



A LETTER FROM THE ABBEY

CISTERCIAN ABBEY

CHRISTMAS 1998

OUR LADY OF DALLAS

From Christmas to New Year

A Guide for a Week of Daily Celebrations

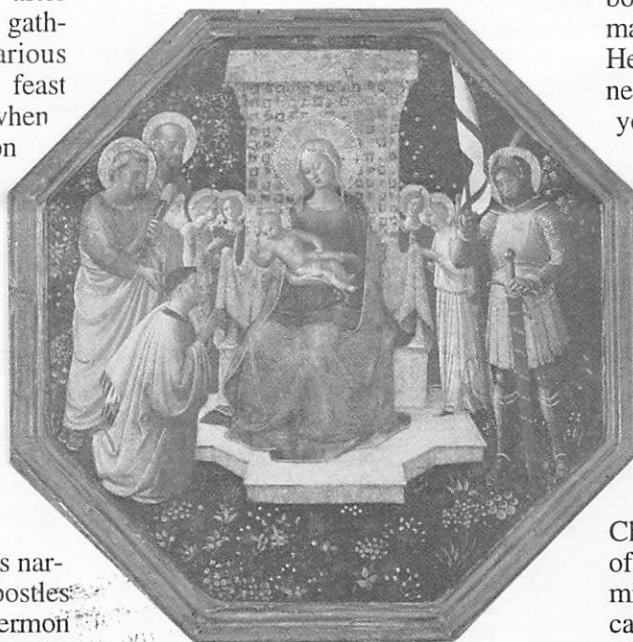
To two feasts in the calendar, Easter and Christmas, an additional seven days of celebration are added, their octaves. In ancient times the rhythm of life depended on the season. In the winter both the slower tempo of work and the shortness of daylight offered the opportunity for more and longer festivities. In the Middle Ages the week after Christmas was thus filled with gatherings commemorating various aspects of Christmas and the feast days connected with it. Today when we have more time for vacation and leisure it is a good idea to pay more attention to the feasts that have so long accompanied the Birth of our Savior. Here is a guide to the feasts which traditionally follow Christmas.

December 26: The feast of Saint Stephen, the first martyr.

Stephen's martyrdom is narrated in the Acts of the Apostles (chapters 6-7). An ancient sermon explains its link with Christmas in the following way: "Yesterday we celebrated the birth in time of the eternal king. Today we celebrate the triumphant suffering of his soldier. Yesterday, clothed in the robe of flesh, our king left the virginal womb to enter the world. Today his soldier leaves the tabernacle of his body and goes triumphantly to heaven. When visiting us in the flesh, our king did not come empty-handed: his gift was love. Armed with this love, Stephen fought his battle and was able to pray

for those who stoned him. " We might say that the day after the Son of God was born into this world in order to save us, his first witness was born through a martyr's death to eternal life.

December 27: The feast of St. John, Apostle and Evangelist



Workshop of Fra Angelico

This is the feast of the evangelist from whose gospel we read the first chapter on Christmas Day. He opens his gospel with the words "In the Beginning was the Word" (Jn 1:1) and then makes the statement that "the Word was made flesh" (1:14). The feast of John, "the Beloved Disciple," belongs most fittingly to this season which helps us see the truth of the statement that "God is love and he who abides in love,

abides in God and God in him. (1Jn 4:4).

December 28: The Feast of the Holy Innocents

This day commemorates the children killed by Herod when he tried to destroy the life of the newborn Messiah. An ancient sermon makes the following statement: "O Herod, why are you so afraid of a newborn king? How could you fulfill your desire of prolonging your life by trying to kill Life itself?" Today's pro-life movement has added new importance to this feast by turning it into a memorial day for the innocent victims of abortion.

