

ADVENT-CHRISTMAS

God is not distant: he is 'Emmanuel,' God-with-us. He is no stranger: he has a face, the face of Jesus.



THE PRECIOUS BLOOD FAMILY



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EDITORIAL

In the course of the liturgical year, *The Precious Blood Family* appears in the great seasons of the Church with an Advent-Christmas issue, one during Lent-Easter along with a July issue, the month devoted to the Precious Blood. The annual calendar allows our readers to follow further the rhythm of these seasons together with the feasts of the Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the memorials of the saints. In this way, I hope we can deepen what Pope Francis in his recent apostolic letter on liturgical formation calls our “capacity to live in full the liturgical action” since the liturgy is the “the first school of the spiritual life.” My hope is this magazine will assist its readers who are enrolled in that school to realize “the formative action of the Liturgy itself” (*Desiderio desideravi*; June 29, 2022).

With that goal in mind, this issue presents a series of articles on the seasons of Advent and Christmas with reflections on the major feast days that dot the liturgical landscape. So often the focus on December 25 overshadows the entire horizon of this time, an arc which this year encompasses the weeks from November 27, the First Sunday of Advent, to the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord on January 9. Far more than one day, however central, the richness of this time deserves our sustained attention.

May these weeks enrich your lives with abundant grace as the Liturgy beckons us with its own unique depth and power. As always, additional resources can be found online at sanguischristi.com.

Fr. John Colacino, C.P.P.S.



REDEEMING THE TIME

Fr. John Colacino, C.P.P.S

01

I recently came across a translation of a verse from the Letter to the Ephesians according to the traditional Catholic version, the Douay-Rheims, which I had never heard before. As with the King James Version, the translation expresses the Greek more literally and reads, “See, brethren, how you walk circumspectly: not as unwise, but as wise: redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (5:15-16). Come to find out there is a parallel verse in the Letter to the Colossians as follows: “Walk with wisdom towards them that are without, redeeming the time” (4:5). The translation currently approved for liturgical use in the United States, the New American Bible, like the New Revised Standard Version renders “redeeming” as “making the most of the opportunity (or time).”

While another Greek word for “redeem” is used elsewhere in the New Testament with the meaning “to purchase” or “to ransom” as in the manumission of a slave, the word in these verses is used twice more by Paul in the Letter to the Galatians where he speaks of Christians being “redeemed” from the Law of Moses, with the meaning of “rescued” or even “ransomed.” Interestingly, modern translations in those instances do employ the English word “redeemed.”

If you will bear with the Greek lesson a little bit longer — trust me, this has everything to do with Advent! — the word for “time” in the verses from both Ephesians and Colossians is “kairos” — as distinct from the other word for time in Greek, “chronos.” The latter refers to “clock time” while the former refers to time with significance.

So, for example, while for most people March 3, 1956 is a long-past day on a discarded calendar (“chronos”) it means much more to me as it is my birthday (“kairos”). On a grander scale, we could say that dates such as July 4, 1776 and September 11, 2001 will never be for Americans merely “chronos.”

Which brings me at last to Advent and indeed to the liturgy in general. I am taking my cue from the Divine Liturgy of the Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches where — yes, in Greek — before the service begins the deacon announces to the priest, “It is time (kairos) for the Lord to act.” In other words, clock time recedes into the background (except insofar as they determine the feast or season) and kairos comes to the fore since liturgical time is always full of significance. Indeed, the Eastern understanding of liturgy always conveys the sense that Time and Eternity as well as Heaven and Earth, encounter or intersect each other during the celebration.

And how does such intersection happen? Well, at any given time, the world will be experiencing kairos in a number of ways as will the members of the congregation gathered for the liturgy. These events will often be matters of grave concern. As I write these words, the war in Ukraine rages on with deep concern over the security of nuclear facilities; the past summer has seen a variety of weather-related disasters from record-breaking heat waves to massive flooding; gun violence and crime plague city streets; political divisions threaten to fray the social fabric, and economic woes affect everything from grocery bills to one’s gas tank. All of this is “secular” kairos impinging on the liturgical action — and all in need of “redemption.”

And the point of intersection when one enters the “sacred” realm of the liturgy is nothing other than the paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection as it unfolds throughout the liturgical year from the First Sunday of Advent to the Feast of Christ the King. While the feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints provide further reminders of the myriad ways the mystery has been lived in exemplary lives of countless men and women. In other words, how the time of Christ and of the Church redeem history by opening it up to the decisive intervention of God in human affairs, challenging the world with the message of the Gospel and demonstrating its power to rescue humanity from its headlong fall into the abyss. Nor do the particular crises of individuals fail to find meaning and rescue in light of the Lord’s pasch.

