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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday 1-1-2017



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes. This week begins with an Old Testament reading that expresses a wonderful benediction on God's people. The second reading is most appropriate for this season of the year. Paul writes to the church in Galatia and encourages them with the marvelous truth that God sent His Son, Jesus, to be the promised Messiah, and He did so at just the right time. The Gospel reading reveals one of the prominent features of the Christmas story, the shepherds, who were the first to hear of the newborn child. [This week was written by Jesse Deloe.]

Introduction to the First Reading:

The Book of Numbers takes up the story where Exodus left it; Leviticus was parenthetical with lots of teaching about the law that had first been noted in Exodus. Numbers is a book of order, preparing the people for the wilderness wanderings. Its theme is service, how God's people should worship and walk in a life of purity.

First Reading:

Numbers 6:22-27 NAS95 22 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 23 "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: 24 The LORD bless you, and keep you; 25 The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; 26 The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.' 27 "So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them."

There are three triplets in vv. 24-26. Could that be a hint of the Trinity? In any case, there are five blessings that the priest is to share with the people. "The LORD bless you" is the first. The term means merely that God will show favor to His people. That would have been a great encouragement to this multitude of people wandering in the wilderness. "… and keep you." God promises to guard, protect, and preserve His people. "The LORD make His face shine on you." This was the request of the psalmist many years later, "Let the light of your face shine on us" (Psalm 4:6). You will recall that after Moses met with the Lord on Mt. Sinai, his face shone with the reflected glory of God (Exodus 34:30). And Paul tells us that "the knowledge of God's glory [is] displayed in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

"And be gracious to you." God is the God of grace; He continually gives to His people what they don't deserve (that's grace). "The LORD lift up His countenance on you" is another way of saying "make His face shine on you." It's a comfort to know that God is always looking at His people and seeking to provide for them. "And give you peace." The Old Testament word for peace is still heard today in many parts of the Middle East. It's "shalom," and it means far more than the absence of hatred and war. It suggests health and wholeness, harmony. And, of course, it is only God who can give that kind of peace ultimately.

To make this text relevant to believers today, remember that if you are in Christ, God extends these same blessings to you: favor or grace, protection and provision, shining His face on you, and giving you spiritual health and wholeness.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

Paul's letter to the Galatians is an argument against falling away from faith. It's a challenge to recognize our position in Christ and conduct our lives as people of faith. The portion we're reading today has some really deep theological content that is important for the believer to understand.

Second Reading:

Galatians 4:4-7 NAS95 4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

The first verse of our study takes us to the Christmas theme, "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman." It's the fulfillment of centuries of promises of the Old Testament prophets. And it occurred at exactly the right time; Paul describes it as "the fullness of the time." The known world at the time of Christ's coming was largely centralized with the Roman Empire in control. There was a trade language that was known worldwide, so the message of the Gospel could be circulated and understood within a few years of Christ's life. Many of the religions of the day were expecting some

kind of "savior." During the 400 silent years between the Old and New Testament God was preparing men, nations, and civilizations—unwittingly to them—for Messiah's arrival.

In fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, Jesus was born. And Paul gives the reason for His coming: "that He might redeem those who were under the law." He came to be the sufficient sacrifice that God demanded as the penalty for our sin. But, there's more than that. Paul speaks of "the adoption as sons." In the culture of that day, a lad had no legal rights or standing until he reached a certain age. He was a real son of his father, but he was not entitled to an inheritance or standing as an adult son until he reached that age, and then he was "adopted" legally as the heir of his father. God, in His grace, has given to the believer today the Holy Spirit ("Spirit of His Son"), and we can call God "Father" or "Papa." As the young men in Galatia, once they were adopted, they were no longer like slaves, they were legitimate sons, heirs. So are believers today; no longer slaves to sin and the law, but free, adopted sons of the Father. And it's all of God's doing out of His amazing love and grace.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

