

Families

Into. About fifty years ago it was fairly common for generations of our families to be born, grow up and live in the same place. Grandparents, parents and children often lived in the same building or neighborhood. Then that began to change. Fewer people worked at one company for thirty or forty years and moved to a job wherever they received better pay and working conditions. Even in later years, people retire and move to places for better weather or financial reasons. Joseph and Mary's reason for moving, like some families today, was for the safety of their child.

I. Just when they were preparing to return home after the extra ordinary events surrounding the birth of their son, another dream and another Word: run and hide in the foreign land of Egypt. Egypt – the

place of one of the worst times in the Israelites' history. So Joseph and Mary took their new-born son and were on the road farther away from their families and friends. How difficult that must have been. They could not introduce their child to their parents or friends. They had no way to communicate with their families, who only knew they had disappeared and were possibly dead. We don't know how long they stayed in Egypt. We *do* know that even when told in another dream it was safe to return to Israel, Joseph was afraid to go back to Bethlehem. He and Mary and the child settled in the town of Nazareth. The Lord's early years were spent moving and living, not among his own people, but among strangers. In Nazareth, he was the new kid in town. For many of us who come from non-traditional families, today's readings may be difficult to hear.

In some ways this family does not look like ours [C. Dempsey, *NCR*]. But this celebration of the Holy Family is *not* about it being the model of the “perfect” family, just a family trying to live their faith, taking care of one another. We know from scripture they had some of the usual difficulties most families have. Remember the young Jesus went missing in the temple; he stayed behind listening to the teachers without telling his parents where he was going. There is a scripture passage of Joseph and Mary angry with him for scaring them. They did not understand his explanation but he obeyed his parents and went home with them.

Concl. There is no “perfect” family. We disagree, get mad, and try to forgive one another. Families struggle with problems, not all of our own making. Unequal opportunities for education and good jobs;

major illnesses; natural disasters like hurricanes and tornadoes; war and violence. All test the strength of our families. Joseph and Mary did the best they could to give their child a safe and healthy home, even though it was far from the so-called normal life. St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians reminds us, over “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience...and forgiving one another,” put on love, “the bond of perfection.” It is what makes family, whether by birth or by choice of friendship. If in all our relationships we can do that, even imperfectly, we can model a holy family, a family that is related to one another no matter *where* or *how* we were born.

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