Advent, in particular, brings out this redemptive intersection of sacred and secular kairos. Advent is, after all, about time — the time of God’s humanity forming in the womb of Mary and the time of God’s future when the vagaries of human life and history — the whole sweep of time — will reach its final consummation. So on the first Sunday of Advent the Apostle reminds us, “You know the time (kairos); it is the hour now for you to wake from sleep.” All of which culminates Christmas night when the proclamation

of the Lord’s Nativity is chanted in which the intersection of chronos and kairos could not be clearer. The text’s rehearsal of “century upon century” interweaves the main events of salvation history during the time of the Elder Covenant with events in secular history including the founding of the City of Rome and the reign of Augustus Caesar until finally “JESUS CHRIST, eternal God and Son of the eternal Father, desiring to consecrate the world by his most loving presence, was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and when nine months had passed since his conception, was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem of Judah, and was made man.”

Of course, God’s kairos is not limited to the years that circumscribe Jesus’ earthly life. His first Advent celebrated at Christmas is joined to the expectation of his Second Coming in God’s future. Our preparation for the former during these four weeks is really symbolic of the Vigil we are always holding in anticipation of the latter. That is the genius of liturgical time; it encompasses past, present and future all at the same “time” or kairos.

So what could it mean then for us to “redeem the time” or, as in modern translations, “make the most of the opportunity” when we gather for the public prayer of the Church? Pope Francis, in his recent apostolic letter *Desiderio desideravi* (“I have longed”) on liturgical formation offers some guidance. There the pope reminds us how in the Eucharist “the power of Christ’s paschal mystery reaches us” (cf. no. 11). And it does so in a collective action where God “takes us by the hand, together, as an assembly, to lead us deep within the mystery that the Word and the sacramental signs reveal to us” via a “symbolic language” (no. 19). In a remarkable reference to the great liturgical scholar, Romano Guardini, Francis speaks of our being “carried along by this inner transformation of our time” (no. 34)

Beginning then with Advent Sunday and every Sunday following we have the opportunity of making the most of kairos time by entering into God’s unfolding action in history and in our own lives, rescuing each moment for God’s purposes by suffusing events with meaning and value — even if only by hope. As Pope Francis says, “the liturgical year is for us the possibility of growing in our knowledge of the mystery of Christ, immersing our life in the mystery of His Death and Resurrection, awaiting his return in glory. This is a true ongoing formation. Our life is not a random chaotic series of events, one following the other. It is rather a precise itinerary which, from one annual celebration of the His Death and Resurrection to the next, conforms us to Him, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ” (no. 64). Amen.

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I

Zechariah

*A spirit glided past my face;
the hair of my flesh stood up.
It stood still,
but I could not discern its
appearance.*

*A form was before my eyes;
there was silence, then I heard a
voice:*

*'Can mortal man be righteous
before God?
Can a man be pure before his
Maker?' (Job 4:15-17)*

My name is Zechariah,
I am a priest
Assigned by David to the division
of Abijah. (1 Chr. 24:10)

*I am righteous before God,
walking in all the commandments and
ordinances of the Lord –
blameless. (Luke 1:6-7)*

When I enter the temple
of prayer and thanksgiving,
where candlelight and incense mingle,
forming one sequence of newness;
shadows then appear,
on ancient walls so near.

Serving as priest before God in prayer,
With clarity of mind and a burning heart
of faith,
silent prayer becomes a voice born in
the wilderness.

In the wilderness of my own being,
bewildered by what stands before me,
I am overcome by fear and trembling.
At the altar of incense
I am given the gift of silence.

Behold, happy is the man whom

*God reproves;
therefore despise not the
chastening of the Almighty.
For he wounds, but he binds up;
he smites, but his hands heal.
(Job 5:17-18)*

I, Zechariah,
listened to the angel of good news,
Gabriel,
and pondered all these things in my
heart (cf. Luke 2:19).

*And you will have joy and gladness,
and many will rejoice at his birth;
for he will be great before the Lord,
and he shall drink no wine nor
strong drink,
and he will be filled with the Holy
Spirit,
even from his mother's womb.
(Luke 1:14-15)*

With joy and gladness does
the Holy Spirit fill your mother's womb,
and the hearts of your fathers will turn
toward their children.

II

Look On Me

It is now 3:00 am.
I cannot resist your need for me,
I cannot resist you.
We linger in each other,
To find each other.

I found you:
Pregnant -
Full of
Spirit.

I remember crossing the Threshold of
Time,
Your Morning Star greeted me like an
Early Sunrise.
In your Heart leapt the endless

singing of Jubilant Birds -
In Variation of Sound -
A Vibration of Love.

*After these days his wife
Elizabeth conceived,
And for five months she hid herself.
(Luke 1:24)*

Hide not love who visits me this night.
In this temporal chamber incense burns
for you,

Your hymns have been written
On a tablet caressed
By candlelight.

You sing songs of song so new,
That echo from a joyful heart,
Falling on the lips
That love you —
Elizabeth.

*Thus the Lord has done to me in the
days when
He looked on me, to take away my
reproach among men. (Luke 1:25)*

III

Canticle

My name is Zechariah.
I am a Priest and a Prophet.
Assigned by David to the Division
of Abijah.

