

## ***The Best of Parenting***

### **Reflection on the Gospel-Feast of the Holy Family Year B (Luke 2:22-40)**

**-Veronica Lawson RSM**

The time between Christmas and New Year is often family time, a time to think about what family means, to reflect on the successes and struggles of the past year and to consider the inevitable challenges of the year to come. It can be a difficult time for families facing financial or other concerns. It can be a time to connect with those who are alone or struggling in some way. Few families are exempt from the “sword” that pierces the soul.

The first and second readings for today engage the family story of Sarah and Abraham, of God's promise to give them a child, and of the fulfilment of that promise in the most unlikely of circumstances. The wonder of God's ways and the need to trust in God are at the heart of their story. At the same time, there is humour reflected in Abraham's choice of name for their son: “Isaac” means “he laughed”. Does Abraham detect God's humour in providing a son for an elderly couple? Does he laugh for sheer joy at the birth of the child who will hold the traditions of the past and the hopes of the future? Whatever about this, the family story of Sarah, Abraham and Isaac foreshadows the even more extraordinary family story to be found in today's gospel.

Luke depicts Mary and Joseph as observant Jews bringing their child to the Jerusalem Temple in accordance with the ritual requirements of the Law, even if the Law applied only to the woman who had given birth and not to the man. Two prophetic figures, Anna and Simeon, recognise God's saving and redemptive purpose at work in this child who is presented in the Temple. Mary and Joseph listen in wonderment at what is said of their child. When they have “fulfilled the demands of the Law”, they return to their hometown of Nazareth.

In the care of Mary and Joseph, the child Jesus grows to maturity, is filled with wisdom and God's favour is with him. Luke's summary statement introduces us to the wonderful world of a grace-filled family home. It invites us to ponder the wisdom that both Mary and Joseph had to share with their child. They taught him to pray and told him the stories of his people. They filled him with wonder at the goodness of God and of God's creation. They mediated the grace and favour of God and watched him grow and gain the strength he needed for life. They allowed him the freedom to develop his own personality and to find his own Spirit-filled way on the earth. Finally, they had to let him go so that he might follow a path that was beyond their imagining when they came to the Temple in fulfilment of the Law. In other words, while they did what so many parents would want to do for their children, they knew the pain involved even in the best of parenting.