December 29: St Thomas Becket of Canterbury

This feast is of medieval origin. It was on this day during the Christmas week in 1170 that agents of Henry II, king of England, committed their infamous "murder in the cathedral" when they killed Thomas Becket, the archbishop of Canterbury as he finished celebrating mass. The cult of the new martyr quickly spread across Europe so that his feast was inserted into the Octave of Christmas.

December 30: Weekday in the Octave of Christmas

This day is not reserved for any celebration unless it falls on Sunday. On Sundays it becomes the feast of the Holy Family, that humble

CHRISTMAS AT THE MONASTERY

In the Abbey the celebration of Christmas officially begins with Evening prayer of December 24. But this is a slow beginning, for at this time several of the priests may be at pastoral duties either saying mass or hearing confessions. The celebration really begins at 11:30 PM with the chanting of the night office followed by the **Midnight Mass**. While many churches of the Metroplex hold the traditional midnight mass in the late evening hour, the Abbey continues the custom of celebrating it at 12 midnight with a congregation of about 200-250 people attending. After the mass only a small group of monks gather in the refectory for some snacks but in less than 30 minutes they also retire to bed. On Christmas Day no prayers are scheduled for early morning. However, the daily routine makes most people get up before 7 AM, when they gather for breakfast. Besides Easter Sunday, Christmas is the only day of the year on which silence is not kept while eating breakfast. The 9 AM mass on Christmas Day is usually well attended by a congregation comparable to or larger than the one at the Midnight Mass. The Monastery's "family feast" is held on the evening of December 25. After dinner we move to the Reception Hall to sing Christmas carols and eating desert. Some after-dinner "spirits" add to the Christmas cheer.



The Octave of Christmas ends on December 31 with the midnight adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. The Eucharist is exposed at 9 PM with members of the community taking their turns in adoration. At midnight we all gather for Benediction after which we wish each other a **HAPPY NEW YEAR**.

Other Sacred Music Events at the Abbey Church



Collegium Cantorum with Mrs. Marilyn Walker

Since the Abbey Church was consecrated in 1992, the choir of the University of Dallas has performed in it frequently. Over the years three programs have become annual and attract many to worship at Cistercian: the All Souls' Day Mass, the Holy Week liturgy and First Friday Masses.

The wider community also enjoys the special elements of the **Holy Week liturgy**. During the Mass on Holy Thursday, the choir will sing during the ceremony of the washing of the feet, the "**Mandatium**." In this special re-enactment of a scene of the Last Supper, the abbot washes the feet of twelve First Formers, the youngest of the Prep School. On **Good Friday**, the Collegium sings during the Veneration of the Cross and communion. During the **Easter Vigil Service** on Holy Saturday night the choir sings

responsorials after the readings that follow the Blessing of the Easter Candle.

The program on First Fridays began some three years ago. On the First Fridays of each month during the school year the community mass is held at 7:30 PM with the Collegium providing the music. There is opportunity for the sacrament of penance before the mass between 6:30 and 7:30.

The musical repertoire of the Collegium has developed considerable variety and depth over the years, but its focus remains on "classical polyphony," sacred music composed in the 16th and 17th centuries by such composers as **Palestrina, Victoria and Anerio**. Most of this music has been written in Latin. The Abbey always provides the audience with a translation of the texts so that, in the true spirit of classical polyphony itself, both text and music would affect the minds and the hearts of the audience in unison.

community in which Jesus grew up. This feast makes us reflect on the quality of our family life. Are we, indeed, a community, a milieu, in which all members "grow in wisdom and grace before God and men" (cf. Lk 2:55)?

December 31: Pope St. Sylvester I

It is a sheer coincidence that the memory of the first Pope under whom Christian faith was given legal status and full freedom is celebrated on the last day of the year. He died in 335 when faith in Jesus' divinity was threatened by Arianism. It might be providential that when we remember the Pope who was first honored by a Roman Emperor we are also reminded of the end of times "when heaven and earth will pass away" with all their glory and might.