Among the many "Christmas" passages in the Bible, Luke 2 is probably the most often read. As told there, the story is filled with the miracles associated with the coming of Messiah, with a report of the first to be told, the shepherd. On the other hand, Matthew 2 tells of the wise men from the East who were led by a star to find the promised Jesus. We would do well, however, to read Philippians 2, also, which in a way tells the Christmas story from Jesus' point of view (vv. 5-8) and what it cost Him. Today's reading begins after the birth of Jesus and the shepherds hearing the announcement from the angels.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 2:16-21 NAS95 16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. 17 When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them. 21 And when eight days had passed, before His circumcision,

His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

In our passage today we read that the shepherds, after hearing the announcement from the angels, "came in a hurry" to check out the story. Isn't it interesting that the announcement was made to men who were considered to be pretty low on society's register? But, it was to them that the announcement was made. We don't know all that they had been told, but they obviously believed the angels' message. They came and saw, and then they left to spread the good news, all the while "glorifying and praising God." As a result, many heard the story and wondered about it.

We're told that Mary also pondered about what had happened. The birth had been foretold, so she knew that this little baby was to be the "Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32). There is a popular Christmas song that asks, "Mary, did you know?" Well, she knew a lot. The angel had told her that this baby would be "great" and would have "the throne of David" and "reign over the house of Jacob forever in a "kingdom [that] will never end." (Luke 1:32-33). Even his name was given Mary and later to Joseph: Jesus "because he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). So, Mary knew a lot about God's purposes for this baby, but she couldn't understand it all. Thus, she wondered about what it all meant and how it would work out.

According to the custom and the practice laid down by God for His people, Mary and Joseph presented the child to God; He was circumcised on the 8th day, and He was given the name Jesus, which means, "God saves." Thus began Jesus' human life on earth, one that He would eventually offer as the only sacrifice that can take away the sins of the world forever.

Happy New Years from Christians for Christ. May this New Year bring you closer to God in many ways.

Reflection Questions

1. Jesus, as the Son of God was truly God in the flesh whereas we as children of God are adopted into His family. In what ways have you yourself understood what it means to be an "adopted" son or daughter of God?

2. As adopted children of God not under the Law but under grace, in what ways to you rejoice in being free from the law and enjoying this father-son type of relationship with God?

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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Sunday,

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7-3-2016



Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **7-3-2016**. This week we learn something about how to find peace and comfort from God during hard times by resting upon His future promises of peace and prosperity in the closing chapter of Isaiah. We learn about the value of humility and how God calls us to reflect upon His works and not our own. In the Gospel reading we see God's early missionary force sent out before His crucifixion in order to spread the word of the kingdom being ushered in through the Messiah Jesus and about coming judgment for those who ignored His promises.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The context of the message from the last chapter of the Book of Isaiah is God's closing message to Judah concerning the ultimate future restoration of Jerusalem, the city of God's own choosing given to the people of his choosing – the Nation of Israel. Chapter 66 provides important insights to the contemporary audience who were facing threats from the Assyrian Empire who soon took over the Northern Kingdom and also the Babylonians who later took over Judah itself.

First Reading:

Isaiah 66:10-14 NAS95 10 "Be joyful with Jerusalem and rejoice for her, all you who love her; Be exceedingly glad with her, all you who mourn over her, 11 That you may nurse and be satisfied with her comforting breasts, That you may suck and be delighted with her bountiful bosom. 12 For thus

says the LORD, "Behold, I extend peace to her like a river, And the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; And you will be nursed, you will be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees. 13 As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; And you will be comforted in Jerusalem. 14 Then you will see this, and your heart will be glad, And your bones will flourish like the new grass; And the hand of the LORD will be made known to His servants, But He will be indignant toward His enemies.

