

HOLY FAMILY



Live lives of holiness and godliness; strive to be found by Him at peace, without spot or blemish.

Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.

~ Jane Howard

Scripture:

2 Peter 3: 8 -15

Call it a Family

8. But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.
9. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.
10. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.
11. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness,
12. waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire?
13. But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.
14. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish;
15. and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him.



HOLY FAMILY

People have some interesting things to say about families. Some of them describe their families as holy, but others not so much.

- **Happiness is having a large, loving, caring, close-knit family in another city.** George Burns (1896 - 1996)
- **Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.** Leo Tolstoy (1828 - 1910), *Anna Karenina*, Chapter 1, first line
- **A family is a unit composed not only of children but of men, women, an occasional animal, and the common cold.** Ogden Nash (1902 - 1971)
- **No matter where you live, brothers are brothers and sisters are sisters. The bonds that keep family close are the same no matter where you are.** Takayuki Ikkaku, Arisa Hosaka and Toshihiro Kawabata, *Animal Crossing: Wild World*, 2005
- **Family isn't about whose blood you have. It's about who you care about.** Trey Parker and Matt Stone, *South Park*, Ike's Wee Wee, 1998
- **Being a grownup means assuming responsibility for yourself, for your children, and--here's the big curve--for your parents.** Wendy Wasserstein

Today is part two of my Advent Series about Holy Places, Holy Families, and Holy Moments. Today we jump from Holy Places to Holy Families.

THE HOLY FAMILY

If we say, "The Holy family," we are likely to mean the family of Jesus. There is even a special day on the church calendar to celebrate Holy Family Day on the first Sunday after Christmas.

In the Roman Catholic Church, Holy Family Day honors Jesus, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and his "foster father" Joseph, as the family of Jesus. Who could disagree?

The feast of the Holy Family was instituted by Pope Leo XIII. Most Protestant denominations refer to the Sunday that Roman Catholics call the Feast of the Holy Family simply as the First Sunday after Christmas.

A common pious practice among Catholics is to write "J.M.J." at the top of letters and personal notes as a reference to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, the members of The Holy Family.

A "HELPFUL PICTURE"

Well that settles that.

For those who need a picture of The Holy Family, we have Michelangelo's picture of The Holy Family on the cover of the bulletin today, the *Doni Tondo*, named after the patron saint who commissioned it in 1504. Artistically this is a study of motion and the artistic control of motion, balance of faces, color, background, and proportion. The Holy Family is separated from the common world, and this painting symbolizes a new realm of Christianity standing against the pagan world. It even includes John the Baptist, looking on from the background.

OR NOT?

So do you think this is exactly the way it was? Here is Jesus, age two, with the face of a ten year old, Mary age thirty and Joseph, age sixty, relaxing in the park one day in northern Italy, with four nude women sitting behind them, and a fifth person whose gender is unclear, when John the Baptist came along to see what everyone was

doing. Michelangelo snapped the shot, and presto: The Holy Family.

I'm guessing not.

WHAT'S MISSING?

Let's start with Jesus' brothers: James, Joseph, Simon and Judas were left out of the picture. Also missing are his sisters.

The family of Jesus is named in three books of the New Testament.

Mark 6.3: Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?'

There are great lists of Jesus' genealogy all the way through King David, to Adam and Eve in both Luke and Matthew. All of them are considered holy families too. You'd think Jesus' living sisters and brothers could be included too. Why be so selective? As a child, was Jesus more holy than his brothers and sisters? Be careful if you say yes.

TIME

Time is the second thing that is missing in the picture. What happened before and what happened afterward?

We believe that Jesus' father was an artisan. Not a carpenter, but more likely a stone shaper, with skills in construction that involved fitting, shaping and assembling of the components of buildings and their furnishings. He is not working in this picture, but the other six days of the week, he was working hard. Mary spent much more time with her children than Joseph.

Mary was a typical Jewish mother, with a home to manage and a growing family. Jesus was home schooled in language, trades, and family life. Their home is not depicted. Jesus religious school probably was at the synagogue; we know the family observed the Jewish high holy days.

So what we have in the Michelangelo painting is an idealized snapshot that depicts one moment in the life of one portion of a family, and it leaves us with more questions than answers.

BUT MY TITLE IS "HOLY FAMILY," NOT "THE HOLY FAMILY."

I think there is something about every family that is holy. And aren't there moments when life together is no picnic in the park, but also unholy

moments of turbulence and challenging interactions with other family members?