We are a people prepared and my wife,
Elizabeth, is to be delivered.
And upon the eighth day he is to be
circumcised;
Our son is to be given a name.
No other name will do.
For no tablet can contain him.
His name is John!

In the wilderness of my own being, bewildered by what stands before me, I am overcome by fear and trembling. At the altar of incense I am given the gift of silence.

I confess to the whole multitude of
people
praying outside the temple at the Hour
of Incense,
that the Holy Spirit is at work within us:

*And you, child, will be called the
prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to
prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to
his people
in the forgiveness of their sins,
through the tender mercy of our
God.
(Luke 1:76-78)*

The tablet read:
He is righteous before God and pure
before his Maker.
His name is John!

IV

Cousins

*And the child grew and became strong
in spirit,
and he was in the wilderness
till the day of his manifestation to Israel.
(Luke 1.80)*

I, John,
Desert of deliverance
Wilderness of repentance
Breath of the Eternal Breath
Spirit within —
Cast out my sin

For you have prepared me,
Lord,
No longer am I a slave
But a custodian of love
Jordan springs beneath me
Like cobblestones of grace

Running joyously
Along Temperance Way
I will die for you
And you will die for us
No longer will death seek death's sting
Life will seek
You – Christ
Most High:

*child – go before –
prepare – ways,
knowledge – salvation – people,
forgiveness – sins,
tender mercy,
God,
day – dawn – high –
light – darkness – shadow –
death,
guide – feet – way –
peace.
(Luke 1:76-79)*

Fear not the steps you hear approaching
On cobblestones of grace
Water and Word mingle
As in a cup
River stream
Baptized are we –
Free

*I had heard of thee by the hearing of
the ear,
but now my eye sees thee;
therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes.
(Job 42:5-6)*

V

Pour and Exhale

I have mourned all night long for a taste
of your water –
Jordan
Let the moonlight take away the

shadows within me
Let the morning sun burn away the mist
of my
Impurity
You have poured your Spirit upon me
Like a river of power
A breath exhaled
A current confessed
To you Lord Jesus streams my:

Yes,
Creator
Word
Spirit
Trinity
Make me new
Refresh me!

*I baptize you with water;
but he who is mightier than I is coming,
the thong of whose sandals I am not
worthy to untie;
he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit
And with fire.
(Luke 3:16-17)*

VI

Embrace

The Father opened heaven's door of
faith and looked out –
The Son was prepared in hope and
received –
Spirit in flight.
Fire's love embraced them tenderly in
the form of a Dove –
Equally sharing in their eternal De-light.

*Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I
am well pleased.
(Luke 3:22)*

Antonio Selvaggi resides
in Toronto, Ontario.

03



*Piero di Cosimo Incarnation of Jesus
(1485-1505)*

MARY: WOMAN OF THE NEW COVENANT

By Mary Shaw, ASC



Let me preface my remarks by saying, when I think of the Blessed Mother, I often think of shadows and of being overshadowed. I recall the *Anima Christi* by David Fleming that says, “May the shelter I seek be the shadow of your cross.” Fruit is abundant in the shadows... I recall picking blueberries as a child. The largest ones were found in the shadows of the brush, protected from scorching sun and birds’ view. And I recall the words of St. Luke when Mary was invited to LISTEN to Gabriel’s message: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow” (1:35).

Oh to be covered like Mary with the shadow of the Most High. She truly listened and in emptying herself, made room for the Word “made flesh.” But it was not until Mary pronounced her ‘yes’ to God was the long-awaited Messiah of the people conceived in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit. Many ancient writers called the Holy Spirit “the initiator of the body and blood of Christ” while today in the Creed we say, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life.” Yes, her fiat is a model for you and for me. We too are called to “listen to God... to be still and know God.” In our own stillness and self-emptying we also give birth to God and become his presence to one another.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “The prayer of the people of God flourished in the shadow of the dwelling place of God’s presence on earth, the ark of the covenant and the temple, under the guidance of their shepherds, especially King David, and of the prophets” (CCC 2594). When the ark was completed, the glory cloud of the Lord (the Shekinah) covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34-35; Nm 9:18, 22). The verb “to cover” or “to overshadow” and the metaphor of a cloud are used in the Bible to represent the presence and glory of God. The Catechism explains:

“In the theophanies of the Old Testament, the cloud, now obscure, now luminous, reveals the living and saving God, while veiling the transcendence of his glory with Moses on Mt. Sinai, at the tent of meeting, and during the wandering in the desert, and with Solomon at the dedication of the temple. In the Holy Spirit, Christ fulfills these figures. The Spirit comes upon the Virgin Mary and “overshadows” her, so that she might conceive and give birth to Jesus. On the mountain of Transfiguration, the Spirit in the “cloud came and overshadowed” Jesus, Moses and Elijah, Peter, James and John, and a “voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!’ Finally, the cloud took Jesus out of the sight of the disciples on the day of His Ascension and will reveal him as Son of Man in glory on the day of his final coming. The glory of the Lord ‘overshadowed’ the ark and filled the tabernacle.” (CCC 697)

Mary is thus the Woman-Ark of the New Covenant. She held in her womanhood the precious body and blood of Jesus, the Bread of life, the true manna and eternal High Priest. Mary listened, surrendered, and was open for the Word to penetrate her fully by the power of the Holy Spirit. In her virginal womb, she conceived the Son of God made flesh. Mary is our model... a prayerful woman, a humble and listening woman who trusts the Word spoken to her so fully that she gave birth on earth to Jesus, Son of God. Mary, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, was filled with the Glory of God!

