

The Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph

# FIRST FRUITS

The Nativity of Our Lord, December 2018 / Issue 45



"FILLED WITH WONDER AT THE NEARNESS OF OUR GOD..."

— Collect for Christmas Morning Lauds



Dear Confreres, Family, and Friends of the Bethlehem Priory,

*Laudetur Jesus Christus!* In this Christmas Season, we are filled with wonder at the nearness of our God, who became incarnate of the Virgin Mary two thousand years ago and continues to be present among us in a very real way through the Liturgy of the Holy Catholic Church, especially in the Most Holy Eucharist. Through the Sacred Liturgy, and particularly in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we are prepared during Advent for His coming – that we may experience His birth in our midst – adore Him in union with His Mother at Christmas, and praise Him for His holiness as it radiates upon His Saints, most especially His Mother, during the twelve days following Christmas. Even while we contemplate the joy and peace of our Lord's Nativity, however, our hearts are deeply saddened by the sin and scandals affecting the Church that have come to light this past year. As we ever more deeply commit ourselves to our vocation of prayer and sacrifice, we invite you to join us spiritually in bringing all those involved in these tragedies to the crib of our Infant God, asking the Prince of Peace for His gifts of healing and forgiveness.

May Jesus, the Little Son of Mary, bless you with the peace of His presence, now and always, filling you with wonder at the timeless mystery of Emmanuel – God with us.

In the Christ Child and Our Blessed Mother,

*Mother Mary Augustine O. Praem.*

Mother Mary Augustine, O. Praem., Prioress,  
and the Norbertine Canonesses of the Bethlehem Priory of St. Joseph

In July, representatives from Norbertine houses all over the world met for the 2018 General Chapter of the Norbertine Order at the abbey of Rolduc, in Holland, the site where St. Norbert chose to consume a large spider which had fallen into the chalice while he was celebrating Mass, rather than let a drop of the Precious Blood be lost. He expected that this would cost him his life, but afterwards, while prayerfully awaiting death, he sneezed out the spider.

We thank God for having been given the opportunity to grow in communio with our Norbertine brothers and sisters, uniting our prayers with theirs as we prepare to celebrate our Order's 900th anniversary in 2021.



900  Prémontré 1121-2021

We wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to  
Abbot General Emeritus, Thomas Handgratinger,  
and we offer our prayers and support for

*The Most Reverend  
Jozef Wouters, O. Praem.*

ABBOT GENERAL OF THE NORBERTINE ORDER,  
elected at the 2018 General Chapter in Holland.



## *The Solitude of Advent*

*"This season of Advent the Church has always celebrated with a special solemnity... The Church asks us to understand that Christ, Who came once in the flesh, is prepared to come again. When we remove all obstacles to His presence He will come, at any hour and moment, to dwell spiritually in our hearts, bringing with Him the riches of His grace."*

– St. Charles Borromeo

A thick fog rolls over the mountains surrounding our monastery and fills our valley, drawing us indoors, and hiding from our eyes the world outside. Just so, the somber tones of the Advent Liturgy roll over our senses, filling our minds, drawing us into the depths of our hearts. In that sacred place which no man can penetrate, we are alone with God.

*"True solitude is to be alone for the sake of not being alone.*

*It is to be alone for the sake of finding God..."*

The Season of Advent is particularly focused on this search for God; with more diligent prayer and meditation on the Word of God, greater silence and increased fasting, we strive to remove from our lives all that could in any way distract us from God, choosing the poverty and solitude that Christ Himself chose in the womb of the Virgin Mary and in His humble birth in Bethlehem.

