**December 26, 2021**

**Feast of the Holy Family**

**Solidarity with Sisters Communal Prayer for Sunday, December 26, 2021**

*¨You don’t choose your family. They are God’s gift to you, as you are to them.¨ — Desmond Tutu*

*“Ohana means family and family means nobody gets left behind or forgotten.” – Stitch*

**HELLOs** and then Betty mutes everyone. **(Betty Thompson)**

**WELCOME (Lynn Bufka)**

Welcome, everyone!

* Introductions – people who haven’t been here before?
* I was privileged to prepare this communal prayer.
* Thanks to Claire, Conrad and Mary Fernandes for our music (my sister-in-law, husband and niece).
* Thanks to the people who will be reading and leading us in prayer today: Jim De Quattro, Ann Jelen, Bob Gallagher, Maryann Dolan, Peggy Thompson, Kathy and Bill Cavanaugh, Kathy Linaberry, and Terri Butel.
* If you’d like to read on future Sundays, please get in touch.

**SETTLING IN (Lynn Bufka)**

After each sentence, we will slow down, pause and breathe. (Pause, breathe.) Let us slow down and settle and be in this moment. (Pause, breathe.) Let us recognize the gift of one another and that we, together, are family. (Pause, breathe.) Let this time be filled with the joy of the spirit. (Pause, breathe.)

Now Claire, Conrad and Mary will lead us into our celebration.

**OPENING – O Come, All Ye Faithful (Claire, Conrad, Mary)**

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;

Come and behold him, born the King of angels.

O come let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation, Sing all ye citizens of heav’n above!

Glory to God, all glory in the highest.

O come let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Yes, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning, Jesus to thee be all glory giv’n.

Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing.

O come let us adore him, O come, let us adore him, O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

**The First Nowell**

The first Nowell, the angel did say, was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;

In fields where they lay keeping their sheep, on a cold winter’s night that was so deep.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell. Born is the King of Israel.

They looked up and saw a star, Shining in the east, beyond them far.

And to the earth it gave great light, and so it continued both day and night.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell. Born is the King of Israel.

This star drew nigh to the northwest, O’er Bethlehem it took its rest.

And there it did both stop and stay, Right over the place where Jesus lay.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell. Born is the King of Israel.

**GREETING (Lynn Bufka)**

Beloved Community, rejoice!We are the family of God! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**All:** Thanks be to God! Alleluia! Alleluia!

**CALL TO WORSHIP (Kathy Linaberry)**

Families are the people we come to know first upon entering the world. For many of us, our families showed us how to live and act by their actions and what they said. Some of us ‘found’ our families as we grew older and these too were places of love and nourishment. As we celebrate the Holy family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, may our reflection this day guide us to treat everyone as a beloved member of our family.

**GATHERING PRAYER (Kathy Linaberry)**

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in you we contemplate the splendor of love, to you we turn with trust.

Grant that our gathering may be a place of communion and prayer. Blessed Be.

**INTRODUCTION TO THEME (Terri Butel)**

Jesus was once a child. Jesus was born to parents and had a family. Such an ordinary experience, and something we all can relate to. Our families are messy and imperfect but we also find love and forgiveness and grace. In the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, God reveals our home. We’re to live as God’s children, “chosen ones, holy and beloved,” as the First Reading puts it. But we are invited to see more, to see how, through our family obligations and relationships, *our families become heralds of the family of God* that is to be created on earth.

We are called to extend the boundaries of our family- beyond those whom we’ve always called family or with whom it is easy to be in relationship. Many of us have ‘families of choice’ in addition to the family we grew up with. But our family also includes the person without housing, fighting the cold and the snow. And the person struggling with drug addiction, living in fear and aloneness this day, is a member of our family. The sick person, dying, alone, dirty and maybe even obnoxious, is a member of our family. The person sitting in the prison cell for whatever reason is also a child of God, and as such, according to St. John, is a member of our family. All these, as well as the cherished intimate members of our family, are “family valuables,” and, as such, are worthy of safekeeping and reverence.

*(Slight pause)*

Now Ann Jelen will read from Colossians, 3:12-17, followed by Bob Gallagher reading from the First Letter of John, 3:1-2, 23. Next we will have questions and silence for reflection. Feel free to stay with whatever question calls you.

**READING 1**  **(Ann Jelen)**

Brothers and sisters:  
As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved,  
clothe yourself in heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.  
Bear with one another and forgive one another,   
if one has a grievance against another, forgive in the same way that God has forgiven you.   
And over all these **put on love**,   
the garment that binds them all together in perfect unity.  
Let the peace of Christ control your hearts.  
Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,   
singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs   
with gratitude in your hearts.  
And whatever you do, in word or in deed,   
do everything in the name of Jesus,   
giving thanks to God the Creator.

**READING 2 (Bob Gallagher)**

Beloved:  
See what love God our Creator has lavished on us  
that we may be called the children of God.  
And that is what we are!  
Beloved, we are already God’s children.

And God’s commandment is this:  
That we should believe in the name of Jesus Christ,  
and love one another just as we are commanded.

