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#117

For the Fourth Sunday of Advent -- Luke 1.26-38

When he grows up...

...therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. -- Luke 1.35b

Had it not been for the Resurrection, the Incarnation would have been all but lost to human history; it would have been just another birth to just another Jewish girl -- rendered somewhat picturesque due to the journey made necessary by the decree of Caesar Augustus "that all the world should be taxed."

How often do we find ourselves saying something like, "If I'd known then what I know now..."? This and similar phrases show the importance hindsight can have; often we can only appreciate the meaning of the past and hold to a hope for the future by having lived through the time in between.

Christmas wasn't even celebrated by the church until the fourth century. It was only as the church came to understand that the second coming wasn't imminent and to realize the cosmic dimensions of the Resurrection that the birth of the child Jesus came to be seen for the unique event that it was, and to be assigned its rightful importance.

Somewhere amidst our secular preparations and celebration of Christmas there is a tableau of Jesus' birth. It includes the figure of Mary immaculately clothed in blue and white, with Joseph nearby gazing in a detached manner at the little babe wrapped in a radiantly white cloth; the animals, of course, look as if they've all had a bath.

Whether we carry around this tableau or another of our own making, a constant persists: Jesus remains at the center of it, but always as a child. We never let him grow up -- not in our minds -- not in our lives.

Our Lord began life as an infant, it is true. But he grew to adulthood, living one completely human life with all the pain and suffering that life entails. And he did so not by avoiding anything but by embracing "everything. He did so that we might imitate him and in so doing become channels of his grace-full love, and agents through whom the world might be trans-formed.

What the angel Gabriel announced to Mary and to us is not just the birth of a child, but the beginning of a human life -- a life to be lived so fully and perfectly that it can become the divine pattern for our lives, if we let it.

It is up to us to take hold of the tiny hand of the Christ child as he lies in the manger and then to grow into maturity with him. He doesn't coerce us; he doesn't threaten us; he doesn't promise us carefree lives lived out on a bed of roses. He quietly invites us to take hold of his hand and to walk with him into adulthood as he shares our lives and we share his.

To the extent that we are able to do this, we -- like him -- will be able at the end of our days to lay down our lives as worthy offerings of ourselves to God. Having shared in his life, we will share in his death, and finally in his Resurrection.

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The call of Christmas

The wise men answered the call of a star; the shepherds followed the vision of angels in the sky --both searching for the same Savior but under a different call. But the story of the wise men and the shepherds tells us more; it also speaks of differences that are not reconciled. The Christmas story tells us that God called each of these people in different ways which are strikingly appropriate. Each received their call in ways understood by them. The illustration here is simple: God does not call us in the same ways; God does not communicate with us in one way only. God speaks in many ways and those who respond in faith and find their way to God are called of God.

There is yet a second contrast between the shepherds and the wise men. Each had their own motivation for coming. The wise men for a king; the shepherds for "a Savior" whose birth had been announced to them. Again, the principle is simple: God does not

recognize only one motivation, one vocation. We are all acceptable, no matter the reason for our coming, when we come to Christ.

A third contrast is that the shepherds and the wise men had different ways to go. The shepherds from the fields and town; the wise men from a far greater distance. Many ways may lead us to Christ and, whoever we are, we will have to find our own way.

There is a final contrast: the shepherds and wise men worshiped Jesus in different ways. The shepherds came and simply saw him; the wise men brought gifts of great value. The final principle emerges: no matter how we worship, all forms are acceptable to God, as long as we worship in spirit and in truth. The Christmas story affirms that vocation comes in many ways, and that worship is expressed in many forms of a heart's adoration for the Christ.

--RTB

Here and there with the Brotherhood...

Community Notes

Boston & Wellesley MA

Over the Labor Day holiday weekend, Brs. James Teets, Stephen Storen and Tobias Stanislas Haller, along with aspirant Patrick Poole, paid a social call on the brothers of Province I. The brothers from Province II stayed at St. Aelred's House, Wellesley, and Patrick stayed with Provincial Br. Laurence Andrew Keller at the "Pembroke Priory" in Boston. During the visit, the brothers of the New England Province organized a get-together in Wellesley, which all attended. On Sunday, the visiting brothers attended their hosts' parishes. During the trip, Brs. James, Tobias Stanislas and Donovan Aidan Bowley enjoyed lunch with the brothers of the Society of St. John the Evangelist, and a visit to St. Joseph's Abbey (Cistercian) in Spencer.

