



“For while gentle silence enveloped all things, and night in its swift course was now half gone, your all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed.”
 (Wis 18:14)

This verse from the Book of Wisdom is used to reveal the moment Christ leapt from the Eternal “Now” of God, and the Incarnation balanced on that thin line between the Old and New Testaments. “Your all-powerful Word leaped down from heaven!” Can’t you almost see this? A vastness of deep inky blue-black and then a speck of light growing and growing and growing till it plunges to our earth in a great burst of brilliant blinding refulgence! The scientists themselves say that light, of itself, does not generate sound. But the solar winds that are pulled down into the magnetic fields of earth do. As the winds collide with the molecules of oxygen and nitrogen at the poles of our planet the Aurora Borealis ripples in our hemisphere. That collision also causes natural radio signals which make sound. All that—so that I can say that a light such as produced by the God’s “all-powerful Word” would be greater than any sonic boom we have ever experienced! A burst of radiance and a cataclysmic blast to shake the earth like the earthquake in the ocean on December 26, 2004 that shook the surface of the entire earth for days! Doesn’t that seem the *proper* way for God to have pierced the

atmosphere of our planet? Wouldn’t this be a proper entrance for the one foretold by the Sibyls and by the Hebrew prophets?

The Jewish nation knew many things about this promised Messiah: that he would be a prophet like Moses, that he would be preceded by Elijah the prophet, that he would be not only a descendant of David but greater than David. Isaiah promised that “authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore” (Is 9:6-7). There were prophetic words about Bethlehem, about a young maiden, suffering and more, but those words, like all, became clear only with hindsight.

And so this great promise of God made to Adam and Eve, seventy-seven generations prior according to Luke’s Gospel, began its earthly time. An angel came to Mary and spoke Jesus’ name to her. That name, Jesus, told who and what he was: “God saves.” It would not be many years later when Luke would write, “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The Incarnation began so quietly that not even those who lived with Mary knew of the angel’s visit. God’s messenger asked a

young maid to be the mother. She said yes. But nothing seemed to change in the world that day. Events played out for her, for Joseph, Elizabeth and Zechariah. The throbbing reality of Jesus’ presence was only spoken of once, when Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, who felt her own child leap in her womb; she cried out, “Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come!” (Lk 1:43). To those around her, Mary’s growing belly was counted on many fingers with a shared knowing look, at best.

There was no glory or renown shining on Mary and Joseph as they began their life together. They were doing those ordinary things of setting up their home, getting into a routine, when suddenly they had to pack and travel for the census ordered by Caesar Augustus. Even this did not make them stand out. This was an order for all of Judea to be registered for taxes. Mary and Joseph joined the other travelers on their journey as God arranged where his Son, our Messiah and Savior, was to be born into the company of our humanity. So unimportant they seemed to be that not a room could be found for them. Would a stable do?

God’s intention, God’s plan, was that his almighty Word leaping into our midst would be small and approachable. There were no guards, no heavy gates, and no winding halls leading to some throne room to find him. There were not even doors! God’s desire was and is for all to love him, yes, even to hold him and see the tender and

SUPERIORS MEETING



Whoever thinks monastic life is monotonous or tedious: please allow me to disabuse you of that notion from the start. Tucked between the Fall Oblate Retreat and our Monastic Experience Weekend was a meeting of international scale held right here in Petersham.

It was the great pleasure of our twin communities of St. Mary's and St. Scholastica's to host this year's meeting of the Superiors of the English Province of the Subiaco Cassinese Congregation of Benedictines. We welcomed ten interstate and international guests to Petersham on September 25-27. Arriving from destinations as near as New York, Chicago and Texas and as far as Germany, England, and Ghana, the superiors made their way to the wilds of western Massachusetts.

'Hold on a moment,' you say. 'Did I read that correctly? Ghana, *Africa*?' Indeed! Fr. Bede Kierney, Prior of Kristo Buase Monastery, joined us as well. He even arrived a few days early and was kind enough to give a conference to our oblates during the weekend immediately preceding the meeting.

Fr. Abbot Anselm moderated the meetings, spanning a period of two days. These gatherings gave superiors an opportunity to share overviews of the workings of their monasteries and seek practical counsel from their peers.



The monks and nuns split hosting duties. The sisters hosted dinner on the first day—a taste of New England Thanksgiving—and our brothers provided the hospitality on the following day, with Fr. Dunstan's kitchen specialties.

There were wonderful opportunities to converse and learn about others' monastic work (from raising sheep in rural New York to keeping a bustling Chicago B&B), monastic practices, and mode of living out the Rule of St. Benedict. And on the second day, each superior was kind enough to give the whole community a verbal "snapshot" and update of recent events at their individual monasteries.

