

From This Holy Mountain

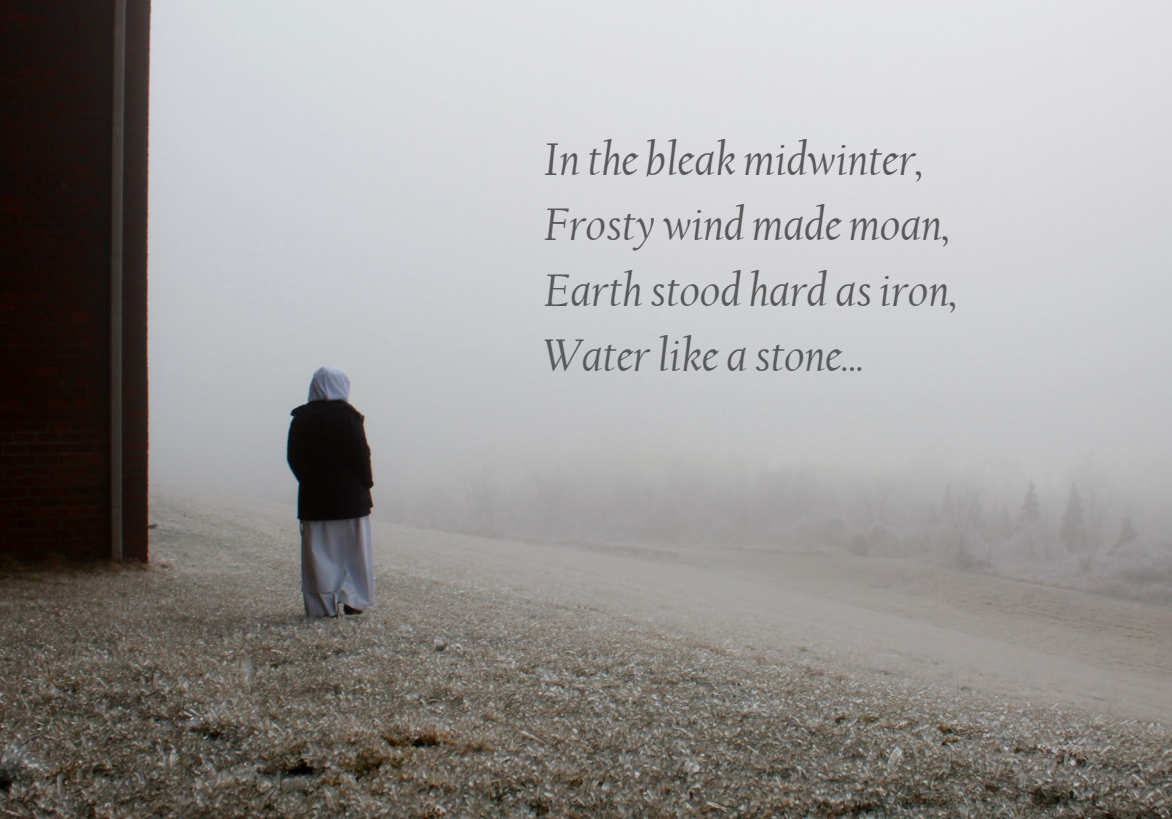
A Publication of the Dominican Nuns of St. Dominic's Monastery - Linden, Virginia - Winter 2023 Issue



ONE NACIVITY



OF OUR LORD.



*In the bleak midwinter,
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone...*

*...Snow had fallen,
snow on snow, snow on snow,
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.*

*Our God, heav'n cannot hold him,
Nor earth sustain;
Heav'n and earth shall flee away
when he comes to reign:
In the bleak midwinter
a stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.*

*Angels and archangels
may have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
thronged the air;
But his mother only,
In her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the beloved with a kiss...*

Dear Friends,

Each season on Blue Mountain brings its own unique beauty and its own moments of grace as well. The season of winter, when earth seems to sleep and the world is clothed in silence and bleakness, is fittingly the moment in history God chose to empty Himself and be born among us as one of us. Christ veiled His divine glory and clothed Himself in our lowly human nature. He did not come to us in majesty, but in the humility of a “Child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.” *In the bleak midwinter / A stable-place sufficed / The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.*

In the bleakness of winter, we pause to celebrate, to ponder, to pray, to refocus our minds and hearts, to contemplate with Mary the mystery of Jesus’ birth. We pray that, like Mary, we too may welcome Him into our souls, our lives, yes, even our very flesh. As contemplative nuns, we have received the precious gift of living in conformity to Christ in a unique way. But God has called each of us to live in His presence, to ponder His Word and to “taste and see” Him in the Eucharist.