But what do I hear? Do I also listen? Does my life give birth to HIS presence? Is it a mirror of Jesus’ and Mary’s own self-emptying? Do I allow God’s Word to fill me? Do I dare stand in the shadow of the cross with Mary?

Such self-emptying is not easy. It is a daily cross each of us must pick up if we are to hear God’s gentle voice. Yes, we will find shelter in the

**Mary listened, surrendered, and was open for the Word to penetrate
her fully by the power of the Holy Spirit. In her virginal
womb, she conceived the Son of God made flesh.**

shadow of the cross. Because God's light shining down from above upon will cast a shadow that is rich in love and mercy upon us. It is a transformative light and an encounter. The listening spirit affords an opportunity for an encounter with the living God and an opportunity for God to enter into our lives so that, as Paul said, "I live now, not I but Christ in me." This is a transformative encounter/moment. Nor should we forget how Mary had to say "Yes" a number of times, treasuring it all in her heart until, at the foot of the cross, she becomes our Mother, our helper, empowering us like herself to be "attentive to the guests" whenever the wine runs out.

With these humble thoughts and reflections on Mary in mind let me wade deeper into the shadows and into the spirit of Advent and Christmas. We all get excited when Advent comes because it means we are closer to Christmas. We light the candles of peace, love, joy and hope and are filled with excitement... so much so that we get caught up in all the buying, wrapping and planning we almost forget the true meaning of the seasons. So how did Mary prepare? Her response, so simple and yet so profound — "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me" — was one of total surrender without any ifs ands or buts. Let it be... "Have thine own way, Lord! As the prophet Isaiah declared, "For he has clothed me with a robe of salvation" (61:10).

Mary carried this selfless stance into her visitation with her cousin, Elizabeth. She did not get carried away with preparing all kinds of stuff or taking care of her own life; she was overshadowed and empowered by the graces of God and set out to serve. Graces which are not meant to be held on to or buried but to be enriched upon by giving them away. Mary recognized in her nothingness that she had all. She was filled with HOPE, JOY, PEACE. Mary was pregnant with life itself. A life too great for one person... a life that had to be shared with humanity. Her expecting was being enfleshed in her fiat, moment by moment. It was not like picking a date on the calendar and waiting for the birth of the child. The birth was happening at each moment that Mary surrendered to God and was becoming flesh at each step as she paid a visit to Elizabeth. Mary's life is Advent was grounded in reality, in the present moment — a life filled with expectancy, joy and hope. It is a life of waiting and wondering.

As we move toward the season of Christmas we get more excited...we can barely contain our joy. We travel, so to speak, with Mary and Joseph to be registered like all the rest.

Mary, the expectant Mother, went silently, trusting, pondering. She is known from sacred Scripture as "pondering all that was said in her heart." Oh yes, Mary is the contemplative in action. And when her time came to give birth it was not in some sanitary, antiseptic hospital but in a manger. The joy of an expectant mother was not dampened because of the place in which she gave birth. On the contrary, the cave was a heavenly palace, for even the cattle were lowing, alerting us to something or Someone! And the angels sang! Pure joy and a birth that assuaged the "hopes and fears of all the years."

Mary, a simple woman, whose simple Yes changed the course of history and whose Son freed us from ourselves and our sinfulness. As we Adorers of the Blood of Christ say in our Constitution, "Ours is a Paschal identity," signed in the Blood of the Lamb. Mary Most Holy, Woman of the New Covenant, first Adorer-Apostle, graces us this season for listening, treasuring in our own hearts, hoping and trusting but, above all, for giving birth to Jesus today in our own space and place.

"Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners; embrace us and lead us to your Son, Jesus. Teach me to embrace simplicity, prayerfulness, trust and wonderment. May this Advent/Christmas season be for me a rich experience of your own experience and end with a profound resolution to my God, "Here I am Lord, let it be done to me, according to YOUR will. Amen."

Let this be your most life-giving Advent/Christmas ever because you are birthing Jesus by your words and actions in service of humanity. Let this sacred time be a renewed effort on all our part to be filled with hope, joy, peace, self-giving, listening and saying Yes! May this be our time to be more attentive to others, their needs and living conditions. Perhaps this season will be for all of us, through the intercession of Mary Most Holy, the most rewarding one of our lives. Why? Because of self-giving and self-caring for the other more than for oneself. Let it be done unto me, and unto to you, according to God's Word.