*"...Solitude is not a preference for peace and quiet, a preference for being alone or in small groups – it is not a fear of the world, crowds, families or responsibilities. It is first an affirmation that all that is, is good, but that we want to forego getting immersed in the many good things the world offers and instead seek the One behind it all, Who is all, and through all and in all: God, be blessed forever."*

– Rev. John Henry Hanson, our Norbertine Confrere from St. Michael's Abbey,  
from a homily given at our monastery, July 16, 2018



*"Escape from your everyday business for a short while, hide for a moment from your restless thoughts..."*

*Make a little time for God and rest a while in Him."*

– St. Anselm



The Nativity of Our Lord  
With St. Norbert and St. Francis

## MARY, MOTHER OF THE EUCHARIST

*"The Eucharist began at Bethlehem in Mary's arms.*

*It was she who brought to humanity the Bread for which it was famishing, and which alone can nourish it. She it was who took care of that Bread for us. It was she who nourished the Lamb whose life-giving flesh we feed upon. She nourished Him with her virginal milk; she nourished Him for the sacrifice, for she foreknew His destiny. Yes, she knew from the beginning, and every day she realized it more fully, that her Lamb was only for immolation. She accepts God's will, and, bearing Him in her arms, herself prepares for us the Victim of Calvary – that Victim of our altars. On the day of the sacrifice she herself will conduct her Divine Lamb to Jerusalem, to deliver Him up to Divine Justice for the world's salvation. Ah, Bethlehem already speaks of Calvary! Truly had Mary heard her Son's first word, 'Father, sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not... Behold I come!' and she united herself in His offering and His anticipated immolation."*

– St. Peter Julian Eymard

As Christians, and in a special way as Norbertines, the Eucharist is at the heart of our lives. As we adore the Divine Victim on our altars, we know that we are called to imitate Him in this mystery, especially in the daily sacrifice of ourselves in union with Him for the salvation of the world. This gift of self, which is the vocation of all Christians, is not always easy, and so, with Jesus, we entrust ourselves to Mary, that she may take care of us, nourishing us as she did her Divine Son. With Jesus, we place ourselves in her arms, knowing that she will prepare us with her gentle hands for

all the ways that we will share in the Sacrifice of Calvary. As she wraps us in the swaddling clothes of her maternal protection, she will obtain for us from God whatever we need to face life's difficulties, so that even our painful Calvaries will speak to us of the peace of Bethlehem. With her conducting us to the heavenly Jerusalem, we find the courage to offer ourselves for the salvation of the world, exclaiming in union with her Beloved Son:

*"Sacrifice and oblation Thou wouldst not... Behold I come!"*



## Today in Bethlehem A Savior Has been Born to You

Every year the birthday of God-made-man becomes a very real event for us and for the whole Church, as we live out the sacred mystery of Christmas in the Liturgy. In union with Mary and Joseph, we prepare a fitting place for Jesus to be born: in our home and in our hearts.

When the time for His birth draws nearer, our pleading for the Savior's coming grows in intensity as we chant the ancient "O Antiphons" in union with the whole Church.

*"O Flower of Jesse's stem,  
You have been raised up as a sign for all peoples;  
kings stand silent in Your presence;  
the nations bow down in worship before you.  
Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid."*

– Magnificat "O Antiphon" for December 18th

Our hearts are focusing more and more on the approaching mystery, as we prepare them to be a fitting dwelling for our God. Our spiritual preparations are mirrored in our convent building as we prepare it for Christmas: setting up Nativity scenes and twinkling lights, decorating Christmas trees and garland boughs from our forest, and arranging an expectant manger in the chapel ...

As night falls on Christmas Eve, a solemn stillness envelops our convent as we wait in the cave of our hearts, made ready by the prayers and pleadings of Advent, for the coming of the Infant God. For we know by faith, as the Church has so often assured us, that in that sacred solitude, Jesus will really be born.

At ten o'clock we process into the choir, lit entirely by twinkling lights nestled in our homemade pine garlands. Not a single word is spoken – on this night every word must be sung: the hymn, psalms, readings, antiphons, responsories, and verses (taken mainly from Scripture) are given ancient and mysteriously beautiful melodies. With surprising speed the two hours are over, and a procession forms in our hall, which grows brighter and brighter as each nun lights a candle, taking her place behind the youngest nun, who carries the Infant Jesus.

