

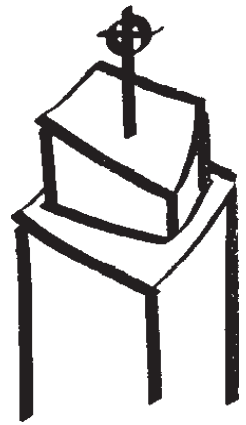
# OUR FAMILY



# NEWS

For Oblates of St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois

November &  
December, 2015



## "IN THOSE DAYS A DECREE WENT OUT FROM CAESAR AUGUSTUS...."

St. Luke's story of the birth of Jesus is one of the best known and most revered passages in all of scripture. It is the source of the Nativity sets, in every conceivable artistic style, to be found in countless churches, homes, and even secular spaces in countries where Christian culture has penetrated. The Virgin and her child, the valiant St. Joseph their guardian, the ox and the ass—which many people think are derived from Luke's Gospel but actually have been imported from Isaiah the prophet—the poverty of the stable and its surroundings, the caroling angels, and the adoring shepherds are all part of the familiar heartwarming scene. Several years ago the formidable Bill Donohue of The Catholic League mailed such a crib set to every Catholic bishop in the United States and urged each of them to try to get it displayed in the capitol building or courthouse of his locality in pursuit of the goal of "putting Christ back into Christmas."

It is unlikely, however, that the warm feelings that we get from the Christmas scene today are what the evangelists really intended. Relating tales of the infancy and childhood of Jesus was not a primary purpose of the gospel writers. This is clear from the fact that two of them, Mark and John, tell us nothing at all about him before his public life. Mark's Gospel, which is the earliest, begins the story of Jesus with his baptism, when he is already an adult. Matthew and Luke wrote their Gospels later, probably in the eighties of the first century, about fifty years after the resurrection. Their purpose was to proclaim the good news about Jesus and his message in order to convert people to the Faith and to provide further information to those who had already been converted. The most important thing that they had to convey was the identity of Jesus, that he was the One awaited by the entire Old Testament. *This Jesus God raised up. God made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.* The Gospels are primarily about Christology.

During Jesus' ministry everyone wondered, *Who can this man be?* In numerous ways he was a puzzle, for he was human in every visible respect, and yet he said and did things that seemed beyond human capacity. It was only after his death and resurrection, when he appeared to his disciples fully alive, that they realized that he shared in the very being of God. As St. Paul expressed it in his Letter to the Romans, *he was descended from David according to the flesh, but established as Son of God in power...through resurrection from the dead.* But if indeed he was God's Son, then he must have already been such during his ministry, and so the early Christians began to look backwards into the events of his ministry, and there to discover episodes that already pointed to his divinity. One such episode that indicated his exalted status was the transfiguration; another was the baptism. In both cases tradition recalled that a voice had testified that he enjoyed divine sonship. What the infancy gospel narratives were intended to do was to push this identification back still further, to the very beginning of his human existence. In other words, the purpose of the infancy gospel stories

is to demonstrate that already at his conception and birth Jesus was the very Son of God, the divine Savior.

Since information about the childhood and family history of Jesus were not part of the tradition handed down by the preachers of the gospel in the earliest decades, we do not know where these stories came from or how they were transmitted. Only Matthew and Luke included them, and the two accounts differ a great deal in their details, although they agree on the two most important points, the virginal conception of Jesus and his birth at Bethlehem. Both of these were believed to have been prophesied in the Old Testament, the former by the prophet Isaiah and the latter by the prophet Micah. It is clear from the whole process by which an understanding of Jesus' identity developed in the New Testament that the intent of the evangelists was to show their readers that he was the agent sent by God for the salvation of the human race, that agent whom the Old Testament had portrayed in different ways and given correspondingly different titles. But beyond that—what was totally unexpected and up to that point really had been inconceivable—he was a divine being to whom they could apply the very titles that hitherto had been reserved for God himself.

Therefore St. Luke's account of Jesus' birth is not just a sweet children's story meant to stir up warm feelings in us. It is a solemn proclamation of the greatest event in the entire history of the world: the incarnation, the taking on of human flesh, of the second person of the Blessed Trinity. God became a human being under humble, very ordinary circumstances in a remote corner of our planet without any fanfare or publicity. He confounded everyone's expectations and all of the established conventions. No attempt was made to publicize what happened, and no one would have believed it had one been made. *My ways are not your ways, says the Lord.* The message was simply announced by an angel to a group of frightened shepherds: *good news of great joy.* And an angelic chorus interprets for us the meaning of this event: God is glorified, and his gift of peace is extended to all who accept with joy and gratitude the favor that God bestows on us. May we open our hearts to welcome the Christ child!

+ Fr. Claude Peifer, O.S.B.



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**Our Family News** is published in the special interest of the oblates of St. Bede Abbey. Please send changes of address and comments to The Editor, Our Family News, St. Bede Abbey, 24 W US Highway 6, Peru, IL 61354.

We welcome your submissions to this publication, either instructive or reflective, whether prose or poetry. They should in some way relate to the **Rule of Benedict**, Benedictine spirituality, and/or the oblate program. The editor reserves the rights to choose material for publication and to edit as necessary.

## SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

Meetings are held in the abbey church  
from 1:30 P.M. to 4:30 P.M.

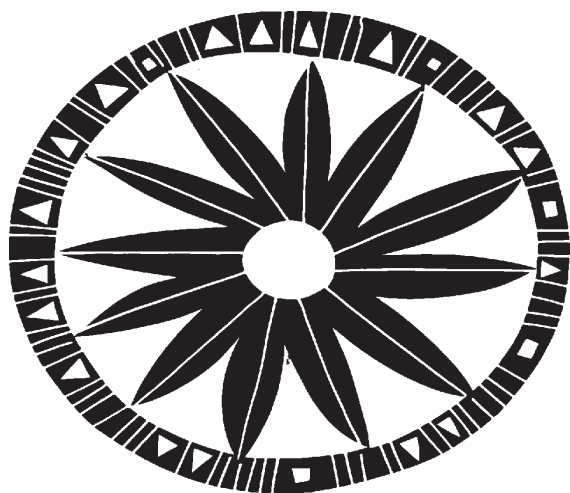
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2015

Sunday, January 10, 2016  
Sunday, February 14, 2016  
Sunday, March 13, 2016  
Sunday, April 10, 2016  
Sunday, May 1, 2016

## Passage for *Lectio* at the December Meeting

I will hear what the Lord God has to say,  
a voice that speaks of peace,  
peace for his people and his friends  
and those who turn to him in their hearts.  
His help is near for those who fear him,  
and his glory will dwell in our land.  
Mercy and faithfulness have met;  
justice and peace have embraced.  
Faithfulness shall spring from the earth,  
and justice look down from heaven.  
The Lord will make us prosper,  
and our earth shall yield its fruit.  
Justice shall march before him,  
and peace shall follow his steps.

Psalm 85:9-14



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### Abbey Prayer Schedule

Visitors are welcome to join the monks for Mass and for the hours of the Divine Office. Conventual Mass is celebrated on the first level of the abbey church, the hours of the Divine Office on the second level. During the school year, the monks' schedule is as follows.

6:00 A.M. Morning Prayer\*  
12:00 Noon Midday Prayer  
5:00 P.M. Conventual Mass\*\*  
7:10 P.M. Evening Prayer\*\*\*

\* on Sunday, 7:00 A.M.

\*\* on Sunday, 10:00 A.M. and on Monday, 7:30 A.M.

\*\*\* on Sunday, 5:00 P.M.