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A VOICE FROM TRADITION: ST. EPHREM THE SYRIAN

From Hymn 4 on the Nativity

This is the month which brings all manner of joy; it is the freedom of the enslaved, the pride of the free, the crown of the gates, the soothing of the body, that also in its love put purple upon us as upon kings.

This is the month that brings all manner of victories; it frees the spirit; it subdues the body; it brings forth life among mortals; it caused, in its love, Godhead to dwell in Manhood.

On this day the Lord exchanged glory for shame, as being humble; because Adam changed the truth for unrighteousness as being a rebel: the Good One had mercy on him, justified and set right them that had turned aside.

Let everyone chase away their weariness, since that Majesty was not wearied with being in the womb nine months for us....

Lo! The First-born has opened unto us His feast as a treasure-house. This one day in the whole year alone opens that treasure-house: come, let us make gain, let us grow rich from it....

The darkness was overcome, that it might proclaim that Satan was overcome; and the sun gave longer light, that it might triumph, because the First-born was victorious. Along with the darkness the dark one was overcome, and with the greater light our Light conquered!

St. Ephrem (+373) is a Syriac doctor of the Church and among its greatest hymnographers.

04

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For information on local groups, contact Fr. Gerardo V. Laguartilla C.P.P.S. at uscatlanticprovince@gmail.com

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"The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it."

John 1:5



Giorgione - Adoration of the Shepherds (1507)

“AFTER THIS, OUR EXILE”

By Peter Santandreu

O God, who are pleased to give us the shining example of the Holy Family, graciously grant that we may imitate them in practicing the virtues of family life and the bonds of charity, and so, in the joy of your house, delight one day in eternal rewards. Through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever.

With this Collect the presider at Mass offers the collected prayers of the congregation to the Father at the liturgy commemorating the Holy Family. In this oration the communal petition is offered so that we “imitate them in practicing the virtues of family life.” While these “virtues of family life” are myriad in nature, one such virtue stands out when considering the biblical accounts that surround the early years of the Holy Family: obedience.

The Holy Family of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus has its foundation in the elemental quality of obedience. The Bible recounts the fiat moments of both Joseph and Mary. In these crucial turning points both spouses decide to lay down their individual plans and allow the Lord to bring together a family of his construction. In the story of Mary and the angel, a young maiden engaged to be married is approached by Gabriel with a proposition asking her to take on the responsibility of bearing the Son of God in her virgin womb. Many an Annunciation homily has focused on the “yes” or “no” moment of deciding to follow God’s will unreservedly or opting for a more controlled version of what life will be. It has been said that “all creation awaits the virgin’s answer” as this will determine the fate of the salvation of the world. One can imagine the enormity of the pressure surrounding Mary’s response. “Will I be accepted by my family? Will people believe that this is a pregnancy from God? What about my betrothed? Will he be able to overcome the apparent contradiction of conception without the marital embrace?” With so much at stake the biblical author presents Mary as a person who hardly considers the substantial risk. Luke’s narrative has Mary responding almost instantly; “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”



05

*Alexandre-Marie Colin
(French, 1798-1875)
Flight into Egypt (1840)*



For Joseph on the other hand things are not so simple. He is “a just man” (Mt 1:19) with a reputation to maintain. In a society where an honorable reputation was of great value, could he really be expected to jeopardize it by a woman to whom he wasn’t fully married? “Would this ruin his future business prospects? Would the community hold him at an arm’s length for the rest of his life?” All of that was possible. Yet, being a just man, he decides to “divorce her quietly not wanting to expose her.” After coming to this conclusion as the only reasonable way out of a precarious situation, he too is visited by an angel seeming to ask the impossible: “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son; and you shall name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:20-21). Then, seemingly without further reflection, the text goes on to state, “Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife” (Mt 1:24). The secret to Joseph’s willingness to react so quickly is implicit in the author’s description of him. Justice, being the high virtue it is, has to do with righteousness in the eyes of the Lord. Joseph’s justice was demonstrated by his self-abandonment to the divine will when it became manifest. He doesn’t question it because he has already spent a lifetime being the kind of person who not only recognizes the Master’s voice but also identifies it with the superior good of humanity and thus follows it willingly.

Thus, Mary and Joseph, having accepted the unexpected gift from God in the person of their Son, continued to demonstrate their obedience as their family life proceeded after Jesus’ birth. The Matthean account of the Holy Family being exiled in Egypt, for example, is significant in a way that might escape the modern reader. In an age of mobility where people often move to new cities and countries for employment opportunities, the ancient concept of “home” can be lost on us. For people of the first century — more so for people from a lower socio-economic status — leaving home for an extended period of time, much less permanently, was unthinkable. Home was not just “where the heart is” as if it could be anywhere one feels a certain connection; it was tied to a geography, a diet, a culture, a definite place. Home for Mary and Joseph would mean the confluence of where they were from and where they belonged. Joseph’s ability to pick up and go into exile voluntarily at the angelic command would really be a second fiat on their part. A brief (possibly years’ long) stay in Egypt could not, however, be compared to the subsequent angelic command never to return to Judea and take up permanent residence in Nazareth of Galilee. It is here that the true Matthean exile begins for Joseph and Mary.