*"O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!  
Come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem.  
Come and behold Him, born the king of Angels.  
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him,  
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!"*

The Liturgy places us into the reality of this mystery, and in the presence of such glory, we cry out with this hymn of adoration. Our procession enters the little chapel, where, in the great sacrifice of the Holy Mass, we join the entire Church - Triumphant, Militant and Suffering - in profound praise, adoration, intercession and thanksgiving. For on this night the Word has become flesh and has given Himself to us, not as a little baby to hold, but as a Sacred Host to consume.

And so, with child-like wonder, we kneel and receive Him.





## The Twelve Days of Christmas

**DEC. 26TH, ST. STEPHEN THE 1ST MARTYR** On the first day of Christmas we turn to the first Martyr of the Christian faith, St. Stephen. Stoned to death, he remained ever peaceful and forgave his murderers. *"Washed in a river of blood, you are shining with a profound light... be mindful of us that by his favor he may show us these gifts: the boy Child born of the Virgin..."*

**DEC. 27TH, ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST** The second day of Christmas honors St. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. *"St. John, praiseworthy guardian of the Virgin, and yourself a virgin, the faithful herald who showed forth the Word... grant that we may penetrate this lofty mystery which you have pointed out."*

**DEC. 28TH, THE HOLY INNOCENTS** On this day the Church honors as martyrs the little children who were killed by Herod in the place of the Child Jesus. *"You, Christ's first-fruits, a flock of tender sacrificial victims, now play with your palms and crowns right up by the very altar... protect all children whose lives are in danger."*

**DEC. 29TH & 30TH, CHRISTMAS** On days during the Christmas Octave that are not given a special feast, the Liturgy prolongs the celebration of the Christmas mystery. *"Almighty God, You wished the birth of Your Son to be proclaimed by angels and to be praised by the apostles, martyrs and faithful of all ages, grant the world that peace which the angels proclaimed."*

**DEC. 31ST, NEW YEAR'S EVE** At our monastery, the year ends with Eucharistic adoration from Vespers until after Matins, as we thank God for the past year and beg His blessings on our community, our Order, and the whole world in the year to come. *"Christ is born for us, come let us adore Him."*

**JAN. 1ST, MARY, MOTHER OF GOD** The life of God on earth began in the womb of Mary, and so we entrust the beginning of the year to the Mother of God, who is also our Mother. *"Mary has given birth to a King, Whose name is everlasting; hers the joy of motherhood, her's the virgin's glory. Never was the like seen before, never shall it be seen again. Alleluia!"*

**JAN. 2ND - 5TH** These days after the Christmas Octave find the Church continuing to ponder, with Our Lady, the deep mystery that has occurred. *"The mystery [is] ever new, never growing old through our understanding of it... the great mystery of the divine Incarnation remains a mystery forever."*

**JAN. 6TH, THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD** In the last days of Christmas, the Church beholds the glory of God in His three-fold manifestation. *"Today the Bridegroom claims His bride, the Church, since Christ has washed her sins away in Jordan's waters; the Magi hasten with their gifts to the royal wedding; and the wedding guests rejoice, for Christ has changed water into wine."*

— All quotations above are taken from the Liturgical propers prayed by the Catholic Church on these days of the Christmas Season

### My True Love Gave to Me

The popular Christmas song, "The 12 Days of Christmas," was written as a sort of catechism for Catholic children during the suppression of the Church in England (1558-1829). Each element of the 12 days represents a deeper reality of the faith, with the "True Love" being Jesus Christ.



Top: A novice teaching our two new postulants how to construct the Advent wreath. Above left: A nun walking our dogs. Above right: Our community recreating on Christmas Day.

### — OUR HORARIUM —

(OR SCHEDULE)

(Please call for our Friday and Sunday schedules.)

