

WEEK 3 – NAZARETH – A PLACE OF SIMPLICITY

MONDAY – A measure of family life



Luke 2: 40 (NIV) *And the child grew and became strong; He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on Him.*

Many present-day Christians undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. In Galilee, they will always visit the place where the story of the Holy Family has its roots.

It is in the small city of Nazareth, located in the north of Israel, where Mary, Joseph and Jesus experienced the simplicity of a humble family life, with all its normal trials and tribulations.

It is here in Nazareth that we can contemplate the life of the Holy Family, a way of life which each of us can imitate in its cohesiveness and simplicity. The Holy Family of Nazareth lead a modest life. They were neither poor nor rich, earning their daily bread by good and honest hard work. Further, I am sure that their family life was marked by prayer, participation in

the rituals of the time and many Judaic feasts.

But while living this modest life, the Holy Family lived another reality, the reality of the preparation of Jesus for His ministry as the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

The simplicity of the early years of Jesus's life also shows how cohesive a family can become when they lead a life in shared love and with God. Whether you are a father, a mother or a child, you can follow the example of Joseph, Mary and Jesus as being an integral part of a loving and caring family.

Reflection: How does your family life measure up to the example set for us by Joseph, Mary and Jesus?



Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift of family and the blessings we share. May Your love bind us together, and Your grace sustain us through all circumstances. AMEN

TUESDAY – The Nazarene



Matthew 2: 23 *and He went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that He would be called a Nazarene.*

As we started discussing yesterday, Nazareth is located in the lower part of Galilee, a district in the north of Israel. The origin of the town itself is believed to date back all the way to approximately 2200 BC, when Nazareth was just a trivial little peasant village, overlooked by mountains on all sides.

Nazareth did, however, not become culturally important until after the angel Gabriel, appeared to Mary with the news that she had been selected to be the mother of our Lord Jesus.

After the birth of their divine Son, Joseph and Mary stayed in Egypt until the passing of King Herod and then returned to Nazareth to raise their boy Jesus as a Nazarene in the Jewish culture.

Why Nazareth? Why was it so important that Jesus had to grow up in Nazareth specifically? Why didn't they stay in Egypt? According to Matthew's Gospel, in the years leading up to the actual creation of the village, some six centuries before people settled there, the prophet Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would come from a town called Nazareth. And so, this simple peasant village, sitting in the middle of nowhere, was destined to become the birthplace of Christianity.

Reflection: Reemphasising our reflections of yesterday, the simplicity of Jesus and His family in Nazareth should be a lesson for families, and a model of how to live a daily life of prayer, work, and family love. Jesus' example of simplicity should also be a model for all Christians to imitate.



Prayer: Lord God Our Father, bring together and keep all families in perfect unity of love and mutual support and harmony". AMEN

WEDNESDAY – An “inside’ relationship with God



John 1: 46 *“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip.*

Over the last couple of days, we have come to the realization that Nazareth was a tiny community. Probably there were no more than five hundred people living there during Jesus’ earthly ministry. Being so small, and not adjacent to any major cities, it was the last place one would expect anything interesting or of lasting significance to happen.

Calling someone a “Nazarene” in that culture would have been like referring to a South African who works on a farm as a “plaasjaapie.” Taking this into account, Nathanael’s question is more than a little sarcastic. He assumes Nazareth couldn’t produce much of worth, let alone the long-awaited Promised One. Philip’s response is not to argue, but simply to invite. He already knew that talking about Jesus would be nothing compared to meeting Him in person.

Meeting God in person is often like a singing lesson. If you’ve ever had one, you might have heard your teacher talking about breathing from your stomach, using your chest voice, or directing your sound out of the top of your head. It’s weird stuff.

When we encounter God, it’s often a similar experience. Sure, there are some external things that can happen (like your singing voice), but that often doesn’t really reflect what is happening on the “inside”.

This “inside” personal relationship with God is a really important part of a Christian life.

Reflection: How do you go about ensuring that you have an “inside” personal relationship with God?



Prayer: Dear Lord, I come before You with a humble heart, seeking to deepen my relationship with You. I know that You are the source of all wisdom, strength and love and I long to draw closer to You each day. AMEN

THURSDAY – The simplicity of the Holy Family



Luke 2: 51 & 52: *Then He went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*

Jesus led a very ordinary existence during His time in the small and almost forgotten town of Nazareth. His early life was much like that of most young men of that time – learning a practical skill from His father, being subject to the laws of God, and socialising with His friends and neighbours.

During these not-often-talked-about years in Nazareth, Jesus's life was centred around His family. We are told that He was obedient to His parents and was a loving and dutiful son. In fact, it could be said that growing up, Jesus's life was not very different to that of the majority of young people of the time. He experienced the fragility of being a child, passing through

adolescence and youth, until, at around 30 years old, He left home to begin His earthly ministry.

I believe that the simplicity of the life of Jesus and His parents in Nazareth is a lesson for every family. We need to look upon the Holy Family of Nazareth as an example for all Christian and human families. It radiates genuine love and charity, not only creating a powerful example for us all, but also offering the guarantee that such love can be achieved in every family unit.

Reflection: Do our family relationships reflect the depth and simplicity of the life of Jesus and His family in Nazareth?



Prayer: Heavenly Father, we come before you as a family, seeking Your divine guidance. Help us to love and support one another, and may our family be a source of unity and strength. AMEN

FRIDAY – Wisdom, Stature and Favour



Luke 2: 52 *And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.*

Luke's three-point description of Jesus' youth provides a blueprint for us today. It is, however, the kind of description that is easy to read right over, so let's take a minute to ponder what Luke is telling us about the young Jesus.

Firstly Jesus grew in "*stature*." He grew into a young person of strength, not only physically, but even more so spiritually.

Sometimes in our modern society, being religious is thought of as something that makes one weak. But true spiritual character is something that takes strength. To make the right decisions and conduct oneself with integrity requires grit, backbone and courage. Jesus had all three.

Secondly, Jesus grew "*in wisdom*." Wisdom is essentially learning what is right and then practically applying that

knowledge to everyday life. Jesus showed that wisdom doesn't just magically appear when you become an adult; it is carefully built throughout your life from childhood.

And thirdly, Jesus grew "*in favour with God and man*." That can sound like just religious jargon—but we shouldn't read over it. This statement means that He received the Father's favour, blessings and protection from a young age.

While Luke is speaking here about the young Jesus, I believe these three points are relevant for all of us. Whatever our age, we need to continue daily to do everything in our power to become more like Jesus.

Reflection: Do I live my life trying to be more and more like Jesus every day?



Prayer: Heavenly and Gracious Father, I come before You today with a humble and contrite heart, seeking to be more like Jesus. Help me to follow Your example of what it means to love, serve and follow You. AMEN