



Dear Friends,

As I was reading and reflecting this week, I was inspired by the striking metaphor of Isaiah in the Scripture we hear on Christmas Day: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation Your God reigns!"

Isn't it true that often it is our heads that take over at this time of the year? We're dreaming of Christmas angels, decorated trees, rich food, beautifully-wrapped gifts, Christmas parties with friends, last-minute shopping, etc. If we do give our feet a passing thought over the coming weeks, no doubt it will be to think how tired, swollen and aching they are from all our running around - and then leave it at that!

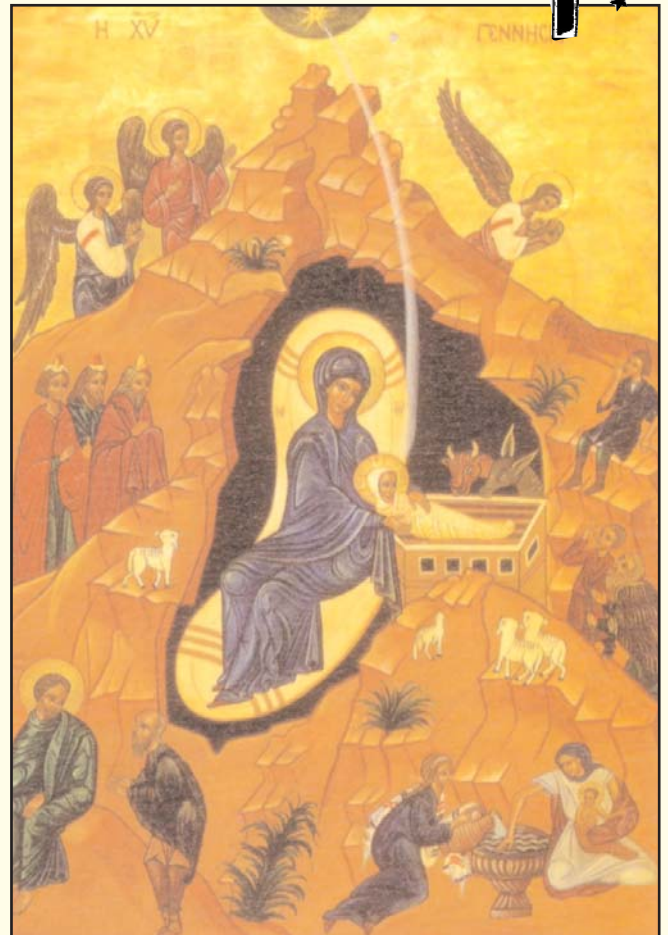
However, if we think of a messenger coming on foot to bring good news, peace and salvation, what image comes to us? Isn't it of someone who really wants to be amongst us? Having come over the mountains, the messenger has taken great trouble to deliver the message. The very notion of such an arduous journey to do this is almost beyond us today - we sit at our computers and e-mail our messages - no trouble at all! Yet the Christmas message is of Jesus delivering the good news of God's reign - indeed how beautiful are His feet!

The Christmas promise is that God is with us - born into our humanity. Our Advent cry is: "Oh, come, O come, Emanuel." Didn't Jesus trod the dusty streets of Palestine amongst the downtrodden and despised of society - didn't Francis do the same along the byways of Assisi and beyond?

Do we believe that Christ is amongst us today, present in our joys and in our sorrows, our sufferings and hopes, our communities and our families - do we really believe that he is there in our everyday lives? Carmel Crawford writes that it is easy to see God in the baby in the manger, in the lights and gifts and the goodwill of Christmas. However, we are called to look beyond what is beautiful and reveals God, to find Him in the reality of the darkness of our lives and the lives of others - especially in the hazy and murky bits.

The challenge this Christmas is for us, the messengers of God in today's world, to take time to bear the good news to all we meet. God's presence is graciousness, forgiveness, love, selfless giving, hope and joy. Indeed, how beautiful will our feet be, as we walk the dusty roads of our own lives, bearing this good news wherever we go.

- Sr. Liz



The Pardon of Assisi

Unfortunately, authentic details of Francis's journey to Spain and sojourn there cannot be found. It probably took place in the winter of 1214-1215. After his return to Umbria, he received several noble and learned men into his Order, including his future biographer, Thomas of Celano.



That he took part in the Lateran Council is not clear, but we know from Eccleston, however, that Francis was present at the death of Innocent 3rd, which took place in 1216. Shortly afterwards, early in the Pontificate of Honorius 3rd, we have the concession of the famous Portiuncula Indulgence. It is related that once, while Francis was praying at the Portiuncula, Christ appeared to him and offered him whatever favour he might desire. The salvation of souls was ever in Francis's prayer, so he begged a Plenary Indulgence for all, who having confessed their sins, should visit the little Chapel. Our Lord acceded to this request on condition that the Pope ratify the Indulgence.

