



Christ's Holy Family

Message for 9 am First Sunday after Christmas Service on Sunday 29th December 2024

Preacher: Br Bill Nicolle

Greetings my brothers & sisters in Christ, what a joy it is to be here!

Yesterday we came together, hopefully with family and loved ones, to celebrate Christmas Day and now, a day later, we come together to worship and give thanks and celebrate the 1st Sunday after Christmas, or Holy Family Sunday.

I pray, that today's message, will lift all our spirits, as we journey together through this Christmas season, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, committed to lives of service, in God's Kingdom!

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.

Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our readings today, are, to me, ones of great encouragement, and all have a common theme of family and have a great message to all of us, as we prepare to move in to 2025!

For example, in our first reading, the story from 1 Samuel, is about different kinds of sonship! However, to really get the full background of what is going on in this reading, we really need the verses before, which are not included in today's reading.

There is a direct contrast between Samuel, who is not Eli's own son, and the two men who **are** Eli's own sons.

Samuel is growing up to reverence Eli, the temple and to God, whilst the two sons of Eli, see the whole "religious thing", as something to be exploited for their own benefit.

These 'natural' sons will die, but Samuel, the son by grace, will grow up to serve God's purpose for his whole people.

This links into our Gospel reading. The passage from Luke, also, is about different kinds of sonship, Jesus' parents are expecting one kind of behaviour, due to them as parents, but Jesus has chosen another road, that reflects his true parentage, and he is amazed that Mary & Joseph have not noticed whose 'son' he is.

It is interesting to note, we are told of Jesus, as of Samuel, that they both increased in 'divine and human favour', and both flourished in their new 'families'.

You could see today's readings as a kind of saga of mistaken identities, of the true heir going unrecognized, in which case, the verses from Colossians add another twist.

Samuel is the heir whom God has chosen, but who has no birth claim.

Jesus is the one that no one thought of as the heir, but who proves to be the Son of the King.

And, as Colossians reminds us, we are the ones, who are to put on the heir's clothes and stand in the place that he has made for us in his family.

It is striking that we are told in Colossians to 'clothe' ourselves with all the virtues, and I quote.

¹² As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

We are not told that we have to become naturally good, all at once, but that we have to learn to put goodness, as a deliberate choice, out of love.

And the love that makes us want to do it is given to us as a gift to enable us to do it.

If we are to act this part with any success, we have to study the true heir, Jesus, learn what he is like, copy his gestures, let his word 'dwell' in us 'richly', and 'do everything' in his name.

These 'clothes' that we are to put on, just think, they could be a bit like the robe that Hannah brought Samuel on her annual visit to the temple.

Just think,the thought of Hannah, year by year, remembering how big Samuel had been last time, making a robe bit bigger, and allowing room for another year's growth, is one of those little understated stories that you just can't forget.

We are the ones who can come into the family because of the sacrifice of the Son, but God has clothes for us, too. The clothes that God makes for us to wear allow plenty of room for growth.

None of us is big enough to fit into them properly, yet, because they are the clothes of the Son.

But perhaps if we put them on, resolutely and with all the help God offers, they will eventually transform us into his likeness.

Let us remember that we are not a group of individuals without any close ties. Together, we form the family of the people of God.

As the words from Colin Buchanan's song encourages us,

Little by little, every day. Little by little, in every way. Jesus is changing me! Amen.