



NO ROOM

Christmas morning we will be reading, "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town" (Lk 2:1-3).

It was the government of the time that required Mary and Joseph to leave their home, their relatives and all that was familiar, at a time when they knew they'd need all that support. God used the human experience of living in a country with secular laws to bring to the world His Great Mercy.

"And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Lk 2:4-7).

Mary and Joseph had the expectations of any young couple with a baby on the way.

Joseph was a skilled craftsman. They lived in a village where they expected their child to be born, to see him grow and where Joseph knew he would be able to support his family with the work of his own hands. Suddenly though, Mary and Joseph had to pack what they could carry and go, despite what was happening in their personal lives – go.

In the second line that began this article I couldn't help but notice a word we have been hearing over and over in the news during these

last years – Syria. Syria, a country where so much suffering and pain are present. But not only in Syria: Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Eritrea, Colombia, Mali, and Ukraine many more. Where people are pouring out of their homelands by hundreds of thousands even millions and fleeing in hope of a safer place. Places where governments or the lack of it impinges on the citizens lives to such an extent that they flee, seeking refuge elsewhere. And most find like Mary and Joseph that, "there was no room for them in the inn" nor another country.

"In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews...When King Herod heard this, he was frightened...Then Herod secretly called for the wise men ... 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' ... And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road" (Mt 2:1-12).

This birth was so important that the stars pointed Him out! The song of the Angels broke the dark silence of the night! And the powerful of the nation, that should have welcomed him, feared instead and sought to end His infant life. "Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt"(Mt 2:13-14). Jesus was carried and nursed in the arms of His mother in a country that spoke a different language than the one He was learning to speak from His parents. Joseph and Mary filled His ears about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and taught Him prayers that were strange to those among whom they lived.

Most of us have not had to flee for our lives, seeking a country to be safe in and raise a family. But we have all been strangers – a new job, school, a move to a new town, maybe even a new parish.

We know what it is like to be seeking friendship, security, a safe-harbor and meaning and what it is like to feel different from those around you. Jesus reveals in His teaching how vital our welcoming one another small or big is, "Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... I was a stranger and you welcomed me'" (Mt 25:34-35). All over the world there are men, women and children running, waiting, wondering what will happen, who will save them, will they ever have a place to call home.

Jesus was too small to humanly be frightened, but certainly Mary and Joseph knew the same apprehension that many of these families are enduring now. The angel said to him "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt...; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt" (Lk 2:13-14).

Syria in this Nativity Gospel this Christmas brings a meaning to Jesus' birth that has never crossed my mind before. It is as if the Lord is crying out to all who are seeking refuge of some sort, "I see you. We are ONE with you. I promise one day you will have an eternal home, a place of peace, a place of ultimate joy and the fullness of life! See My Beloved Son, so like you just now, but not forever, not forever." Let's pray for those who are not home this Christmas that they receive the best gift of all – knowledge of this God Who loves us so much that He gives us His own Son vulnerable and tender as a new born and strong and powerful beyond our imagination. He is the One who today brings us the way to Eternal Life and happiness. Have a truly Merry Christmas!
MMEK

MSM M.649 Mirror of the lyf of Jesu Christi 1440

Gratitude and Photographic Credit: The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.



A HOLY PRESENCE

Before arriving at Fleury, I had heard that the Relics of St. Benedict were in the Crypt of the Church, which took a little bit of time to find, as you felt you were going into areas, you should not be in, and then the crypt was dark, and unlit, with the exception of the holy candles burning in front of the relics of St. Benedict. As I was praying in the crypt, I was amazed at the constant flow of pilgrims that came to pray to St Benedict and to light candles.

Then one night after Vespers, a monk tapped my shoulder and motioned to come to the Crypt, as the relics of St. Benedict were being taken out of the Shrine they are kept in, and would be exposed, and we could spend about ten

minutes or so praying in the presence of them.