Midnight	Vigils – Office of Readings (Matins)
6:00 am	Morning prayer (Lauds) & Angelus
6:35 am	Chapter (Martyrology, Reading the Rule)
7:15 am	Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament & Mid-morning prayer (Terce)
8:15 am	Benediction
8:30 am	The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass
10:00 am	Work, Class, or Study
11:40 am	Mid-day prayer (Sext), Angelus & Rosary
12:20 pm	Dinner
1:00 pm	Mid-afternoon prayer (None)
1:30 pm	Grand Silence - prayer, rest, exercise, etc.
2:30 pm	Work, Class, or Study
5:10 pm	Evening prayer (Vespers) & Angelus
5:40 pm	Lectio Divina
6:20 pm	Supper, followed by Recreation
8:00 pm	Night prayer (Compline)



*"The Lord shall be your Light forever, and your God shall be your Glory."*

— Isaiah 60:20

## Monastery Expansion

In God's great mercy, we continue to raise funds for Phase II of our Monastery Expansion Project, with the help of our friends (most recently at the October 7th, 2018 third annual Los Angeles fundraiser) and through our own efforts. Phase II includes the building of a chapel with an accessory wing, and will address the acute space needs of our growing community, while providing the proper ecclesial and monastic architecture for the worship of God and the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. The estimated cost of the construction of Phase II is \$12 million, with a minimum of \$8 million required to take the next step forward in commissioning a complete architectural design and blueprints. We put all of our trust in the Lord, knowing that *"enduring love will govern all matters pertaining to the fleeting necessities of life."*

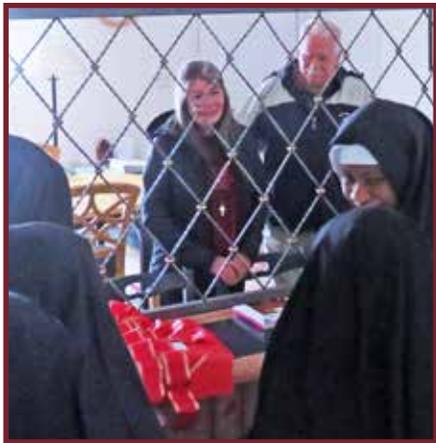
— The Rule of St. Augustine



R. BELCHER

Conceptual Drawing of our Future Chapel  
By Mark Russell, A.I.A., Radian Design Group, Inc.

[WWW.NORBERTINESISTERS.ORG](http://WWW.NORBERTINESISTERS.ORG)



THE NORBERTINE CANONRY OF THE BETHLEHEM PRIORY OF ST. JOSEPH  
17831 Water Canyon Road  
Tehachapi, California 93561-7686 USA

NON PROFIT  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Bakersfield, CA  
Permit #110

## — A Special Thank You —

To our dear friends who have generously given of their time and talents in caring for our needs and in offering professional assistance in various capacities. We offer our prayers and deep gratitude for all they have done for our community.

*May God reward you for helping to build this first North American foundation of Norbertine Canonesses!*

## Norbertine Canonesses

— WEBSITE —

- ✦ Online Monastery Gift Shop
- ✦ Photo Gallery
- ✦ Horarium in Photos
- ✦ Information on our Holy Founder, St. Norbert