Francis then set out for Perugia with Brother Masseo to visit Pope Honorius 3rd. The latter, notwithstanding some opposition from the Curia at such an unheard-of favour, granted the Indulgence, restricting it, however, to one day yearly. He subsequently fixed the 2nd August in perpetuity, as the day for gaining the Portiuncula Indulgence, commonly known as "The Pardon of Assisi." The Pope granted the Indulgence as a sign of God's great love for humanity.

The conditions for gaining the Indulgence include praying the Our Father and the Creed, as well as receiving the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist, and praying for the intentions of the Holy Father.

The Christmas Tree

Tree of Life

I am sure you will all agree that Christmas would not seem the same without a Christmas tree, but have you ever wondered why we have a tree?



It is to remind us of the tree whose wood was used to make the cross on which Christ died to save us. It is customary to use an evergreen tree such as a pine, which symbolised the everlasting life which Jesus won for us through his birth, death and resurrection.

Originally, fir trees were decorated with apples, symbolising the "infamous" tree in the Garden of Eden, but these have now been replaced with glass baubles. Later, small wafers representing the Holy Eucharist were added. In some countries, these have been replaced by Christmas biscuits and candy canes. The lights on the tree also have a special meaning, symbolising light and warmth. Christ is the Light of the World who came to save all "who live in darkness and in the shadow of death."

When you decorate your tree this Christmas, think of the Tree of Life and thank the Lord for all his gifts - especially for the knowledge that He loves us with an everlasting love.

News from Sudan

On Sunday, October 3, Srs. Elaine and Jeanette returned to Rome after spending a month in the Southern Sudan and Uganda, where they offered discernment workshops to the Sacred Heart Sisters. They also met with their Leadership Teams in preparation for their General Chapter. This was the first meeting of its kind for this community, as the Ugandan and Sudanese communities have so often been separated because of multiple civil wars and terrorism. Our two sisters brought great enthusiasm and hope to this congregation - may the Lord continue to bless their efforts.

May I ask each of you reading this article to join in the Sudanese Catholic Church's 101 days of prayer for peace to ready the country for the referendum vote on January 9, 2011. At this time, it is anticipated that the Southern Sudan will vote to separate from the North, where Khartoum is the capital. With Juba the centre, the south will secure its status as an independent, mainly Christian democratic country, in contrast to the Islamic north.

When Sr. Helen Neini arrived in Sudan from PNG, there was great rejoicing at her coming. Sisters Elaine and Jeanette were there to greet and welcome her to her new mission. Within a few days, Helen settled right into the community, relaxed and excited about her new ministry. She will soon begin teaching in Usuratuna School (Arabic for Holy Family), run by the Sacred Heart sisters. This Primary school has an enrolment of over 1000 students. English is the medium for teaching, but from her first day in Sudan, Helen was eagerly learning a few Arabic words!

Right after Helen was introduced, children began to claim her as their teacher - the boys





because sisters always teach the boys: the girls, because she was a sister, and they are all sisters, and the primary first graders because they were new and Sr. Helen was also new!

Every blessing, dear Helen, as you begin life in the Sudan. We know you will do a wonderful job there - be assured that our prayers and thoughts will accompany you along the way.

80 years on

Kedron Parish in Brisbane recently celebrated the 80th Anniversary of the arrival of the Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Kedron and in Australia. The community celebration began with Mass



at the Parish Church of St. Therese and St. Anthony. Parish Priest, Franciscan Father Peter Clifford, was the principal celebrant, assisted by several other Friars. Many sisters from other communities also attended the celebrations.

The Kedron Youth Choir led the singing, and the sisters renewed their Vows in the presence of the local Church. At the conclusion of the Mass, many came across to "Delamore" for refreshments and a special liturgy. Sculptor Mardi Kearney had fashioned bus-reliefs to commemorate the pioneer sisters, and these were blessed by Father Peter.

Following the blessing, there was "open house" of the convent and Delamore Residence. The sisters acquired

the Delamore property in 1935. The site now accommodates St. Anthony's Primary school, Mt. Alvernia Secondary College and the Delamore Retirement community. The sisters still have their convent home there. (The sisters' first convent is now the Parish Hall.)

Go in Peace

On Saturday evening, June 26, Sister Mary Martinian McSweeney breathed her last and went peacefully to her Maker.