When I got to the Crypt, candles flickered, the bones of St. Benedict were exposed in a glass case. These were not tiny specs or pieces of bone, these were actual, identifiable bones. I had never seen anything like this. It was very special, and I did feel and perceive that I was in a Holy presence. It's hard to put into words, but it was real. It was a moment of Grace. I prayed for so many by name, in my mind, the intentions they had entrusted to me, family, friends, strangers. St Benedict is a powerful intercessor and protector. St. Benedict Pray for us. SGM



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HAPPENINGS



September 8th is a big day for both of our Communities: it is the patronal feast of St Mary's Monastery and it is the Foundational Anniversary of St Scholastica Priory. After the first group of us made our Solemn Vows in 1984 we processed with Bishop Harrington and Mother Elizabeth Sumner, OSB of Stanbrook Abbey and elected our first Benedictine Prioress! It was Sr Mary Clare, of course, our foundress and long-time superior. We four were part of that big day!



September 13th Mother Mary Elizabeth and Sr Gemma left on a trip that would end at the Provincial Chapter of the English Province of the Subiaco-Cassinense Congregation. They spent a few delightful days with Abbot Anselm and many familiar faces at Pluscarden Abbey in Scotland. The community has been sending monks since the 1989. We grow attached to them very quickly and claim them as brothers. Sr Gemma with Br Finbar once with us and Fr Bede who lived in Petersham for 17 years!

We left Pluscarden with Abbot Anselm and Fr Giles in one of the monastery cars on the 18th for a trip down the center of Scotland to Stanbrook Abbey in Wass, England. On the way we stopped for tea, of course! There we came across a very familiar word to us here in Petersham, Athol! Here in Massachusetts it is the town next to us. In Scotland it is an earldom and in the little town we stopped in – an Inn!



Stanbrook Abbey generously passed the Benedictine life onto our community. From

1980-84 there was at least one Stanbrook nun living with us. Sr Gemma and I went to visit them and saw their newly built and just dedicated Church.



September 20-26th Mother Mary Elizabeth and Sr Gemma attended the Provincial Chapter which was held at the Abbey of



Saint Benoit Sur Loire in Fleury, France. The Abbey was founded in 630. Nuns and monks were there from the US, England, Scotland, Mexico and Germany. Work was done in preparation of the General Chapter of the whole Congregation in 2016.



On our return we discovered the Sr Mary Clare was taken to the hospital that very morning. She is home now and feeling much better. Please keep her in your prayers. She is still teaching so much by the way she lives.

October 3rd Cedric Liqueur, our actor friend, put on a one-man show at the Petersham Town Hall on Duke Ellington. Toes were tapping!

October 9th-11th we welcomed four lovely women coming to take part in the Monas-



tic Experience Weekend. We are always touched by hearts listening to the Lord's call and willing to considering a life Consecrated to Jesus! Pray for them and for us!

October 17th we welcomed more than 40 of our Oblates for a day of retreat. Two women began their discernment year. What an inspiration these men and women are to us who each work to let the leaven of St Benedict's Rule and the prayer of the Psalms penetrate their lives in so many different states in life.

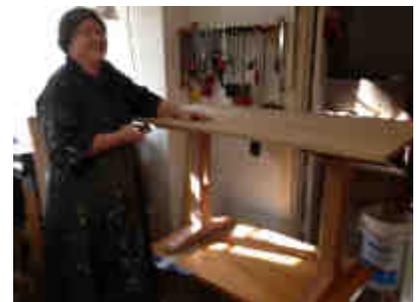


Interspersed between these events we have had visits from dear friends from near and far. The guest house was full nearly non-stop through the summer and fall. One group was from St Malachy's Chapel in New York, a group of Catholic artists of all different disciplines trying to bring their faith into their art and share it with others.

The summer and fall were a time of getting some maintenance done such as the new railing for our walk. Our new railing is wrought iron. Here is hoping that ice won't take it down! Thankfully no one was in our library when a 15 foot square of ceiling fell! We had no idea that a bay of shower stalls had leaks going on and boom! The drains are repaired and ceiling will happen soon.

October 31st, what would have been Sr Mary Herbert's 100th birthday; we supplied the town with chocolate chip cookies for their Halloween party.

November 4th we all gathered around the first of the refectory tables that Sr Monica is making from the cherry wood our dear friends gave us last winter. The first is the most painstaking trying to do it perfect. She has seven more to do!



