



St. Scholastica Priory, 271 North Main Street, PO Box 606, Petersham, MA 01366

UNBIND THEM!

Think what a different world we would live in had Jesus only been an appearance. I started to wonder if in the history of world religions there are any other gods (with a little "g") that purported to have been incarnated. But not simply an avatar as a full grown man or woman, having just an exterior skin suit like Zeus and Hermes whom Baucus and Philemon welcomed in Ovid's fable. Or even someone like the Dalai Lama, whose followers see as the reincarnation of the former Dalai Lama, and who is somehow recognized and then taken from his own family to be spiritual leader of Tibet as a Buddhist monk. I consulted our friend Carol Zaleski, Professor of World Religions at Smith College, who confirmed that although there are stories of gods taking on a human form like Buddha, Krishna and others, none are a true historical reality as is Jesus, who is a factual figure. The idea of becoming incarnate – actually being a human being – is not a part of any of these figures. There is no other fable or myth that even tries to put forth in their narrative a teaching or revelation like that of the Incarnation of Jesus: that in our world time God, the second person of the Trinity, became truly God *and* man. And Jesus as God and man has never ceased to exist since.

Michael Barber writes in his book "Singing in the Reign" about entering into a covenant. He says: "A covenant implies as adoption into a household, an extension of kinship, the making of a brother/sister." It is not just a set of requirements to keep the pact active, like a

contract. It is a real embrace into a family. It is saying, "I am yours, you are mine!" Quoting Paul Kalluveetil he continues: "[T]hat 'I am yours, you are mine!' underlies every covenant declaration ...the act of accepting the other as one's own...to make someone a partner to one's own flesh and blood." That covenant seed of God's was planted in Abra-



ham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and grows to total fulfillment in Jesus, God and man: "I AM yours, you are MINE."

Jesus, the Son of God, united to us truly in his humanity. He grew in Mary's womb in the fetal stage; he grew from a baby into a youth. He took trips to Jerusalem among family and friends, including the time he was lost when Mary and Joseph searched for him, finding him in the temple. Scripture says: "He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them.... And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man" (Lk 2:51-52). Twenty-one or so years later he began his public life. We know he wore sandals: John the Baptist refers to them. Matthew's Gospel records that Jesus took

the scrolls into his hands and found the place he wanted to read. He could write: he traced words into the dirt with his finger when others brought the sinful woman to him. The Gospel of Mark tells us that he slept in a boat. Many times he shared meals, was thirsty and watched the crowds. He spat and made a muddy paste for the blind man's eyes. Seeing his

Father's house being made a place of commerce rather than prayer, he made a whip of cords and cleared the sellers out. He laid his hands on lepers, women, children, and the dead. He broke bread, lifted a cup of wine with his hands, blessing it and giving it to those around him. His feet were wept over and dried with the hair of a repentant woman. He wrapped a cloth around his loins as he washed the apostles' feet. He fell on his knees, sweating blood. He face was kissed and slapped. His body was whipped and nails were hammered through his flesh and he bled. He had a real human body.

In the first chapter of John we have the first recorded words Jesus spoke outside of his family. He was asked, "Where do you live?" and he replied, "Come and see" (Jn 1:39). He could only say this because he was a human being. These same words, "Come and see," occur later in the eleventh chapter, but there they are the words of the crowd who came to console Mary and Martha at the death of their brother Lazarus. The people say to Jesus "Come and see." This "Come and see" is, as it were, all of humanity holding up an icon to Jesus and asking him to "come and see." What

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are we asking the Lord to come and see? Us – a “man” who is bound, lying in a dark tomb and dead.

We learn from this same passage of John’s Gospel the disposition Jesus had in his heart. It records: “Lord, he whom you love is ill;” “Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus;” and “See how he loved him!” Jesus *loved*. He loved them as individuals so truly that it says he was “greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved,” causing him to weep! Was he weeping because Lazarus had died? No. Two days earlier he had received the message from Lazarus’ sisters asking him to come because Lazarus was ill. He told his apostles, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory.” And then finally, two days later as they finally began their journey to Lazarus, Jesus tells the apostles clearly that “Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.” He was glad he had not been there, and yet when he arrived he wept. Wept because of the anguish he himself knew and which he saw consuming Martha and Mary, whom he loved. He wept seeing the grief they had to bear for the good of all: those present there, us, and all mankind until the end of time. Mary and Martha were already sharing in Jesus’ redemptive suffering. And, despite his knowing that Lazarus would return to his earthly life, Jesus wept. “See how he loved him!” This is simply how Jesus loves, how he loved them and loves us as we live “in this valley of tears.”

