

Commit to an inclusive, open, creative community

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Christmas 1C – 1 Sam 1, Ps 148, Col 3 12-17, Lk 2 41-52

Christmas is a time where families gather and reconnect. So it's a bit of a surprise that, on the face of it, our readings and collect prayer today seem to challenge family ties. The collect challenges our Christmas family focus profoundly. It says God's call to us takes precedence over our family ties. It sounds like the sort of thing you'd expect of one of those exclusive cults that turn up on the news from time to time. So it confronts us. Yet it reflects the message we've heard in the stories in today's scriptures. Samuel was dedicated to God's service before he was even conceived. And twelve-year-old Jesus stunned his parents with a declaration of God's prior call on his time.

The collect prayer says God is 'God of community' – and then goes on to unpack that community word by saying our primary family as Christians is our faith community, not our family of origin. I struggle with this; I want to find a balance to what it's saying. And I think I find my answer in our baptismal liturgy – our christening services.

Baptism is where this confronting picture of Christian community is redeemed. Our baptismal teachings understand community and families as embracing each other; weaving our families together with everyone whose lives are linked with ours in a community of support, respect and love.

God's community is one which embraces – it doesn't exclude. That's why the Psalm has us calling the whole creation into communion with God. That's why the reading from Colossians is so focussed on the empathic, welcoming, forgiving choices and

decisions we need to make to treat another person with respect. Because that's what it takes to build a transforming, Christlike community.

Col 3.12...Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

At our baptisms, these are the choices we are encouraged to nurture in our families. Then our new Christians can grow into outward-looking people who can bring the peace of God to the world. Our families are meant to belong to the Christian community and our Christian family is to belong in the whole world; God's world.

In the end, I think that's what our collect prayer calls us to do; to commit to inclusive, open, creative community. Far from being an exclusive cult, we're called to have open borders with wonderful gifts to share and receive, and a genuine desire to do just that. Thanks be to God for this call! Amen.