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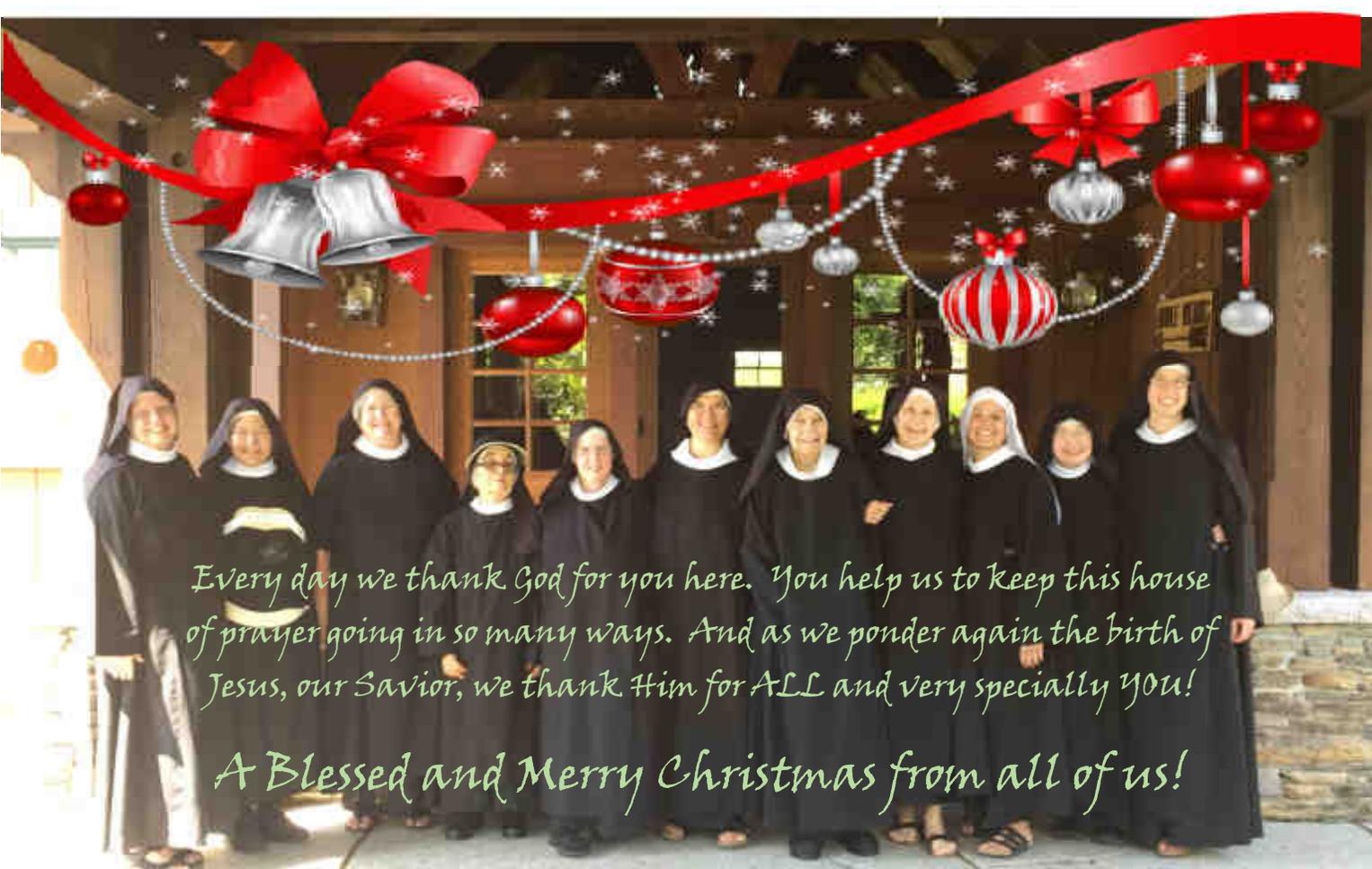
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Mankind is a great,
an immense
family... This is
proved by what we
feel in our hearts at
Christmas.

Pope St John XXIII



*Every day we thank God for you here. You help us to keep this house
of prayer going in so many ways. And as we ponder again the birth of
Jesus, our Savior, we thank Him for ALL and very specially YOU!*

A Blessed and Merry Christmas from all of us!