January 1, New Year's Day and the Octave of Christmas

The Feast of Mary, Mother of God

When you visit a new born baby, you first inquire about the child. You then turn to its mother, congratulate her, rejoice with her and express your best wishes. This is how the Octave of Christmas became the feast of Mary's motherhood. THEREFORE:

The double wish of

"MERRY CHRISTMAS" AND "HAPPY NEW YEAR"

which we extend to all of you
and your families
does not refer to two different
events,

but to the Birthday of Jesus
that gives us courage and hope
to swing from one year to the
next, switch calendars,
accept a world grown one year
older and face the future
as a vehicle of renewed graces
from God.

Three Choirs Sing Psalms in the Abbey Church

Once again the abbey church provided the place for a wonderful concert of sacred music. At the initiative of **Mrs. Marilyn Walker**, director of the **Collegium Cantorum** of the University of Dallas, the choirs of **Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church** and the **Jewish community of Temple Emmanu-El** joined forces with those of the Collegium to present samples of religious music all based on a commonly shared biblical tradition, the Psalms. The program was exquisitely rich, as it represented a wide spectrum of linguistic, musical and religious diversity, all rooted in the identical soil, the 150 Psalms of the Hebrew Bible.

Each choir's performance was introduced by a brief survey of the role of the Psalms in its own liturgical tradition. **Father Anthony Savas**, cantor of Holy Trinity, spoke of the Greek Orthodox tradition, and **Mr. Simon Sargon**, Director of Music at Temple Emmanu-El, spoke of the Psalms as "prayer songs" in Judaism. **Abbot Denis Farkasfalvy** of the Cistercian Abbey traced the use of the Psalms in Catholic liturgy, the Divine Office and the Mass. Psalms were sung first in Greek, then in Latin and Hebrew, and intermittently also in English. Between the three consecutive parts of the program **Dr. Louise**



Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Choir with Fr. Anthony Savas (center left) and Abbot Denis (far right).

Cowan of the University of Dallas read selections from the Psalms in the classical King James version. At the end, the three choirs sang together a verse of Psalm 135 to the music of Maul Manz, a contemporary composer. The Abbey Church was packed for the evening: an audience of nearly 500 people listened appreciatively throughout the program and applauded enthusiastically all at the end. The Abbey hosted a reception in the lobby.