On the morning of Thursday the 27th, a chartered bus pulled up in front of the Priory. The visitors and the members of both communities were treated to an outing to the Hancock Shaker Village in Pittsfield, MA. We were blessed with a glorious blue sky on a crisp autumn day, the perfect showcase for the bright, fall-colored Berkshire hills. (And fortunate, too, as we had brought along a picnic lunch!) Learning about the Shakers' way of life was very interesting. While there were dramatic differences (no 'shaking' off our sins here in Petersham), there were some provocative parallels with our Benedictine way, such as desiring to live a gospel-inspired life in community, living celibately, being organized as a family of brothers and sisters, and a focus on prayer and work (*ora et labora* to us).

In my short time here as a novice, I am constantly amazed that our visiting brothers and sisters from so many varied cultures and backgrounds all seem to slip seamlessly into our life and liturgy here in Petersham. It is truly just a reconnection with family—our extended international Benedictine family—that shares the same values, practices and spiritual patriarch.

It was a full few days, yet we wouldn't have missed this wonderful opportunity. And, who knows, perhaps the world will someday beat another path to our monastic door. If so, our portress will be pleased to answer! SMh



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CEMETERY BLESSING



All Souls' Day this year was like no other. In fact it was on our minds for weeks, because on that day we were to have the much-longed-for blessing of our monastic cemetery. This blessing would mark the official completion of a cemetery that has been in planning and formation for over two years, and the realization of a dream that began over thirty years ago.

The Sunday prior to the big day, at the end of recreation, we were all exhorted to pray hard for the weather. The forecast predicted rain the entire week and Friday would have scattered thunderstorms! Well, we prayed and prayed, we asked others to join our efforts and pleaded with the saints in heaven (especially the members of our community) to intercede. Given that we live in New England, we had hope that the forecast would be the absolute opposite to what was predicted, but it did in fact rain the whole week. Nevertheless, two plans were put forth: either the ceremony would take place before Mass if there were a break in the rain, or after Mass, which wouldn't be decided until the last moment. That morning, it was pouring! Even if the rain were to stop, the ground would still be wet and muddy. We gathered boots, raincoats and umbrellas near the doors of our cloister. The formality of cowls and capes was forgone and we even had to bring out a cover for the microphone system. The rain had become a light mist by Mass time, but we decided to go ahead with having Mass first. Our community in heaven was certainly looking after us, because in the middle of the liturgy you could hear the rain beating on the roof. We would have been completely soaked! As Providence would have it, the rain stopped just as Mass was ending.

The ceremony began with the first of the seven penitential psalms followed by a procession from the church to the cemetery as the Litany of the Saints was sung. Throughout the rest of the ceremony the other six psalms were either recited or chanted. In these psalms, the psalmist repents of sins committed while longing for God and seeking his forgiveness. St. Benedict tells us that we are led to repentance—a necessary first step for salvation—by the pa-

tience of God, because God does not “wish the death of a sinner” but prefers “that he turn back and live” (RB Prologue 37-38; cf. Ezk 18:23, 33:11).

While we chanted the psalms, Fr. Gregory walked the grounds of cemetery several times in varying forms sprinkling holy water. The cross was at the center of all the movements made by the priest during the rite. At one point, Fr. Gregory walked from the large crucifix in the form of a cross demarcating the burial ground. The prayer of the blessing read, “Grant that this cemetery, under the sign of the cross, may, by the power of your blessing be a place of rest and hope.” The entire liturgy reflected our Christian belief that “we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom” (RB Prologue 49).

The rite of the blessing of the cemetery included elements of repentance, the redeeming power of the cross, and hope of resurrection—a reflection of our Christian life of faith as well as the monastic vocations of our sisters and brothers buried there. It was a solemn celebration of vocations lived out entirely and the hope of “the glory to be revealed.” Fr. Gregory spent some time supplementing the current liturgy using medieval rites and gave the two communities a conference on its significance. The liturgical additions truly gave the blessing a more monastic character.

As the rite progressed, the liturgy moved toward the full expression of our longing for the joy of eternal life - both for us and for our departed members. In Psalm 129 we sang, “My soul hopes in the Lord, more than watchmen for daybreak...It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.” The final prayer pleaded that those in the cemetery “obtain the reward of eternal happiness” and the final petitions spoke of our consolation in the resurrection of Christ and asked that we, too, may live with him in glory. The words of St. Benedict at the end of the Rule give the best summary of the rite and all it encompassed: “Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life” (RB 72). SMI

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HAPPENINGS

August 30 - We joined many others offering special prayers and day of fasting for healing and reparation.