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS / PROMPTS 1 (Jim DeQuattro)** (show the image)

Think of a family member with whom you have been less than loving. How can you reach out in love to this person?

How has your family (natural or chosen) become a herald of God’s family on earth?

What does it mean to you to be a child of God? Do you see others as also children of God?

*(Slight pause)*

**COMMUNAL SILENCE**  **(Betty:** Share slide 1, time 2:00, chime, stop slide.)

**(Lynn)** We will now sing “O Little Town of Bethlehem” and as we do, let us think about the lyrics. What does it mean ‘in the dark streets shineth the everlasting Light’? How are you inspired to meet your ‘hopes and fears’?

**REFLECTIVE SONG (Claire, Conrad, Mary)**

O Little Town of Bethlehem

O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie!

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.

Yet in the dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;

The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,

While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wond’ring love.

O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth!

And praises sing to God the King and peace to all on earth.

**(Lynn)** Now Maryann Dolan will read an adaption of Rev. Zac Koon’s reflection on the Nativity Façade of the Basilica de la Sagrada Familia in Barcelona.

**READING 3 (Maryann Dolan)**  (**Betty**: Show the image)

Antoni Gaudi’s dream was to create a Bible out of stone, a dream that is still becoming the Basilica de la Sagrada Familia, the icon of Barcelona. The Nativity façade is now standing in final, rich, detailed form, inviting exploration, just like scripture. This is not just any Christmas crèche with sentimentalized sculptural accoutrements, but a fresh and theological telling of the birth of Christ. It is an incarnational telling of the Incarnation in the deepest sense.

Before seeing the figural sculptures, you realize that what seem to be a thousand abstract sandcastles melting into the stone are actually a thousand varieties of fauna and flora. They give the façade an organic sort of unity, making one scene melt into another as if to say, “All these different stories are really one story.” Individually, they work both to set geographical context and to make theological argument through symbol, often intentionally blurring the lines between what is ancient and what is modern, what is biblical and what is Barcelonan.

Gaudi did not simply want to transport the people of Barcelona to first-century Bethlehem, he wanted to show them what it would look like for Christ to become incarnate in the Barcelona of his time. Gaudi reminds us that Christmas isn’t about us doing the traveling anyway. It is about God traveling to us. All the way to wherever we are. Gaudi’s Christmas story in stone is not about Christ coming among us then. It is about Christ coming among us now.

*(Slight pause)*

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS 2 (Jim DeQuattro)**

What image or story expresses the incarnation for you today?

How do you make the incarnation of 2000 years ago a present reality in your life?

**COMMUNAL SILENCE**  **(Betty:** Share slide 2, time 2:00, chime, stop slide.**)**

**Lynn**: I will now lead our sharing.

**SHARING (Lynn Bufka)**

We invite you to briefly share what emerged in **your** heart this morning as you listened and as you reflected on these readings. That helps us to glimpse the many ways God is among us. We welcome new voices, and we also know that the wisdom of this community includes both words shared and silent listening,

*[If it feels needed or you’d like to include this:* As you share your feelings, please use "I” or “me". And let's leave a breath of silence between speakers. A bridge of silence allows us to take in what was just said and let it influence what we may want to share.]

So let’s begin in silence as we gather our reflections. [Long pause.]

Please unmute yourself to speak, and mute again afterwards.

Who would like to begin our sharing?

(Sharing)

Thank you.

Now Full Name will lead us in prayer.

**PRAYERS OF THE COMMUNITY (Kathy Cavanaugh)**

We know that God alone is enough for us. At the same time, we have heard Paul say that “if there is anything you need, pray for it.” So now we bring what is in our hearts to God. Our response will be: Holy Family, be with us.

I offer myself to You this day and in doing so I offer You my family.  I offer every relationship, be it good or difficult, and I offer every challenge we face.  Please come and sanctify my family, making it holy in imitation of your family in Nazareth.  We pray. Holy Family, be with us.

Let us look to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious as they live imperfect, messy, holy family love. May their example strengthen the lives of all they touch. For this we pray. Holy Family, be with us.

We pray that families never again experience violence, rejection and division: may all who have been hurt or traumatized find ready comfort and healing. For this we pray. Holy Family, be with us.

Let us pray especially for refugees and for all those for whom home is not a place of family and love. Let us open our hearts and share our resources so that all too can feel the warm embrace of love. For this we pray. Holy Family, be with us.

Let’s remember the feelings and prayers that arose in us as we shared reflections, and also the prayers we carry with us. [Pause.]

Now, for what else shall we pray? Please remember to unmute and mute yourself.

(People speak.)

Thank you.

O God, we give you all our prayers, spoken and unspoken. We will do all that we can to put our prayers into action – while entrusting the outcome to you. Amen.

**OFFERTORY (Bill Cavanaugh)**

Today, we are reminded that we are children of God. That we are to work towards bringing about the family of God, the kin-dom. How do we offer ourselves in this action? *[Pause.]*

Let us pray. Generous God, Creative Spirit, we commit to sharing our time, talents, and treasures so that we may be a light and a vessel of transforming love. Blessed be.

**CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION (Bill Cavanaugh)**

O Great Love, we are humbled and emboldened

to know that you trust us to be your body in this world.

We are part of that body as we let go of all that separates us from you,

and as we embrace one another and your entire creation with merciful love.

We give you thanks for your presence in and among us. [Pause.]

We remember the night before Jesus died.

At dinner with friends, Jesus knew all that would soon be asked of them,

and, loving them to the end, Jesus showed them how to care for each other

as they went out into the world.

First Jesus washed their feet

and said, “… as I have done for you, you should also do.”

Then he looked at what was in front of them, the bread and the cup,

gifts of the earth and work of human hands, and blessed them.

So let us, too, invite God right now into what is front and center in our lives

knowing that God will indeed enter what we offer – and bless it. [Pause.]

Let us invite God into ourselves so that we become God’s living presence in our world. [Pause.]

Holy One, you transform us as you nourish us here.

May we nourish others with your presence.

Amen.

**OUR UNIVERSAL PRAYER (Peggy Thompson)**

Now let us join our hearts as if we could join our hands to pray in harmony with our family throughout the world:

***All (muted):***

Heavenly Father, heavenly Mother, Holy and blessed is your true name. We pray for your reign of peace to come, We pray that your good will be done, Let heaven and earth become one. Give us this day the bread we need, Give it to those who have none. Let forgiveness flow like a river between us, From each one to each one. Lead us to holy innocence Beyond the evil of our days — Come swiftly Mother, Father, come. For yours is the power and the glory and the mercy: Forever your name is All in One. Amen.

**FINAL BLESSING (Lynn Bufka)**

Strengthened in our prayer with the knowledge that we are God’s children, may we reach out to all God’s children. Let our homes and hearts be living expressions of the coming kin-dom, God’s family. Blessed be.

Now Claire, Conrad and Mary will lead us in Angels We Have Heard on High.

**CLOSING – Angels We Have Heard on High (Claire, Conrad, Mary)**

Angels we have heard on high sweetly singing o’er the plains,

And the mountains in reply echo back their joyous strains.

Glo----ri a in excelsis Deo, Glo--- ria in excelsis Deo.

Shepherds why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?

Say what may the tidings be, Which inspire your heavenly song.

Glo---- ri -a, in excelsis Deo, Glo---- ri a in excelsis Deo.

Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the angels sing;

Come adore on bended knee, Christ, the Lord the newborn King.

Glo---- ri -a, in excelsis Deo, Glo---- ri a in excelsis Deo.

See him in a manger laid, whom the choirs of angels praise;

Mary, Joseph, lend your aid, while our hearts in love we raise.

Glo---- ri -a, in excelsis Deo, Glo---- ri a in excelsis Deo.

**RESOURCES**

Family quotes: <https://parade.com/1045384/marynliles/family-quotes/>

<https://stpaulcenter.com/audio/sunday-bible-reflections/our-true-home-scott-hahn-reflects-on-the-feast-of-the-holy-family/>

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2019-12/sunday-reflection-vatican-news3.html>

The universal prayer of Jesus from Parker J. Palmer

<https://www.elkgroveumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Alternative-versions-of-the-Lord.pdf>

Prayer resources: Pope Francis Prayer to the Holy Family for the Synod

<https://www.catholicbishops.ie/2019/12/27/prayer-resources-for-the-feast-of-the-holy-family/>

Thanks to Edieart on Etsy for the One Love image of children.

<https://www.etsy.com/listing/709246399/one-love-art-print-diversity-art-peace?gpla=1&gao=1&&utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=shopping_us_b-art_and_collectibles-prints-giclee&utm_custom1=_k_CjwKCAiAwKyNBhBfEiwA_mrUMu2yExIvn7EcyDgWjyic9tVjSBkjmc7zU8FVUtU1FiHsgpaDtUct1BoCtXUQAvD_BwE_k_&utm_content=go_12573072625_126376606544_507602439596_aud-1118323511678:pla-354814757658_c__709246399_129047331&utm_custom2=12573072625&gclid=CjwKCAiAwKyNBhBfEiwA_mrUMu2yExIvn7EcyDgWjyic9tVjSBkjmc7zU8FVUtU1FiHsgpaDtUct1BoCtXUQAvD_BwE>

Nativity Façade of La Sagrada Familia

<https://livingchurch.org/covenant/2020/12/27/the-christmas-story-in-stone-the-nativity-facade-of-the-sagrada-familia/>

Image of the Nativity façade

<https://www.google.com/search?q=sagrada+familia+nativity+facade&rlz=1C1EJFC_enUS938US938&sxsrf=AOaemvJzIJ_sBNoGMRTNArI_E6yLg3KTPA:1638063021745&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=2ahUKEwi-gZ-k9Ln0AhUB_RQKHXqnDMAQ_AUoAXoECAEQAw&biw=1280&bih=577&dpr=1.5#imgrc=MwInGC5NI5cYwM>