

Catholic

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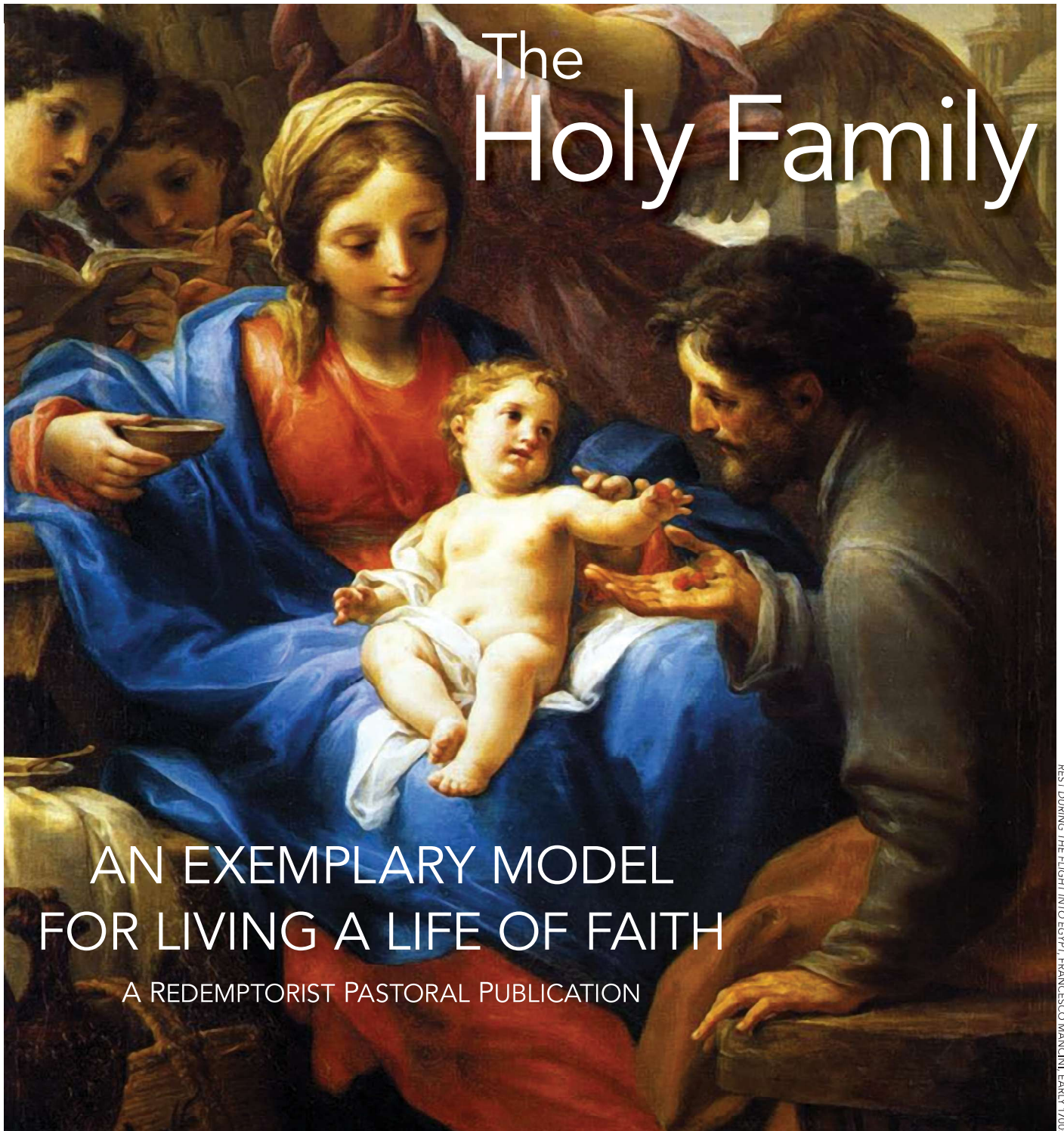
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DECEMBER 2020

The Holy Family



REST DURING THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT, FRANCESCO MANCINI, EARLY 1700s

AN EXEMPLARY MODEL
FOR LIVING A LIFE OF FAITH

A REDEMPTORIST PASTORAL PUBLICATION

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ANNUNCIATION, BAROCCI, 1852–84

Annunciation

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary.

LUKE 1:26–27

Mary is “greatly troubled” by what the angel then says to her. What does it mean to “have found favor with God” and be

chosen for such an unbelievable task? To be a virgin and yet conceive? To be little more than a child herself and yet be a mother? To call a Son Jesus and yet not have been with her husband? “How can this be?” she asks, and it’s easy to understand her dismay and fear. And yet she comes to understand and accept. For the Holy Spirit brings her not only the seed of life but a glimpse of understanding. Just enough to move her forward to say yes, she will do this.

Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”

LUKE 1:38

Joseph is anxious to begin his life together with Mary. He takes his promise of love seriously, and he accepts and cherishes her. Then the earth gives way beneath him as she tells him the strange story of the angel and of the Spirit-given life now growing within her. One could hardly blame him for the charitable route he chooses. He will dismiss her quietly to protect her name and his. He will start over and seek a new life, somehow. But then he has his own encounter with an angel of the Lord.

The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.”

MATTHEW 1:20

He is convinced, like Mary, that something greater than both of them is at work. In Bethlehem, a Child is born. And there, for the shepherds, the voices in the night grow louder and more glorious, as if urging them on. They are still at first. When quiet returns they decide to act.

The shepherds said to one another, “Let us go...to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger.