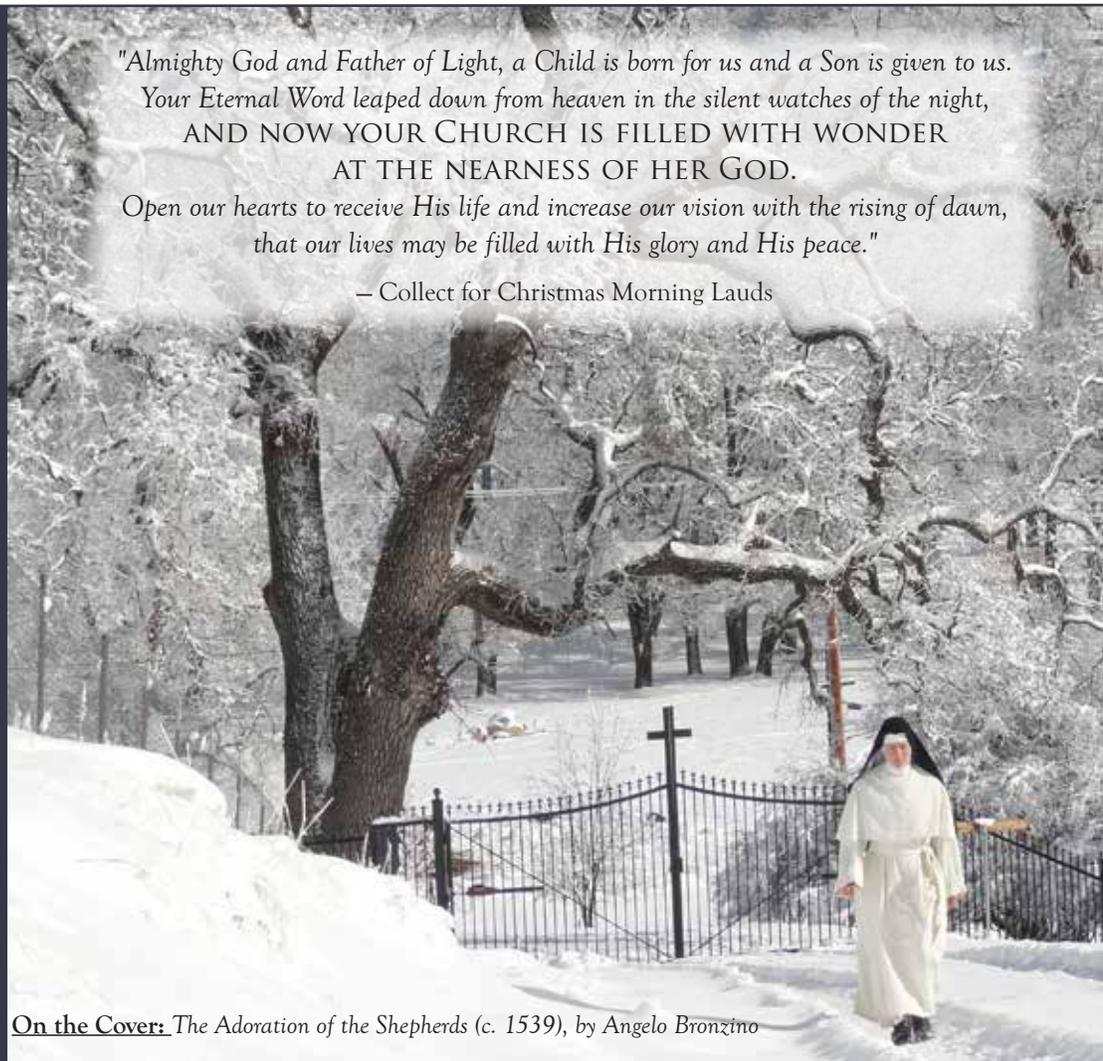
[WWW.NORBERTINESISTERS.ORG](http://WWW.NORBERTINESISTERS.ORG)

- ✦ MONASTERY GIFT SHOP HOURS:  
Daily 10-11:30 am, 2:30-5 pm  
(except Fridays, 2:30-4:15 pm)

- ✦ FOR GIFT SHOP PURCHASES:  
Please visit our website at  
[www.NorbertineSisters.org](http://www.NorbertineSisters.org)

- ✦ WE ARE HERE TO OFFER PRAYERS FOR YOU AND YOUR INTENTIONS:  
You are welcome to call us:  
(661) 823-1066 - or -  
email us: [pray\\_req@cybersurfers.net](mailto:pray_req@cybersurfers.net) or  
[MotherMaryA@aol.com](mailto:MotherMaryA@aol.com).

Please kindly help us update our address & email database by sending us your current information.



"Almighty God and Father of Light, a Child is born for us and a Son is given to us.  
Your Eternal Word leaped down from heaven in the silent watches of the night,  
AND NOW YOUR CHURCH IS FILLED WITH WONDER  
AT THE NEARNESS OF HER GOD.

Open our hearts to receive His life and increase our vision with the rising of dawn,  
that our lives may be filled with His glory and His peace."

— Collect for Christmas Morning Lauds

**On the Cover:** *The Adoration of the Shepherds (c. 1539), by Angelo Bronzino*