Fr Thomas Joseph White, OP, writes in his *The Light of Christ: An Introduction to Catholicism*, “Jesus’s substitutionary atonement for our sins is above all something positive, not something negative.

He substitutes his love, his justice, and his obedience there where the human race has lacked love, justice, and obedience.” Jesus lives this with and for us – “I am yours, you are mine” – as no other human being could: making us partners in his own flesh and blood as brothers and sisters in his earthly and divine family.

And so, back to the icon of humanity: Martha says, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Jesus says to her – and us – “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” Jesus came to that tomb, our tomb, fallen humanity, unredeemed. It was a cave, a cold, dark, dank place and a stone was lying against it. And Jesus orders, “Take away the stone.” “There is a stench” (Martha says), because the gates of heaven are closed. The Gospel continues, “Jesus replied, ‘Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?’ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, ‘Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.’ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, ‘Come out!’”

We, the dead ones, come out, our hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, our faces wrapped in cloths. Jesus says, “Unbind them, and let them go.” He himself *took our infirmities and carried away our diseases*. “I am the resurrection and the life.... I AM yours, and you are MINE. *MMEK*

Cover photo of a sculpture by Angela Johnson



Sr Mechtilde Ainley, OSB!

My friends knew me as a huge nerd and artist who loved video games, comics, cartoons and attending conventions dressed up like colorful characters. My family knew me as an outgoing, intelligent young woman, who would hopefully soon be having the big Catholic wedding and grandkids that they had long anticipated. My coworkers knew me as a quiet, steady worker who didn’t like to rock the boat.

“You’re entering the monastery?!”

By all accounts, I was living a charmed life. Yet in spite of my big circle of friends, well-paying job, caring boyfriend, and the thrill of keeping up with the latest geeky entertainment, I was feeling very empty. Not depressed, per se, but very restless and unsatisfied. Like so many others who have entered monastic life, I was slowly coming to the realization that nothing the world could offer me would ever be enough.

I was forever haunted by the image of myself as a little ten-year-old girl, who had no friends but attended daily Mass and found great peace in God and secretly aspired to become a saint. Throughout the years, deep down, I knew there was nothing better than that, even though I had long considered it the worst time of my life. However, in the interest of finally finding friends, I let myself forget that peace with God. In the interest of growing popular with the varied social circles around me, I let myself forget even more.

Finally, a few years ago I had a “reversion,” and from then on drank in the teachings of my faith like water. I started discerning if I had a religious vocation, and eventually attended a Monastic Experience Weekend here at St. Scholastic Priory. (The same one Sr. Mary Gertrude attended!)

I was astounded by how much everything appealed to me: the humble manual labor, the beautiful Latin chant, the meals cooked

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We thank God for your support and encouragement! The Divine Office is the heartbeat of the monastery. There we pray for you and all the world.

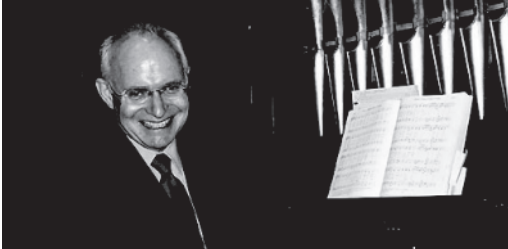


Our Eastertide gift to you is novena of Masses offered for your intentions at Pentecost! Pray for us too!

HAPPENINGS



November 12 Professor Joseph McVeigh, professor of German Studies at Smith College, gave us a talk on the Reformation in Germany.



December 6 The headstones for Mother Mary Clare and Fr. Cyril's graves were installed. The same day, Sr. Mary Frances began organ lessons with Leo Abbott of the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Boston; he was Mother Mary Clare's teacher.



A table full of baby sweaters that Sr Mary-Frances knitted were displayed before being picked up by Mary Lea Shusta who distributed them in Worcester to the babies at the shelter she volunteers at.