In the opening verses God taught Isaiah how Jerusalem was as a holy mother to God's people, a place of safe dwelling and nourishment full of bounty (vv. 10 – 11). Jerusalem, which was at that time still standing and had yet to face the utter destruction promised to it (Isaiah 22:1-14), had been since the conquering of the Jebusites and the placing of the temple there been a beacon of God's glory to the world. The city in which God dwelled served to reveal Himself to the Hebrew nation as well as the surrounding Gentiles. It is no coincidence that the name Jerusalem itself means "city of peace" since it was (and will be in some future age) the representation of God's presence and rule on earth. In verse 12 we see this aspect of the City of Peace extolled, where God says, "Behold, I extend peace to her like a river." The next part of this verse reveals the future, universal significance of the City of God not just to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. God says that He will bring the glory of the nations into Jerusalem, with the coming of the nations is shown by Him to be a good thing. These would have been strange words to Isaiah's contemporary audience since they would have viewed anything from the Gentiles as unclean and dangerous. This was especially in light of the fact that the Gentile Assyrian army was posed ready to strike down the Jewish Northern Kingdom very shortly. The reading concludes by continuing the expression of God's peace and comfort to His people (vv. 13 – 15). God said their hearts would be glad (14a), that they would flourish physically like "new grass" (14b), and that He would conquer their enemies (14c).

This message of hope given by Isaiah the Prophet of Judah would have been very comforting to the people who had only to look to God for their ultimate deliverance from their enemies and future peace. Little did they know that the ultimate peace would not come until after they had killed their promised Messiah and waited while God fulfilled His divine plan by bringing the Gentiles to faith in Him through the mystery of the church (Ephesians 5:32). In our day we can look to Isaiah's message and find a similar application. We can trust that in the end God will vanquish our enemies, bring eternal peace to us as spiritual prosperity and ultimately will fulfil all of the prophetic promises that He has made to us. When we read about the "nations" in the Old Testament passages such as we saw in Isiah, we can trust that God has a plan for us and that we are a people grafted into the nation of his choosing, Israel. As in-grafted believers we share not only in the responsibilities of God's people, but also in the current and promised blessings.

The Scriptures teach us about the importance of focusing upon God both in the good times and the bad. I remember once a few years back while I was windsurfing on the eastern coast of Florida when the boom which held the sail to the mast suddenly broke in two and I was forced to swim a long distance back to the shore. My readers may recognize that many of the illustrations I include are often drawn from my experiences windsurfing! As I made my way back towards shore with a side-

stroke while grasping onto my board and broken rig and kept my focus upon the distant shoreline. I found it helpful to focus upon my goal as I made progress towards it at a snail's pace. It is during these times when keeping the goal in sight is helpful and how promises never to leave us or forsake us. During the easy times it's easy to place our beliefs on a shelf and not retrieve them again until the next hard thing comes along. But during our difficult struggles God becomes paramount in our minds. This isn't necessarily a bad thing because we do indeed turn more closely to God when hard times come rather than to fall away and feel that God has left us during our challenges. As I continued my long swim that day as I got closer to the shore the lifeguard who earlier been blowing his whistle at me for being too close to the guarded area began watching me through binoculars to see if I needed any help. With the whistle blowing exercise fresh in my mind I happily scurried onto the grassy shoreline of the public park quickly rather than waiting around for him to question me. I thought, how dare I break down in the guarded area where windsurfing was prohibited, and there was nothing that the lifeguard could do about it! These lessons have taught me reliance upon God and the value of focusing upon Him during the good times and the bad.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The second reading picks up where we left off last week in Galatians. Here Paul continues his explanation of salvation by faith alone and not through the works of the Law. Earlier, Paul had just finished explaining the danger of the believers falling into the trap of conforming to religious Jewish practices for the sake of preventing persecution for their faith. Paul said, "Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ" (Galatians 6:12). Some in the church were urging conformance to religious practices including circumcision and the boasting about it as though they were the religious police, judge, and jury (v. 13). Paul's opposition to their boasting is the subject of today's reading.

Second Reading:

Galatians 6:14-18 NAS95 14 But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. 16 And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God. 17 From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brethren. Amen.

In this short message, Saint Paul extolled the value of boasting only in the finished work of Jesus Christ who died on the cross for us rather than in anything that we do, even if it be of great religious or spiritual value. God promises the peace will fall upon those that walk humbly in light of this admonition although they may endure persecution for Him (v. 17, the "brand marks of Jesus"). Paul closes the reading and the entire Book of Galatians with a closing blessing in which he calls for God's blessing while affirming the brotherhood of those whom he had addressed so sternly throughout his message.