Margaret McSweeney was born on February 21, 1921 in Co. Cork, Ireland. One of four children, Margaret was the only girl. She was close to her brothers and took a great interest in all their sports, following every hurling match in which her brothers played. She maintained this interest until the end of her life. (It is a well-known fact that she waited every Monday for Fr. Liam to give her the weekend hurling scores from Ireland!)



Margaret was educated by the Irish sisters of Charity, and in 1941 entered the MFIC's in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. On receiving the Habit, she took the name of Sr Mary Martinian after a sister who had inspired her during her school days. In 1946, she left Bloomfield and set sail for the long journey to Australia, where she spent most of her time in the classroom.

From Australia, Martinian was assigned for a number of years to our missions in PNG, where she continued her ministry in education and took a pastoral interest in the lives of the village people. In 1990, Martinian left Australia to return to her native Ireland. Here she took up residence in Assisi House, Dublin, helping the elderly residents and praying with them. In 1992, Martinian retired to the Braintree community in England. She loved her work as sacristan, but had to give this up when her arthritic hands became too painful to hold the sacred vessels.

Martinian was known for her great hospitality - she ensured that no visitor ever remained long without a cup of tea in hand! Just as she was committed to her teaching ministry, so her dedication to her prayer life and her community was truly admirable.

We thank you, Marty, for sharing the journey with us and for your quiet and gentle presence. May you rejoice in the presence of your God forever.

The 12 Days of Christmas

This song is often sung over the Christmas period. Is it a song about a young man who is madly in love with a young woman and is giving her these gifts as an expression of his love? Or is it a nonsense song about the gift giving tradition of Christmas?

A more likely explanation is that the song was written to convey tenets of the Catholic faith during the persecution of Catholics in England from 1558 to 1829.

The 12 days of Christmas are celebrated from Christmas Day to January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany. Some people decorate their trees Christmas Eve and remove the tree and decorations on January 6.

The song

On the first day of Christmas
my true love

gave to me,

a partridge in a pear tree

On the second day of
Christmas my true love gave to
me **two turtle doves**

On the third day of Christmas
my true love gave to me **three
French hens.**

On the fourth day of Christmas
my true love gave to me **four
calling birds.**

On the fifth day of Christmas
my true love gave to me **five
golden rings.**

On the sixth day of Christmas
my true love gave to me **six
geese a-laying.**

On the seventh day of
Christmas my true love gave to
me **seven swans a-swimming.**

On the eighth day of Christmas
my true love gave to me **eight
maids a-milking.**

On the ninth day of Christmas
my true love gave to me **nine
ladies dancing.**

On the tenth day of Christmas
my true love gave to me **ten
lords a-leaping.**

On the eleventh day of
Christmas my true love gave to
me **eleven pipers piping.**

On the twelfth day of
Christmas my true love gave to
me **twelve drummers drum-
ming.**

Meaning

God the Father

Jesus Christ, His son

**Old and New
Testaments**

**Faith Hope and
Charity**

**Four Gospels and/or
the four evangelists**

**First five books of
Bible (Pentateuch)**

Six days of creation

**The seven
sacraments**

Eight beatitudes

**Nine fruits of the
spirit**

Ten Commandments

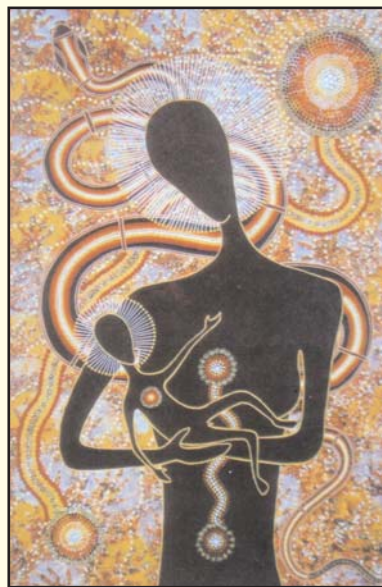
**Eleven faithful
apostles**

**Twelve points of
doctrine in the
Apostles Creed**



In Conclusion ...

As Advent begins, let us remember each other in prayer.
Let us cry out with joy -



Madonna and Child by Richard Campbell
Reconciliation Church, La Perouse

*Rejoice, O people of the earth.
Rejoice, for salvation is near.
All earth rejoice! Sing out for joy!
Jesus is coming.
He reigns supreme.*

*“Blessed be our feet that feel the beat
at the heart of life.”*

- Joy Mead

A blessed and Holy Christmas to each and everyone.

Love,

Sr. Liz