As we look at our country and world events, it seems the bleakness of winter surrounds us on every side, threatening to overcome us. Yet, even here is a seed of hope, knowing

that God will not allow war, hatred, violence and lies to have the last word. In the end, Christ, the Prince of Peace will come, not in lowliness, but in majesty and glory, putting an end to the kingdom of evil and ushering forth the Kingdom of God, where justice, charity, peace and truth will abide.

This Christmas we give thanks anew for this promise and we give thanks for each of you. Your generous support makes our contemplative life possible. Your assistance is also bringing us ever closer to our goal of building a permanent chapel here on Blue Mountain. As together we move forward in faith, we trust that God is at work in each of our hearts, preparing us to be a home where He may dwell ever more fully.

Know of our prayers for you, your families and all your needs and intentions. In gratitude, we will be remembering you and your loved ones in a novena of Masses celebrated in our monastery chapel this Christmas season. May God bless you in abundance!

With our grateful prayer,

Sr. Mary Fidelis, O.P.

Prioress



Friend's Spotlight:

Theotokos: Our Model

WHEN I ANNOUNCED my pregnancy to a dear friend, she responded by offering both her congratulations and her condolences. “How odd,” I thought. And then, “How Catholic,” for it is precisely the role of a mother to receive both the joys and sorrows that motherhood demands.

Our Lady, the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, expressed this when she proclaimed her *Fiat*. “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38). In this way, the *Theotokos* proclaimed her assent to the joys and sorrows inherent to the physical Mother of God and the spiritual Mother of God’s children.

Our Lord chose to inscribe the nature of woman with a space for another. That space exists in the sense of a physical womb, but it also reflects a spiritual, intellectual, and emotional space that is inherent to our dignity as women. For this reason, women are called to imitate Our Lady’s model of motherhood, whether physical or spiritual. Some women may balk at this idea of receptivity. “Men are called to welcome to stranger too. Don’t put it all on me.” / “I’m not interested in creating an inviting home. Paint colors are boring.” / “I don’t want to chase young children around a playground. I’m tired.”

Immaculate as she was, I doubt Our Lady desired to travel the roughly one hundred miles between her home and the home of her cousin, Saint Elizabeth, in the early weeks of her vulnerable pregnancy. She chose that journey anyway. Because she was receptive to God’s Will, and because she understood the nature and dignity of her femininity, the *Theotokos* unhesitatingly received the charge to serve her cousin at the same time that she received the Christ Child in her womb.

Sanctity has little to do with what we desire; it has everything to do with what we choose. To the degree that we are

receptive to God’s Will—working with our nature instead of against it—we can joyfully welcome the stranger, create an inviting home, and yes, even occasionally play with the children entrusted to our care. Our feminine receptivity may come with many more sorrows than joys in this life. But our receptivity to Grace has the power to sanctify and transform any sorrow. So let us imitate the model of the *Theotokos* who hesitated not to proclaim herself His handmaid, let us seek first the Kingdom of God, and let us receive everlasting joy.



ABOVE / *Self-Portrait at the Easel* by Sofonisba Anguissola, 1556

Karen Perez is a St. Catherine de Ricci Guild member. She lives in Minnesota with her husband, Juan, and their five children.



A DWELLING-PLACE FOR THE LORD

Sacred Beauty & the Handmaid's Son

LET US BUILD a dwelling-place fit for Our Lord! What does it mean to build a chapel, and to open our hearts to Christ's birth anew? Ours is a world, it seems all too often, that has no place for its Maker and King—no time in its hurried hours, no room in its restless inns. Discord bombards our culture and clamor assails our tired souls: fear, anxiety, lies, confusion, languor, anger, rancor, noise. While people yearn for rest and healing, so many know not how to pray.