The exile of the Holy Family is in some way a mirror of the various exiles of Israel throughout their history. It can be likened to the exile to Babylon insofar as those who had left their home were encouraged to “build houses...take wives and have sons and daughters...seek the prosperity of the

city to which I have sent you” (cf. Jer 29:5-7). There was the expectation that the generation to whom Jeremiah was speaking would never see hope again. And while this exile would eventually end, it was left to their children and their children’s children to see it.

One can also draw parallels between this “Nazarian exile” and the earlier Assyrian exile that destroyed the northern tribes of Israel. This exile was one that did not promise a way home. Just as Joseph and Mary might have thought they would live out their last days far from their home in Bethlehem, so these exiles to the nations would also have settled into the conditions that fell to them. Left only with the hope for reunion on the last day or at the coming of the Messiah, the exiled ones were not expected to return home and their loss was keenly felt by those they left behind.

Matthew uses another such biblical parallel as he interprets the Holy Family’s sojourn in Egypt. The infant Jesus had to travel down to Egypt so that he, and his family, could be said to have come out of that land like Moses of old: “Out of Egypt I have called my son,” citing the prophet Hosea (Mt. 2:15, Hos 11:1). The Holy Family had to relive this exile from homeland too so that it could be said how, even in the uncertainty of living in an alien land, God’s will is being done.

So it is from within this context of a family formed by the experience of obedience to the divine command that Jesus grew into a man. He did not personally experience the suffering that Joseph or Mary endured to bring him into the world and keep him safe, but such scars are readily visible for those with eyes to see. Joseph and Mary, already faithful servants of the Lord, were further forged into the saints we know today by way of their exile. The boy Jesus enjoyed the fruit of their sacrifice not only by providing him with material well-being but also by their commitment to divine obedience — which they undoubtedly transmitted to their son.

Jesus will one day speak about “hating” father and mother as a requirement for true discipleship (Lk 14:26). While this is one of the more difficult passages to stomach for most people, perhaps he is calling all would-be disciples to imitate the obedience of his own parents. Parents who followed the divine command to leave their home, accept the ridicule of the community for going ahead with their marriage, and take on the risk of an uncertain future with a mysterious child. We pray that as we “imitate them in practicing the virtues of family life,” we may always strive to follow the example of Joseph and Mary in their self-abandoned obedience to the will of God which made them, through exile, the foundation of the Holy Family and the model of parenthood.

Fr. Peter Santandreu is a priest of the Diocese of Buffalo currently studying canon law in Washington DC.

**The Missionaries of
the Precious Blood,
Atlantic Province
wish you a Merry
Christmas and a very
happy New Year 2023!**



"My very best wishes for the upcoming mysteries, both to you and yours, and I wholeheartedly hope that every blessing will be bestowed upon you. Let us never cease praying during the solemnities for which the Church prepares us, so as to progress in the ways of the Lord and, as the temporal years pass by, let us prepare ourselves for eternity."

-Our Beloved Founder, St. Gaspar del Bufalo

THE MAGI, THE STAR, AND CHRIST

By Craig Bullock

During this Christmas Season and beyond, may we too persevere in our journey to the manger of the Christ Child, which is the center of all hearts and the center of all history. This journey is humanity's only hope.

If the Christmas story is to have real meaning in our lives, we must realize it is about us and our journey through life. Otherwise, it remains a quaint story with no actual relevance to our everyday experiences. Its relevance is shown very clearly in the biblical account of the Magi making their way to the Christ Child. The Magi are us, and their story is meant to serve as a tried and true map for our own pilgrimage to Christ and the life he offers.

As a starting point, the Magi chose to follow a star that was leading them to the king of the Jews in the East. This star was not located in the world of politics, power, or possessions, but far above in the heavens. The Magi had the star, but what moves and directs our lives? Is our life map manufactured by secular and unenlightened sources, or is it inspired from above, by God's saints and a transcendental wisdom? These questions are far more than interesting philosophical queries. How we answer them has everything to do with the quality of our lives and whether or not we realize the liberating mystery of Christ's presence within creation.

Furthermore, the star that the Magi devoted themselves to following did not engage them in idle speculation, endless psychological analysis, or political debate. Rather, it moved them in the direction of the Christ light, deeper and deeper into the organizing force field of God's truth, beauty, and goodness. The meaning for us is clear: when we are following heaven's luminous light we are moving away from fear, despair, and our preoccupation with meaningless pursuits and engaged in the process of initiation into the blissful mystery of God's love and wisdom, perfectly embodied in Christ Jesus. As we continue to follow the light of heaven we pray more, serve more, and love more.