LUKE 2:15–16

The Infant in the manger was tucked into straw, his eyes open to them. They tell the parents what they heard in the field, expecting surprise but receiving only kind smiles in return. These simple men had no doubt that something big had happened, and they had to tell everyone.

Thus we are introduced to the Holy Family: Mary, Joseph, and Jesus—an exemplary model of faith and living in the world. As we celebrate this season, let us explore through the eyes of classic art how we can strengthen our bond and be drawn deeper into the mystery of our faith.



THE FALL AND EXPULSION FROM GARDEN OF EDEN, MICHELANGELO, 1509-10

Immaculate Conception: The New "Eve"

*[God asked,] "Where are you?"...
"I heard you in the garden; but I
was afraid, because I was naked, so
I hid."*

GENESIS 3: 9-10

Adam's words reveal the drama of a soul hiding from God. Michelangelo represented this essential story on his famous Sistine Chapel ceiling. In this chapel, inside the Vatican, where the popes are elected, he depicts the drama of our struggle to say yes to God—a response that Mary gave so freely.

Once our first parents were duped into not trusting God, Adam and Eve knew their relationship with him had profoundly changed. Their fear of being "naked" reflects a feeling of defenselessness, exposure, and shame. The natural next step for the guilty soul who distrusts God's love and mercy is to run and hide. All parents can relate to the pain and sorrow experienced when their child prefers to conceal a problem rather than come under the protection of their mercy and understanding. God responds as any loving parent would. He goes in search of his confused and hurt children.

The whole of the Old Testament is God going out into the garden of humanity and searching for his people again and again. Close to or on each December 8, we celebrate the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the human being who, with her yes, fully and definitively allowed the human family to be embraced by God. Mary is the new Eve, the daughter of the Father who reverses this trend of sin, fear, and evasion. Preserved as she was from any stain of original sin in view of her call to be the Mother of God, she lived a life of trust and love. The most natural thing for her was to run toward God, to confide in his loving fidelity, and to let herself be guided by him.

She is our example. If you are hiding from God, Advent is the perfect time to let yourself be found. If there is some interior wound or failure that keeps your heart far from fully receiving God's love, then take the Blessed Mother's example and return trustingly to him. Hear God tell you the same thing he told her. "Do not be afraid, Mary...." Strive to follow Mary's lead and always respond just as she did, as she says in Luke 1:38:

*"May it be done to me according to
your word."*

The whole of the Old Testament is God going out into the garden of humanity and searching for his people again and again.

Prayer to Mary: Heart of the Holy Family and Queen of Saints

Dear Mary, Mother of God
and my mother,

You had an extraordinary role
to play in the Incarnation of
the second person of the
Blessed Trinity, your Son,
Jesus Christ.

You were the heart in the
home of the Holy Family,
where you were more of a
mother than a queen, caring
daily for the needs of Jesus
and St. Joseph.

Teach me to take time, like
you did, to reflect on the
moments of God's grace
in my life, pondering them
in my heart.

Help me to see how important
it is to go to Jesus in the
sacrament of reconciliation
on a regular basis and to take
time each day to pray.

Since you are the Queen of
Saints, intercede for me to the
King of Saints, Jesus Christ,
and assist me in my efforts to
become a better Christian.

Amen.



**Mary, teach me to
take time, like you did,
to reflect on the moments
of God's grace.**

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THE NATIVITY PINTURICCHIO, 1498

Holy Family: The Nativity

In Pinturicchio's painting, Mary is depicted in royal blue, her hands are folded in joy, and she is kneeling in admiration of her newborn child. She is keenly aware of the mystery she contemplates, for she knows in her flesh that this is the Child of the Most High. For nine months, she wondered how he would be and what he would look like. She spoke to him when she couldn't sleep, prayed to him when she didn't understand, and mused about him when she was given to daydreaming.

And now the word had become flesh and dwelt with her. As we make the journey toward Bethlehem with the Holy Family, may we prayerfully embrace them as a model of faith and living in the world.

I adore you, O Jesus, and I bless you, because by your Incarnation and life you have changed my life and redeemed the world. Amen.

John the evangelist proclaims the truth eloquently in his holy Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

JOHN 1:1

The Word always was, and all things came to be through the Word. The Word was light that shines in darkness and overcomes it. But the Word was not content to sit alone and apart, shining light like a sun on a distant and lifeless planet. The Word took on flesh and lived among us. The Word breathed our air, drank our water, and lived our lives so he could understand more fully what it means to be created and loved. The Word became Jesus, taking a name so we might know what it means to be called by our name into a life of faith, hope, and love.

Mary beheld the glory of the Lord and was the first to look upon the unseen face of God. What joy must have filled her heart in these moments! The wonder must have been overwhelming. Contemplate her. Talk with her.

In this work of art, Jesus lies directly in the open air upon a rich red cloth with

the hay of the manger under his head. He is out in full view of the passersby and of you and I who adore him now. Jesus came for all and, even in his first moments of life, the world comes to him.

Pinturicchio fills the scene with those first called to behold Jesus. Angels sing from the heavens.

Glory to God in the highest and peace to people of good will.

This mystery amazed the angels, who had experienced worshipping Jesus in heaven and then saw him in a manger. Our response should be like theirs: be amazed at God's plan, give glory to God, and adore at the feet of Jesus.

Yet the life of the Holy Family was not only in beautiful, peaceful Bethlehem. It also meant the humble obedience that led them to exile in Egypt (Matthew 2:14), a scene from which is depicted on the cover of this newsletter. Joseph obeyed the angel, and Mary and Jesus followed. May we, too, trust in the paths God lays before us and follow him wherever he leads us.