despite their long experience of childlessness. Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph – seemingly ordinary people – despite the social disgrace that might have ensued. Abraham and Sarah received the descendants they desired, and Joseph and Mary

watched as Simeon and Anna recognised their son's greatness – a greatness for which he would be both celebrated and rejected during his life.

These biblical families may be unique, but their experiences are reflected in the experiences of families everywhere today. Would-be parents still suffer the pain of childlessness, and children are born in circumstances that some may perceive as "shameful".

Isaac, Jesus and their families are all extraordinary figures in our story of salvation. But no life is truly ordinary. No life is not

precious, blessed, full of potential and deserving of constant love and protection. Families and communities have provided that love and protection, through thick and thin, throughout history. The feast of the Holy Family reminds us of the power of a family's love to enable all children to take their place in the story of the Christian community, and of the Christian duty to support families in doing so.

Gráinne Treanor is a mother of three and professional editor/proofreader who works from her home in the west of Ireland.

Stand by me!

by Des Kelly

Parents are the first and best teachers of their children in the ways of love and faith. The children of a stable family know they will be loved through thick and thin. This love is lived out in word and action. I remember when my son was small and he would sit on the wall outside, waiting for me to come home. As I approached him, he would jump into my arms: he knew I would never drop him. I run a baptism course in our parish and the new parents are so receptive, especially when I put up the following: "As your parents we promise you that we will always be in one of three places: in front of you to cheer you on, behind you to have your back or next to you so that you

aren't walking alone." Parents know that, like Mary, a sword will pierce their hearts at some time but their love will never falter.

Des Kelly, a retired headteacher, now works to develop leadership in Catholic schools and parishes.

Holy Family of Nazareth, watch over, protect and bless all families whoever and wherever they are. Let them know peace and happiness in their lives together. ☩ Amen.

Family wisdom

by Paul Higginson

Today we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. All of us, of course, belong to a family: our loved ones, both living and dead. Sometimes families argue and occasionally there are serious rifts, with people not speaking to each other. As Mary knew, the family can be a place of pain as well as joy. If I want to make my family a "holy family", then are there people I need to be reconciled with? Holy families are made when we allow ourselves to accept, affirm and forgive; when we allow that same Holy Spirit that came upon Jesus in the Temple to enter into our own hearts. As Jesus surely knew, a strong family can help us face the future with hope

and confidence. This Christmastide reach out to your family, whoever and wherever they are, and tell them that you love them.

Paul Higginson is the Assistant Principal at the Catholic Sixth Form College in Harrow and has been a parish catechist for thirty years.

"Let us pray for all the families in the world, especially those in which, for various reasons, peace and harmony are lacking. And let us entrust them to the protection of the Holy Family of Nazareth."

Pope Francis

Today: Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3
Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19
Luke 2:22-40

Monday: 1 John 1:5 – 2:2
Matthew 2:13-18

Tuesday: 1 John 2:3-11
Luke 2:22-35

(E) St Thomas Becket (Feast)
Colossians 1:24-29
Luke 22:24-30 or
Matthew 10:28-33

Wednesday: 1 John 2:12-17
John 2:36-40

Thursday: 1 John 2:18-21
John 1:1-18

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

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

Next Sunday: Ecclesiasticus 24:1-2, 8-12
Ephesians 1:3-6, 15-18
John 1:1-18
(S) Isaiah 60:1-6
Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6
Matthew 2:1-12