September 3 - Labor Day and it was also Fr. Gregory's Patronal Feast Day. We had a meal with and both communities. The novices did a skit recalling the paintings of St Gregory the Great with the Holy Spirit in his ear.



September 18 - Fr. Bede arrived from Ghana, Africa! It was a joy to have him back in his old “homeland.” He was a member at St Mary's Monastery from 1993 to 2011.

September 20—Sr. Monica and other sisters oiled some of our refectory tables for the Oblate retreat and the Superiors Meeting.



September 22 -We had our annual Oblate retreat. Fr Bede gave the main talk that day. They were delighted to see him.



October 5-7-The Monastic Experience Weekend began in the afternoon of our monthly retreat day. Five women came to see from the inside what life is like in a Benedictine Monastery. Pray for them!

October 17- We had a Chapter meeting to talk about “Cor Orans,” the new document written on contemplative women in the church. We will be working on adapting our constitutions to reflect the new requirements.

October 31 - Just as we were walking into the Church for Lauds at 6:30, the fire alarm went off and then the electricity. Without hardly a beat all the nuns and monks picked up their books and headed to the cloister that leads to St Scholastica's where we gathered around a table where the generator powers lights and carried on. Mass was in the Priory house chapel that day too. It was a bad electric panel! All is well now though. Afterwards the sisters baked a slew of cookies for the Petersham Town Hall Halloween Party for the children.

November 2- All Soul's Day and the cemetery blessing.

November 8- Professor Craig Nicolson, Program Director of Sustainability Science at UMass gave a lecture called, “Two Farmers, a Forester and a Very Long Letter.” He shared his own journey in faith coupled with his love for the living in partnership with God's environment. Three previous popes have expressed what culminates in “Laudate si” of Pope Francis. Who writes to “all people of the planet.” Professor Nicolson sees a similar understanding in the writing of Wendell Berry. It was a very enriching talk!



November 10 - We said goodbye to the wheelchair van the Knights of Columbus in Louisiana helped us to purchase. It made life so much easier for our older sisters. We are ever grateful!



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Dear Friends,

The year has zoomed by here in Petersham but that never means we haven't had you and your intentions in our daily prayers here. Ask our novices and they can tell you a regular old work day or a "monastic vacation day," there is always the Divine Office and prayer for all of you and the world.

The news keeps us keen to be at prayer asking God to do what humans can't without a big boost of grace and sacrifice for others. That is what God has done for us. Jesus "emptied himself" to come among us to bring us back to the Father and full and eternal life! He became, oh so small bodily and in the eyes of the world - for us, all for us to be like him. Something beyond our dreams!

We can not thank you enough for the support that you give us in your prayers and material too. We could not do this without you! God knows and sees you when we are praying the Divine Office. Our Christmas Gift to you is a novena of nine Masses during this Christmastide! Blessed Holy Christmas and every blessing in the New Year!

All here at St Scholastica Priory

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infinite love that God has for us in that Child's eyes, and win us over to him.

But that was not all. From the start God wanted to have others "help" him in this revelation, in this salvific work. The angels did announce the glory of God to the shepherds—but not to all the shepherds in the world. Their heavenly light and song was heard only by the few who ran to see and hear the news. So few but, oh, so necessary! The ox and the ass provided warmth in that drafty place to this most holy family. Like our newsletter's manuscript illumination, maybe even some midwives from the town were there to help the Almighty Word enter our tiny planet earth. And of course, Mary was there to bear and bring him forth, and Joseph to guard and provide for him.

God calls out to each of us to love him who loves us beyond any love we know! Knowing us and all our failures he sent his beloved Son Jesus to us. God asks each of us also to carry out a part of his plan: a part that only we can do—being a shepherd and telling others what we saw! Being a finger like John the Baptist,

who would later point to Christ at the river and say, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn 1:29). Being like Andrew who dragged his brother, Simon, saying, "We have found the Messiah" (Jn 1:40). Or like the Gerasene demoniac, who wanted to go with Jesus after he was healed, but Jesus told him to "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you" (Mk 5:19). God asks each of us to do a part of his work, something we are *able* to do and only we *can do*. How humble is our God! God wanted his Word spread not by a cataclysmic blast but by a parent to a child, a friend to a friend, a teacher to a student, a preacher to a crowd. The "all-powerful Word's" first word was *coo* becoming our Jesus, our Emmanuel!

"He overcame the bitterness not by bodily strength, not by force of arms; But by word he overcame the smiter, recalling the sworn covenants with their ancestors" (Wis 18:22). MMEK