Thirdly, the Magi lost their way on their journey to the Christ Child, just as we lose our own way

on our life journey. Yet being lost and confused was not their problem; it was who they chose to ask for help. They consulted King Herod, a puppet monarch put into power by the Roman Empire who was known to be the very personification of ruthlessness. The result of seeking guidance from such a dark source was the tragic massacre of the children of Bethlehem. We will all experience confusion on the path to encountering the living Christ. The story of the Magi teaches us that we need to be very discerning about the source of our guidance. Science can reveal certain facts about how life works and provide us with lifesaving technologies, but it cannot reveal the meaning of life. The political system, when it works, provides us with policies that safeguard fundamental human rights, protect the most vulnerable among us, and help society thrive materially, but it cannot create an earthly heaven. Finally, as beneficial as the social sciences might be, they cannot empower us to transcend humanity's self-destructive tendencies. Only the light of heaven, communicated by those streams of legitimate spiritual authority, can provide us with the living wisdom necessary to overcome our ignorance.

Despite their wrong turn into Herod's darkness, the Magi persevered in their journey to the Christ Child and received their reward: they encountered the living Christ and were forever transformed. During this Christmas Season and beyond, may we too persevere in our journey to the manger of the Christ Child, which is the center of all hearts and the center of all history. This journey is humanity's only hope.

Craig Bullock is the Spiritual Director of the Assisi Institute in Rochester, NY and a practicing psychotherapist.



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*Bartolomé Esteban Murillo - Adoration of the Magi
(655-1660)*

A STAR TO HERALD A KING

By Patricia Wheelhouse

The Child we seek
Doesn't need our gold.
On love, on love alone
He will build his kingdom.
His pierced hand will hold no scepter,
His haloed head will bear no crown;
His might will not be built
On your toil.
(Gian Carlo Menotti)

Scripture tells us that King Herod heard of a child's birth who would be "King of the Jews" and learned from the Magi the exact timing of a guiding Star's appearance which would lead them to Jesus. The king directed them to search for the babe and return with his location. The Magi, however, had been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, but to return to their own country by another way.

Now imagine a small town in Southern Ohio in 1970. A small youth choir, led by an innovative music director is learning the meaning of Epiphany through music. The winter was cold there, snow was falling, and the hush of the frozen night almost felt reverential as the choir gathered in the bell tower of the church, high upon a hill overlooking the town. Each chorister held a hand bell of varying size. The director had issued bells in a particular scale — the Pentatonic (five-note) Scale for the purpose of harmonic improvisation. The lights were turned out. Only the outdoor lighting cast a blue glow into the tower room as the young musicians played their bells as they saw fit. They made beautiful music, haunting melodies and harmonies ... music fit for a King. It was a revelation for all of us — yes, I was there — and we did indeed have an Epiphany moment. From separate bells came heavenly sounds. The vibrations of the bells rang through our bones, causing a deep connection with the polyphony that

emerged from our common experience.

This same choir had learned a choral anthem in the folk tradition whose composer and lyricist are unknown. The words I can remember are, "The sun had set upon Judea. A puppet King adorned the throne...." The chorus of the song read, "Don't stand there looking at the sky, boys. It's not up there He'll reappear." I can't remember the rest of the chorus, but it was something like, "But in your hearts and minds He'll find you, you have nothing to fear." The point of the anthem was that the return of the new King promised by a Star would be internal, but only after making the ultimate sacrifice for His people.

The youth choir later drove to a small chapel far out in the country to share their music. As we drove through a beautiful starlit river valley, the words of that anthem seemed to come alive. Yes, we were looking up at the sky. The North Star, Polaris, pointed the way to True North — to Truth. Yes, we were thinking of the infant King who would one day return. Our fourteen-year-old minds tried to grasp the enormity of the story we were sharing with our rural friends. What did it mean? What does it mean?

When the Magi followed their own star to find the babe, they fell down and worshipped him. In Matthew's gospel this marked the first time Jesus was recognized as a Savior by human beings.

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Perhaps those two encounters of mine involving a bell choir and later singing an Epiphany folk hymn under a canopy of stars were the first time that I had encountered the Divine. The choir's experience wasn't a dramatic event – but these memories made an indelible imprint on my understanding of Jesus's coming, and his returning within my heart. The brilliance of the heavens on a cold winter's night provided the stage upon which these scenes were played out for me as a young girl. This was the Epiphany gift I received. Like the Magi, I came to worship Him.

**Swifter than lightning
He will soon walk among us.
He will bring us new life
And receive our death,
And the keys to his city
Belong to the poor.
*(Gian Carlo Menotti)***

Patricia Wheelhouse PhD is a member of the Rochester Mission House.

“WHAT’S IN A NAME?”

By Renée Tembeckjian

Now in the mind and heart of that same God, *Beloved* is our true name as well. If only we could believe it. If only we would live as if we believed it. And when we choose baptism, for ourselves or someone we love, we make a vow to that same path – that by all we say and do, we will honor our true and divine name, *Beloved*.

What’s in a name? Quite a lot, actually... which is why expectant parents often spend time considering them. We might just like the way a name sounds, or might want to honor someone we love or admire, or invoke traits we hope to see expressed in the person’s life: names like Grace, Earnest, Sage, Joy, Hope, etc.