Paul's words from the reading reminds us of the Prophet Micah's message from God to the people of his era. Near the end of his Book he wrapped up the entirety of the calling God was placing upon the people in one short sentence: "He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). As we saw in the first reading God calls us to focus upon His works and promises and through this we find comfort through our difficult times. In today's second reading Paul added to this by reminding his readers the value of walking in humility and boasting only in what God has done for them rather in what they have done for Him.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The context of the Gospel reading from Luke is Jesus' sending of the seventy, an early missionary group who went out across the land in pairs to present the message that "the kingdom of God [had] come near to [them" (v. 9). This group was given spiritual power for healing along with this message which also included an admonition for those who turned against God's provisions of the kingdom.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 10:1-12 NAS95 1 Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. 2 And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. 3 Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. 4 Carry no money belt, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way. 5 Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' 6 If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. 7 Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. 8 Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you; 9 and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' 10 But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 11 'Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' 12 I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city."

Luke 10:17-20 NAS95 17 The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." 18 And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. 19 Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will injure you. 20 Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven."

God sent the seventy in pairs with very specific instructions, the first of which was to discern the receptiveness of the house in which they were preparing to enter. Jesus had earlier warned His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount about "not casting their pearls before swine" (Matthew 7:6), meaning not to attempt to preach godly things to those persisting in ungodliness and unwilling to listen. Jesus expanded upon this admonition by promising to His missionary force that those who

don't listen will be subject to severe and eternal discipline. Jesus told them that the destruction of those who reject the message would be worse than the destruction experienced by the unrepentant sinners in Sodom which the Lord destroyed by divine fire from heaven (v. 12). This missionary force returned after the conclusion of their assignment with the astounding news of divine power over Satanic forces (v. 17). Jesus then told them about how He had already seen Satan fall from his exalted position and how He had given them this divine authority which they experienced during their journey (v. 19). In closing, Jesus pointed them to His higher purpose. They were not to boast about the power that He had given them for their missionary responsibilities but rather to rejoice in the fact that, unlike Satan and the nonbelievers, their names were written in Book of Life in heaven (v. 20).

By application, the power to which Jesus extended to His first ministry force of seventy people extends to us in a certain extent today. As missionaries of Jesus we are called to use discernment in gaging the receptiveness of our audience. We are also to recognize that like the seventy we too possess divine power that comes from God according to the spiritual gift which is given to us (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; and 1 Corinthians 12:28). We are also reminded to keep in mind the urgency of this message because nonbelievers will be judged with a worse fate than those at Sodom. And like we saw in the second reading we need to walk humbly before the Lord and exalt in His works rather than our own. We are to "rejoice that [our] names are recorded in heaven" (v. 20) while using the example of the seventy as guidance in how we are to approach that that may be highly resistant to the Gospel.

A few things to keep in mind regarding the reading are:

- There is a great need for missionaries in our world today.
- God places a great intrinsic value upon each person where He wishes that none would perish (2 Peter 3:9).
- The consequences of rejecting Jesus are real and eternal.
- Jesus demonstrated the value of community in accomplishing His missionary work by sending the missionaries in pairs. We don't need to accomplish our "scary" ministry alone but rather we can follow Jesus' example and work in teams to achieve the greater glory of God.
- There is a fantastic spiritual battle that is happening behind the scenes in the heavenly realm. As believers we enter the "second heaven" which is invisible domain but which is very real in terms of the spiritual battles being waged.
- Through all of these things we need to remember Jesus' Great Commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. In the Gospel reading we learned about Jesus' first missionary force of seventy people sent out as "lambs in the midst of wolves (v. 3). In what ways do you feel as a lamb among wolves in the work

that God has called for you to do today?