From Wikipedia

Today nuclear families with the original biological parents constitute roughly 24.1% of households; roughly 75% of all children in the United States will spend at least some time in a single-parent household. As of August 2008, single-parent households are now considered "nuclear families."

According to some sociologists, "[The nuclear family] no longer seems adequate to cover the wide diversity of household arrangements we see today." (Edwards 1991; Stacey 1996). A new term has been introduced, *postmodern family*, which is meant to describe the great variability in family forms, including single-parent families and child-free couples."

FAMILY DYNAMICS AND DYNAMIC FAMILIES

Cheryl and I used to have a nuclear family like the one in the picture, but we don't anymore. The girls became young women, and started families of their own. What we call part of our family, other parents call part of their family. We are a typical sandwich family with some older and some younger, some living near by and others that require some travel.

So what is true of our postmodern family is that it is dynamic.

You may have been in a nuclear family at some point, but seventy-five per cent of us are not.

People live without children, with one parent, with a grandparent, with a committed partner of either gender. We are widowed, we are parts of several families that overlap, we live in fear of losing a job, or health, or a home. We live in hope of finding others with whom we can bond, share and grow. Human beings were not designed to live alone.

If our country is built upon the nuclear family, then it is built on a myth.

In reality the family unit is far more diverse and we all know it.

Don't miss my soft words about valuing committed relationships of all kinds. Softly is the way I prefer to speak, but I mean it with the

passion of a person who shouts out in the public square.

**It is time to move past gender
as the definer of family.
In fact we did that long ago.
College roommates, senior companions
sharing facilities to make ends meet,
committed relationships of many kinds
are part of the branches of most
post modern family trees.
And a family of one is still a family.

We hold our church family dear
and precious because it recognizes
the value of one, just as much as it
recognizes the value of many.**

FAMILY WATCHING

Seventy-five per cent of us don't look like the picture on the front of the bulletin, and we think our families are holy too. I don't think God intended to leave those people out. If you are a people watcher at Christmas, become a family watcher and see if this seventy-five per cent statistic is true.

THE BIBLICAL MODEL OF FAITH IS BASED UPON FAMILY

Let me tell you why God did not intend to leave those seventy-five per cent of the people out. The model of our faith described in Holy Scripture is based upon the relationships within a family. These relationships stand up through every age in which we may find ourselves, and will stand up long into the future.

GOD IS LIKE A BIBLICAL FATHER.

- God desires an intimate relationship with us. God is our Creator. (Genesis 1:26-31)
- Christ is our Savior. (John 3:16)
- The Holy Spirit lives in us. (Ephesians 1:13-14)
- Perhaps the most important of all these images is God as our Father. (Hosea 11:1-9)
- Our earthly fathers may not be all they should be, but the Biblical Parent is loving, kind, appropriately stern, caring, just, and holy.

WE ARE LIKE GOD'S CHILDREN.

As God's children we have tremendous privileges. In both Romans 8:12-26 and Galatians 4:1-7 Paul stresses that we are adopted as God's children. So we are heirs of God's blessings and joint heirs with Christ.

The Holy Spirit lives in us now and we look forward to heaven in the future. We pray to our Father (Matthew 6:9-13) and God meets our daily needs. (Matthew 6:25-33)

We are God's children through faith. We do not merit such a loving relationship; instead we are blessed with them through Jesus Christ.

GOD'S PEOPLE ARE LIKE OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS

**When we become God's children, we gain
brothers and sisters from all races and
nationalities who trust Christ.**

**We share with our brothers and sisters a
love of the Father and a love for one
another that transcends our differences.
(1 John 3:11-24)**

GOD'S FAMILY TRANSCENDS ALL HUMAN BARRIERS

- Our family has been baptized into Christ. We are happy to submit to baptism so that the world will know that our sins are buried with Christ and we are raised to be new people. (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12) We are equally happy when someone else is baptized because of faith in Christ.
- Our family transcends race and gender. Our family has no use for racial or gender prejudice. We are from many nations and races. We have both brothers and sisters. Our love for Christ unites us and our love for one another identifies us to others. Whenever we fall short of these standards, we are not acting like God's family.

- Our family transcends time. Like Moses, Abraham, and Sarah we enter the family of God through faith. Like Sarah and Hagar we suffer and serve; like the disciples, the adopted family of Jesus, our skills and tasks are many, but it is one God who rejoices when our family honors God.

THERE IS A PLACE FOR YOU IN GOD'S FAMILY.

May we rejoice when others are invited and find their own places in God's family.

And may the holy family of those who are joined in faith rejoice in the house of the Lord in which we are joined as heirs.



**Dr. John H. Cushman
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
December 7, 2008**