Year of Cistercian celebration comes to a close

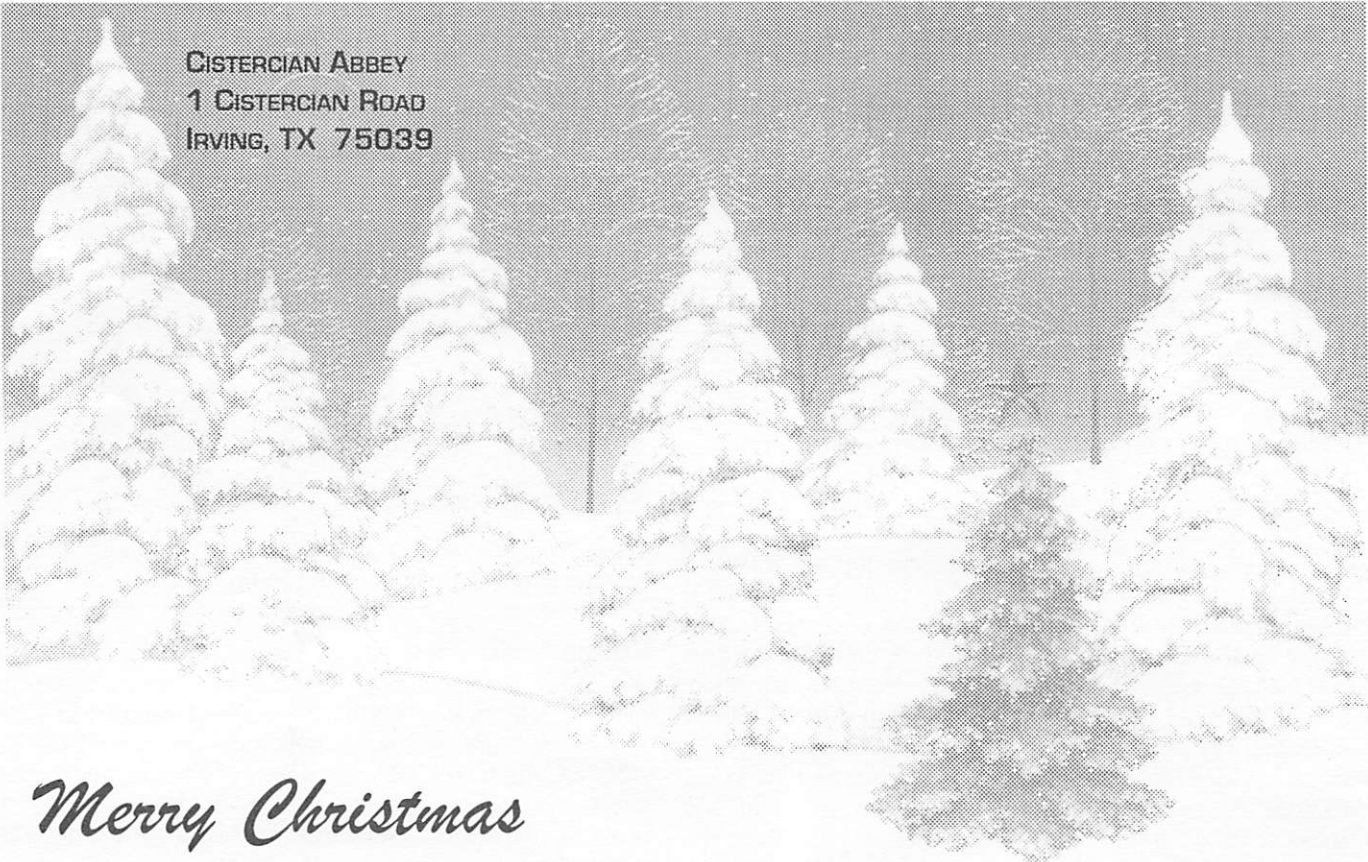
900 years and counting

As the special year of jubilee marking the 900th year of Cistercian history comes to a close, we can survey all the events that have taken place. For our monastery, the Jubilee Mass of March 21 with the dedication of the new School Library and the publication of the commemorative volume **Cistercians in Texas** stands out. Major Cistercian conventions took place in France, the US, Austria, Spain and Poland. These gatherings aimed in two directions: historical scholarship and spirituality. Cistercians (O. Cist.) and Trappists (Cistercians of the Strict Observance or O. C. S. O.), the two Orders claim-

ing the heritage of Cîteaux, or "Cistercium," made some important progress in reaching out to each other to renew brotherly and sisterly ties. A major task of providing leadership and advancing the dialogue is left for their respective General Chapter in the year 2000. In August **Fr. Chrysogonus Wadell**, a Trappist from Gethsemani, Kentucky, was invited to preach our monastery's annual retreat. Fr. Chrysogonus is an outstanding scholar of Cistercian history and was a close friend of our deceased confrère, **Fr. Louis Lékai**, himself a noted scholar. The retreat was especially valuable in providing us with new knowledge of the past and fresh insights into the contemporary life of American Trappists.

On the horizon

Next year the two Orders are planning a common study week in July in Brazil. The convention is organized jointly by the Cistercians of **Rio Pardo** and the Trappists of **Nuevo Mundo**, both in the province of Sao Paulo. Abbot Denis has been asked to give the keynote address under the title, "Cistercium Today and Tomorrow." This gathering is being organized with the explicit goal of looking beyond the celebration of old glories to a discussion of the tasks and responsibilities involved in carrying the Cistercian heritage into a new millenium.



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Merry Christmas