A week before Christmas, the brothers' community came down with the flu. Their voices were recovered enough to carry their side of choir for Midnight Mass.



The New Year saw bitter cold weather. One night, a temperature of -27° to -30° with the wind chill factor was recorded.

January 11 Mother Mary Elizabeth visited with Bishop Marconi from the Archdiocese of Newark, New Jersey.



January 13 Elena Ainley was clothed as a novice and was given the name of Sr Mechtilde, after the great 13th century Benedictine saint. (see page 2)



From January 14-17, Mother Mary Elizabeth had a much-needed rest and retreat at Glastonbury Abbey.

The sisters missed the outbreak of flu that the monks experienced before Christmas, but our turn came in mid-February: over half the community was down sick. Those who were well carried on the Divine Office and minimized the work in order to care for the sick. At the same time, Kate Gagnon begun her pre-novitiate retreat. She was clothed on February 22, and is now named Sr Martha.

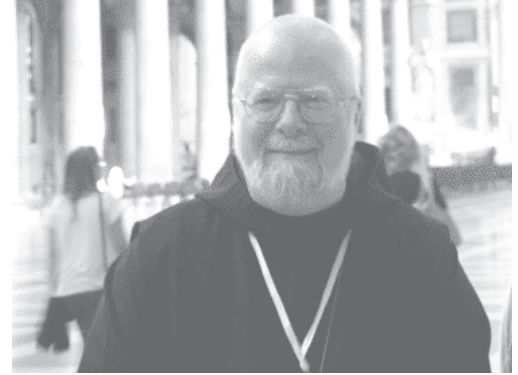


The formation sisters have been hard at work getting the house library and art room in order.

On March 1, Fr Thomas White, OP,



gave us a talk on the Atonement according to St. Thomas Aquinas. Fr. Thomas is an old friend, and was received into the church here on Easter Day, 1993.



On March 5 we had Abbot Anselm over for breakfast during his visit to the communities. It provides a good chance for us to see him and have news of the other monasteries of our federation.

A forestry cutting project began after Christmas. When the ground got too soft it had to stop. This is stewarding the forest that surrounds us. It also helps us to pay the bills for the church! The snowdrops were just beginning to bud when they were buried in a snow-storm. We've had three heavy snows recently, and another is on the way.

**Genuine love ...
is demanding. But its beauty
lies precisely in the demands it
makes. Only those able to
make demands on themselves
in the name of love can then
demand love from others.
Pope St John Paul II**

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with love, the flowing veils, even the puppy love of little Chaeli! I was so excited, I started to cry on my way back to the guesthouse after Lauds. I felt like my lungs were inflating for the first time. Beams of June sunlight were coming through the bright green trees and I thought I heard a voice in my soul saying:

"All this and more I wish to give you."

At that point, I knew I was home. Ever since I arrived in the Priory I've been overwhelmingly thankful to be here. I never feel empty anymore – even on the bad days (and there are some, like anywhere!). I'm so grateful that Jesus stole me away to be with him here and to serve him on behalf of the world in the hidden contemplative life. Please pray for me, as I do for all of you! SMdA

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"I have been working on some comic book versions of Benedictine saints. Here is the latest, with St Gertrude (top) and St Mechtilde (bottom). They are wielding the "strong and noble weapons of obedience" (Rule of St. Benedict) against the forces of evil! St Gertrude is associated with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mechtilde with the Immaculate Heart of Mary, hence the spear and the sword. St Mechtilde is in a Cistercian habit and St Gertrude is in the habit of a Benedictine novice. This is because both traditions claim these women saints, and Mechtilde was the novice mistress of St Gertrude! Through their prayer these two nuns of Helfta from the 12th century became true warriors for God."

All you saints and angels! Pray for us!

The illustration to the right was done by Sr Mechtilde to honor the patrons she and Sr Mary Gertrude now have with their new names. She has been drawing for many years including the general category called "cartooning" you can see this has nothing to do with *Garfield*, *Peanuts* and the like. These are more in line with the action figures of *Batman*, and the Marvel action figures. And it seems a very good insight into the saints. They are our "power figures" who are ready to intercede and help us in our everyday life here on earth, where they lived themselves.