2. In what ways to God's promises empower you to accomplish His work, including the Great Commission? How does gaining a better understanding of God's promises help you? What are some ways in which you could learn more about God's promises and create future reminders about what you have learned?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/070316.cfm

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Lectionary: 102

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

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Mass Study Notes for Sunday, 12-27-2015

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Welcome back to the Sunday Mass notes for **12-27-2015**. This week we open with 1 Samuel 1 where God gives a barren woman a son, whom she dedicates back to the Lord and His service. Then we move to Colossians 3 where we are told to live out the virtues of Christ in response to all He has done in and for us. Finally, we conclude with the Gospel of St. Luke 2 where Jesus begins to reveal His deity and many around him are amazed.

Introduction to the First Reading:

Gender reveal parties have become a popular way for expecting couples to reveal the gender of their baby to family and friends. It is a fun excuse for a party but the truth is, in our society, most people are thrilled and thankful no matter what the gender is.

If the technology had been available, a gender reveal party would have made more sense in Old Testament times. It was important among the Hebrew people to have children. Barrenness was seen as a curse and children as a blessing from the Lord. It was an even greater blessing to have a boy because the family name, inheritance, and headship were passed down through the son.

Elkanah, a man who lived during the time of the Old Testament judges, had two wives—Peninnah and Hannah. There was a rivalry between the two, and Peninnah, who had several sons and daughters, would regularly provoke Hannah because she was barren. This caused Hannah great sorrow.

Yearly, Elkanah would go up to the temple in Shiloh to worship the Lord there. On one of these trips, Hannah poured out her sorrow in the form of a prayer and vow to God. She promised that if God would give her a son, she would in turn give him back to the Lord to serve Him all the days of his life. God heard her prayer and gave her a son whom she named Samuel.

In the First Reading, we see Hannah fulfilling her vow to God. How hard it must have been for her to relinquish her only son to the Lord. Once the child was weaned, she took him to Eli, the priest at Shiloh, and presented him for service to God. What a great demonstration of faith this was.

Sometime later, but while Samuel was still a young boy, God called him to be a prophet in Israel and used him in a powerful way to reveal God's direction and will to God's people. Samuel faithfully spoke the word of the Lord concerning Israel all the days of his life. At God's direction, he anointed David to rule as king over Israel. Eventually another king would come from the house and line of David who would save His people from their sins and reign in righteousness. This king is Jesus.

First Reading:

1 Samuel 1:20-28 NAS95 20 It came about in due time, after Hannah had conceived, that she gave birth to a son; and she named him Samuel, saying, "Because I have asked him of the LORD." 21 Then the man Elkanah went up with all his household to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and pay his vow. 22 But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, "I will not go up until the child is weaned; then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD and stay there forever." 23 Elkanah her husband said to her, "Do what seems best to you. Remain until you have weaned him; only may the LORD confirm His word." So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him. 24 Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with a three-year-old bull and one ephah of flour and a jug of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh, although the child was young. 25 Then they slaughtered the bull, and brought the boy to Eli. 26 She said, "Oh, my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you, praying to the LORD. 27 "For this boy I prayed, and the LORD has given me my petition which I asked of Him. 28 "So I have also dedicated him to the LORD; as long as he lives he is dedicated to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

Like Samuel, our children are a gift from God. We don't have to turn them over to full-time service in the church in order to dedicate them to Him. Teach them to serve God whole-heartedly no matter what profession they choose, knowing that God can do much with a man or woman whose heart is fully devoted to Him.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

In many of the Apostle Paul's letters, he presents a tragic picture of us in our sinful, fallen state and contrasts us with Christ in his holiness and perfection. In addition, he recounts what God has done for us in His grace, when we deserved only wrath. Once we understand the depth of our sin and the riches of His grace toward us, only then does he ask us to live a life that properly honors God and reflects His glory.

In the book of Colossians, St. Paul tells us that we were enemies of God, alienated from Him and

living in spiritual and moral darkness (Col.1:13,21). Jesus on the other hand, is the perfect image of the invisible God and supreme over all creation (1: 15-18). By His death He rescued us from the dominion of darkness and reconciled us to God, presenting us free from blemish and accusation (1:13, 22). Because of this, St. Paul says we are to live a life displaying His virtues and being thankful.