A name may also tell a story: Moses means *to draw out*, because his adoptive mother drew him from a river. Samuel means *God has heard*, to honor his mother’s plea for a child. Isaac means *he who laughs* after his mother Sarah reportedly laughed at the absurd promise of conceiving a child so late in life. And in the Gospel, we meet the Baptizer whose name, John, means, *Yahweh is gracious*, given because his parents were also well past the age for expecting a child.

But as he grew into a very public ministry, John’s followers tried to give him a *different* name. They wanted to call him *Messiah* because that is who they needed him to be. Generations of hoping and waiting for a savior brought them to this moment, to the one they believed the ancient prophets of their people have been speaking of all along.

And John seems the perfect fulfillment of those prophecies. Raised in the desert territory of Judea, he was probably formed by the practices of the Essenes, a Jewish sect of self-denial, fasting, prayer, and ritual immersion in water. John cut a vivid figure in his traditional camel hair and by his dynamic, unapologetic preaching. As stern and demanding as it was, that message drew hundreds of followers, persuaded that he is the promised Messiah and calling him just that.

How easy it would have been for John to accept this grand title. How tempting it would be to accept such a designation, to enjoy such elevation and influence over those who would so readily call themselves his disciples. Imagine how easily a lesser man might fall right into it. He wouldn’t even have had to strong arm his way through that crowd – he would only have been giving them what they wanted.

But John the Baptist was not a lesser man. He refused the accolade and rejected the title *Messiah* because it was not true. He risks and tolerates disappointing his would-be

disciples rather than lie to them. John is crystal clear that he is part of a larger narrative of succession and that he is not the whole story himself. Thus he says, “I am not the one. There is one coming after me.”

As it happens, the “One” to whom John refers is a man in his late 20s about to meet him at the water’s edge. Until then he had been living a village life with his parents, other family and friends. He has learned to read, attends synagogue and is probably an apprentice carpenter. We assume he had been raised with a wondrous story of his conception and birth, and a belief that he is the fulfillment of all that the prophets of his people have spoken for centuries. All this history, his own contemplations, and the power of Baptizer’s message, somehow lead him to be baptized that day. We, of course, know him as *Jesus* or, more accurately, *Yeshua*, meaning “Yahweh saves” — now so deeply drawn by the public ministry of the Baptizer that he left Nazareth and made his way to the Jordan River to be baptized. And in the midst of this bold step and faithful act, Jesus perceives another name, the name by which God’s vision – God’s dream – will be expressed in human form and life: *This is my Beloved, in whom I am well pleased*.

In the mind and heart of God then, *Beloved* is Jesus’ true name and with every breath of his being, by every word of his mouth, prayer of his spirit, and action of his life, Jesus honored that holy name. He did right by it, with an unfailing heart for the poor, a keen ear to the cries of the oppressed, a righteous anger toward injustice of any kind, a demand that we look in a mirror before we dare judge others, a call to forgive as we have been forgiven and, ultimately, a willingness to give of himself, even unto his very life, rather than betray in *any* measure that God-given name, rather than betray the God whose own name is Love itself.

Now in the mind and heart of that same God, *Beloved* is our *true* name as well. If only we could believe it. If only we would live as if we believed it. And when we choose baptism, for ourselves or someone we love, we make a vow to that same path – that by all we say and do, we will honor *our* true and divine name, *Beloved*.

So what's in a name? Quite a lot, actually. Because in this life, no matter what you may be called, your true name is Beloved of God. If only we could believe it. If only we would speak, pray, and act as if we did believe it. Amen.

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Of course, we will not do this perfectly. We are human and we will falter. There will be times when we are tempted to align ourselves with a viewpoint, or group, or path of action – *with a name* – that does not embody the God of Love. We have all known the temptation to laugh like Sarah when the promises of God seem too absurd or too distant to sustain us. We have all known times of stress, anxiety or anger, when we are tempted to lash out, or to be less than honest in order to avoid certain consequences, personally, professionally, or politically. We have all known a moment when we must choose between what is right and what is easy. There will always be the allure and temptation to betray the name we vowed to honor at our Christian baptism.

And when those times come, and I believe we are in such times right now, I bid you remember those baptismal promises, to remember that the name you have vowed to follow is Jesus, the Prince of Peace and his way of love. Only you can decide.

So what's in a name? Quite a lot, actually. Because in this life, no matter what you may be called, your true name is Beloved of God. If only we could believe it. If only we would speak, pray, and act as if we did believe it. Amen.

The Very Rev. Renée Tembeckjian, PhD is rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Fayetteville, NY.



DISCERNING MY VOCATION

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few...” (Luke 10:2). Let us pray for vocations and encourage and support young people to respond to God’s call to serve as priests and religious men and women.

To become a missionary of the Precious Blood, please contact our Vocation Director Fr. Alarey Abella, C.P.P.S. at 416-829-6717 or e-mail alareyab@yahoo.ca.



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