“Behold, darkness covers the earth,” declared Isaiah, and his words resound truly then and now:

*Thick clouds cover the peoples;
but the LORD will arise upon you,
and His glory will be seen upon you.
Nations shall walk by your light,
and kings in the brightness of your rising...
They shall bring gold and frankincense,
and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.
(Is 60:2–3, 6)*

To a people who walked in darkness, the Father sent His beloved Son. Among them, as among us, our God became man and deigns to dwell. This is the mystery announced this Christmas and celebrated in faith throughout each day: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; and we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father” (Jn 1:14).



Let us build a house fit for the Word-made-flesh! What does it mean, then, to build a chapel, in light of Christ’s birth so long ago? Jesus was born in a stable—in fact, probably a cave—in rustic simplicity, even radical poverty. In architecture and décor, shouldn’t our churches follow suit? Why guild our tabernacles and chalices when Christ first lay on a wooden throne? Why fashion marble altars and gem-like windows when He was housed in rough-hewn stone?

There is a certain insight here that bears pondering, to be sure. Adorned not in pomp and pride but in humility, our Creator first opened His infant eyes. God looks on the poor with love to the point of clothing Himself in our very flesh. And with the utmost humility He still gives Himself to us, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Thus we approach the altar with the plea of the tax collector and the centurion’s confession of faith: “*Kyrie eleison!* O Lord, I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof.” Indeed, our hearts are not unlike the stable, stony as they are—bedecked with straw and ashes, and perhaps a few donkeys and goats. Who among us is a tabernacle fit for Our Lord? Yet, “Only say the word, and my soul shall be healed.”



Let us build a temple fit for the Divine Child! What does this mean for us Christians now, and for the woman who bore the eternal Son? That holy night, in the humblest stable, our Savior opened His eyes. And who else would He first have looked upon but the fairest and lowliest handmaid of God? She was the Mother whose arms would enthrone Him, the Virgin whose womb had been Jesus’ cloister and shrine. “Like a bride bedecked with her jewels,” our liturgy acclaims her, “Beautiful as the moon, resplendent as the sun” (Is 61:10; Sg 6:10). In Mary, in her pure body and Immaculate Heart, God built His loveliest home on earth.

*Why fashion marble altars
and gem-like windows
when Christ was housed
in rough-hewn stone?*



ABOVE / Detail from the Mystery of the Nativity stained-glass window to be installed in the Permanent Chapel



Let us build a chapel fit for our Spouse and King! What does this mean for our community today, contemplating the humble handmaid as she mirrors the beauty of her all-holy Son? “Arise, shine,” says Isaiah, “for your light has come, for the

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“IN THE DOMINICAN TRADITION, the monastic or conventual church represents a witness to the glory of God *and* a sacrament of God’s presence in a fallen but redeemed world, the hidden glory of the divine mystery partially revealed in wood and stone. History shows that even where evangelical poverty was faithfully observed, no expense was spared by Dominicans in the construction and adornment of their churches. Far from being a distraction to faith or a temptation to worldliness, in the Dominican vision, the beauty of its architecture can itself become a sacrament of divine grace.

Who wouldn’t want to have the privilege of helping the Dominican Nuns realize this vision today in the Shenandoah Valley?”

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ABOVE / Archbishop Augustine Di Noia, O.P.
Roman Curia, Vatican City

glory of the LORD has risen upon you!” (Is 60:1). Indeed, Saint Paul bears witness, He “has shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). It is this glory we seek to reflect as we build our chapel, a fit dwelling-place for the Lord: the wondrous in-breaking of the reality of Heaven into our earthly realms.

Our brother Archbishop Augustine Di Noia describes the role of sacred architecture in this way: “More than just a testament to the greatness of God, the conventual church in the Dominican tradition represents a sacramental embodiment of the presence of God in our midst.” In short, it radiates the mystery of Christmas, the “immanence of the divine.” The monastery chapel thus participates in our Order’s holy preaching, becoming in its very beauty a sign and conduit of divine grace. “I was borne up to You by Your beauty!” exclaims Saint Augustine, and he speaks not as a rarefied mystic but as a man. For, observes Saint Basil, “It is part of our nature to seek what is beautiful. Now what could be more loveable than divine beauty?”