Second Reading:

Colossians 3:12-21 NAS95 12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.

To display these virtues, we must cooperate with God's work of transformation. If you read all of Ch. 3, you will notice how this passage is interspersed with action verbs that indicate there is something God wants us to do. Col. 3: 2 tells us to *set* our mind on things above—that is, to think about what we possess in the spiritual realm—salvation from our sin, peace with God, and eternal life, to name a few. Verse 5 tells us to *consider* ourselves dead to evil desires. Verse 9 tells us we are to *put aside* the old self and *put on* the new self. That means to actively put aside old habits and patterns of living associated with our old, sinful self and actively live out the virtues of our new life in Christ by the power of God's Spirit.

In the Second Reading, we are told to *put on* the virtues of compassion, forgiveness, peace, and love. We are to *let* the Word of Christ dwell in our hearts, living its wisdom and teaching its precepts to others. Wives are to *submit* to husbands, husbands are to *love t*heir wives, and children are to *obey* parents. God is transforming us into Christ's likeness and calling us to intentionally live out those virtues for the benefit of others and the glory of God.

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

The first 20 verses of the second chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke are some of the most well known of the whole New Testament. This is the story of Jesus' birth in a humble stable and the angels' glorious announcement to the shepherds that a Savior has been born.

This Savior was God the Son who took on human flesh and was born as a baby—fully God and fully man. And just like other human babies, Jesus grew from an infant to a boy to a man, increasing in

physical stature but also in wisdom and favor with God and men (Luke 2:40,52).

While much of his growth was typical, Jesus also developed in ways that astounded those around Him. This Gospel Reading recounts an occasion when Jesus, as a twelve-year-old boy, amazed the seasoned teachers in the temple with the depth of His understanding of the things of God.

Jesus had come to Jerusalem in a caravan with his parents to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. A day into the return trip, Mary and Joseph discovered their son was not with them. They quickly returned to Jerusalem, and after an anxious three-day search, found Jesus in the temple, interacting with the Jewish teachers.

Mothers everywhere can identify with Mary's response which was likely a mixture of relief and consternation: *"Why have you treated us this way? Behold, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."* Jesus' response must have sounded impudent to those who didn't fully understand who He was. He asked, *"Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know I had to be in My Father's house?*

No, Mary didn't know. It seems neither she nor Joseph fully understood the implications of the statement their son had made to them. They didn't understand that Jesus was under the authority of another Father, a Heavenly One, and Jesus would soon follow that Father's will all the way to the cross. All would be revealed in the fullness of time. Until then, Jesus continued to live in subjection to His earthly parents, and Mary treasured all these things in her heart.

Gospel Reading:

Luke 2:41-52 NAS95 41 Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. 42 And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast; 43 and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it, 44 but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. 45 When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. 46 Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. 48 When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You." 49 And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" 50 But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. 51 And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. 52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Mary tried to make sense out of the events as they unfolded. We, on the other hand, have the whole written record of Jesus in the Bible. We know the rest of His story: He entered into ministry, performed miracles, claimed to be Son of God, and proclaimed that He was (and is) the way, the

truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by Him (Gospel of St John 14:6). He purchased our salvation through His death and resurrection, and someday He is coming again to rule and reign in righteousness. This Christmas season we can celebrate our Savior's birth and share the rest of this glorious story with all who come to celebrate with us.

Bottom Line: Questions for Reflection

1. What can you do this week to actively put aside old habits and patterns of living associated with your old, sinful self and actively live out the virtues of your new life in Christ by the power of God's Spirit?

2. On Christmas a Savior was born. What can you do to help others around you know Jesus as their Savior?

Readings for the Week

Note: For a listing of readings for the Roman Catholic Mass, visit this web site:

http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/122715.cfm

Source(s):

Online Scripture verses for most Bible versions can be found at: http://www.biblegateway.com/

Scripture quotations taken from the NASB