Graymoor, Garrison NY

Superior General Br. Richard Thomas Biernacki, joined by the community's good friend, the Rev. David Henritz, attended

the celebration of St. Francis' Day at the invitation of the Friars of the Atonement. The Holy Eucharist was celebrated by the Rev. Jack Lewis, recently appointed Guardian, followed by a dinner and social. Having just been at Graymoor for the Brotherhood's



Alma Thomas, Canon Smith, Brs. Earl & William



The brothers and Fr. Smith enjoy a joke at the reception

Tobias Stanislas was epistoler and Br. Earl preached. Br. William assisted the rector, the Rev. Canon Edwin Smith.

Manhattan NY

Brs. James and Tobias Stanislas attended the interim meeting of the board of the Catholic Fellowship of the Episcopal Church.

Hamburg NJ

The Superior General held a retreat for the brothers of Province II at his summer home, "Gilead," in the Tall Timbers trailer park. The autumn foliage was at its peak of color, and provided a perfect background as the brothers sang the Noonday office under the bright, clear blue sky on a tree-covered hilltop. It was a perfect way to celebrate and enjoy God's creation.

General Chapter, Br. Richard Thomas enjoyed the chance to renew friendships and to share in the life of the Atonement community.

Bronx NY

The parish of St. Andrew's celebrated Br. William Bunting's life profession and his 39 years of ministry in that place with a festive eucharist and gala luncheon. Brs. James, Christian Williams, William Francis Jones, Stephen, Tobias Stanislas, Earl Christian, and novice Br. Christopher Stephen Jenks attended. Br.



Brs. Richard Thomas and Christian mulch roses as John Colon and Br. James look on



Br. Earl preaches at the festival eucharist.

Towson MD

Br. Edward Munro visited with Helen Joyce, the Brotherhood's mentor and guide in formation, at her new home, Stella Maris, where she lives with some of the Sisters of the Visitation. While there, Brother attended Rosary and Benediction.



The brothers (with aspirant Pat Poole) gather "on the deck" at Gilead

Rockville MD

The brothers of Province III gathered at Christ Church in early October for the eucharist, business and "state-of-the-Province" address, Noonday office, lunch, and a reading (with meditations) of four writings by Saint Gregory. The day concluded with Evening Prayer.

St. Charles IL

Br. Richard Thomas assisted General Convention

Coordinator Lori Arnold at the recent interim meeting of the House of Bishops. He set a new record when he was able to name over 100 of the bishops at the registration desk. Most of the work involved assisting with registration, and checking on meal functions and meeting rooms. One of the more enjoyable times was the dinner honoring retiring bishops. The Rt. Rev. Harold Robinson wrote new lyrics to the

musical score from *The Sound of Music*, and those bishops retiring, joined by their spouses, performed the musical *Over the Hill*. After two rehearsals with Br. Richard Thomas the troupe was polished and the show went on, with the benefit of Tyrolean hats with feathers, and kazoos for the chorus parts. It was an honor for Br. Richard Thomas to play the piano and direct the chorus, taking part in this tribute to the ministries of these faithful bishops.

Chicago IL

Province West members gathered for the eucharistic celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, which coincided with the House of Bishops' meeting. After the service, the Superior General, Provincial Br. Thomas Joseph Ross, novice Br. Edward Ramon Riley, postulant to the Companion Sisterhood Linda Marie Peters, and aspirant Alan Speer were invited to lunch with the bishops.

Note to our readers:

Starting with the first issue of 1988, *The Servant* will be produced six times a year, on a bimonthly basis. The change has been contemplated for some time, and we feel that it is wise, both in terms of stewardship and content.

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The Superior General's tonsure is visible in the foreground, as he accompanies the retiring bishops' swansong