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Sacred beauty proclaims to us who God is, and it reminds us who we are meant to be as well. “Receive the sacred veil,” the celebrant says when a Dominican nun makes her Profession; “In wearing it you shall be recognized as a house of prayer to your Lord and a temple of intercession for all people.” The words are simple yet they are strikingly profound, echoing liturgical prayers for both Our Lady and the Dedication of a Church. Truly each of us, like the Virgin Mary, is called to be a tabernacle for the Lord—a call received universally in the grace of Baptism, and intensified in our consecration as contemplative nuns.

Dwell together in unity in your house and be of one mind and heart in God. Thus Saint Augustine begins his monastic Rule, which has guided Dominican life for over eight hundred years. His final blessing renews the theme, illuminating what it means to be God’s dwelling-place here on earth: Live always “in a spirit of charity, as lovers of spiritual beauty, giving forth the fragrance of Christ in the holiness of your lives.”

As we prepare to build our chapel, this is our prayer for our community and each of you: With hearts uplifted in humility, may we know the beauty of the face of God. And may we, His living temples, radiate the fire of His love.

*Then you shall see and be radiant, your heart shall thrill and rejoice . . .
and I will glorify My glorious house (Is 60:5, 7).*

Contemplata Aliis Tradere

By Fr. Reginald Lynch, O.P.

The Desert and the Parched Land will exult (Is 35:1)

DURING THE SEASON of Advent, the Church's liturgy reminds us of the approach of our Savior by recalling the words of the prophet Isaiah, who foretells the renewal of the root of Jesse—although cut down and seemingly desolate, in the providence of God the lineage of Abraham sprouts new life in Mary, and then puts forth the full flower of new life in Jesus Christ. In his commentary on Isaiah (Is 11:1), St. Thomas Aquinas tells us that Mary, proceeding from the royal line of David as the 'rod' (or in Latin, *virga*) of Jesse is our virgin queen, described in Numbers (24:17) as the star rising from Jacob and the 'rod' or scepter arisen from Israel; Christ, coming forth as the God-man through the virginal maternity of the Blessed Mother, emerges as the flower of this shoot, described in the Song of Songs as "the flower of the field, and the lily of the valleys" (2:1).

As a time of expectation, Advent encourages us to prepare our own hearts for the coming of Christ as bridegroom of the Church. As a parched land yearns for rain, the desert of the Church's messianic hope becomes ripe for the full flowering of the effects of Christ's Incarnation in the members of his body—what begins in the course of salvation history as the emergence of a single living shoot will, in the fullness of time, cause the desert itself to bloom with the living grace of Christ (Is 35:1). As the rod (*virga*) from which Christ emerged as the flowering of new life in our flesh, Mary's virginal queenship remains the context in which our expectation finds the beginning of new life in Christ.

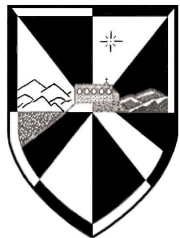
As a temporal reality, the Church finds itself on a journey from the desert of the failed projects of the fallen human condition and towards the authentic renewal that only Christ can give. Journeying as a wayfarer along the desert road (Acts 8:26), the Church therefore travels under the scepter of Mary's queenship, as a people already living in the green-root of the divine promise that she embodies and represents. Living in the hope of this new life, the Church is sustained and nourished by the Eucharist, the heavenly food that brings the charity of Christ to full bloom in the people of God. As a Marian and a



ABOVE / *The Dream of Mary* by Simone dei Crocifissi, 1370

Eucharistic reality, the Church is already a living sign of the fulfillment of all things in Christ.

For St. Thomas, the manna given to the Israelites in the desert is one of the chief figures of the effects of the Eucharist on the soul. Using descriptions of this manna as 'bread from heaven' and the 'food of angels' from the Book of Wisdom (16:20) in his Eucharistic hymn *Lauda Sion*, St. Thomas describes the song of praise that arises from the Church: *Ecce panis Angelorum*: "Behold the Bread of Angels, food for us pilgrims, and token of the promise by Christ spoken." May Mary the Mother of God intercede for us during this holy season, and may the true bread of the Eucharist strengthen our hearts, that we may see the goodness of God in the land of the living (Ps 27:13).



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A SPECIAL NOTE OF GRATITUDE

to all who contributed to the \$500,000 Challenge Grant! Because of your generosity, we successfully matched the grant and are now \$1 million closer to our goal: to build our permanent Chapel for the praise of His glory!

Mass Times:
Sundays 11:00 a.m.
Weekdays 7:00 a.m.

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