



# Oblates of St. Benedict

*Oblate Program at Belmont Abbey, NC*

*December, 2014*

## BETHLEHEM

The little town of Bethlehem is taken from two Hebrew words which mean "House of Bread." He Who called Himself "the Living Bread descended from Heaven" was born in the "House of Bread" and was laid in the place of food, the manger. The first temptation Christ had in the beginning of His public life was to become a bread King, and to win men by supplying them with food. On one occasion when they attempted to make Him King after multiplying the bread, He fled into the mountains. Rome once rang with the cry: "Bread and circuses." But the Bread that was brought at Bethlehem was an entirely different kind: "Not by bread alone does man live."

The body has its bread. Shall not the soul have its food too? Those who have nourished themselves solely on the bread of the stomach and ignored the Bread of the soul have cried out with some of the bitter disappointment of the Lord Chesterfield: "I have seen the silly rounds of business and pleasure, and have done with them all. I have enjoyed all the pleasures of the world and consequently know their futility, and do not regret their loss. Their real value is very low; but those who have not experienced them always over-rate them. For myself, I by no means desire to repeat the nauseous dose."

We say a person has a "sense of humor" if he can "see through things"... God made the world with a "sense of humor," in the sense that we were to see Him through His creation: to see His Power in the mountains, His Beauty in the sunset, His Wisdom in a snowflake, His Love in the human heart. Poets have inherited this sense of humor for, like Thompson, they can look at the sun and see in it the Host that is raised in Benediction over the world, and at night set in the Flaming Monstrance of




the west. Saints must have a sense of humor, so as to be able to see a resurrection through the trials and sorrows of life.


Man loses his sense of humor through sin. He begins to take money seriously, flesh seriously, business seriously, food seriously. These have no other purpose than just to satisfy him. Now

Christmas Day was the restoration of humor, and those who displayed it most were the shepherds and the wise men. They came to this little Babe and "saw through Him" - God Himself. His Flesh was the Sacrament of His Divinity. When the Babe grew, He taught parables in or with a sense of Divine Humor. Salt and camels, sheep and goats, patches on old clothing, wine in old bottles, businessmen, traders, were not to be taken seriously. All were telltale of something else. Christmas then is a romance and a joy only to those who have a sense of humor, whose vision is not opaque when they look at a Babe, but can see through Him all the problems of life answered in the vision of God Who appeared as a Man. They who pass through this life with that sense of humor, which is faith, will one day be rewarded by the one thing that will make heaven Heaven - His Smile.

*-Archbishop Venerable Fulton J. Sheen*



The next Oblate meeting will be  
December 21 at 3:30 PM in the Gallagher  
Room on the first floor of Stowe Hall.  
Please refer to November's newsletter for the questions  
for this meeting



We will also be having a small Christmas  
gathering and everyone is requested to bring a  
refreshment to share.

# O Antiphons

The Advent Tower is meant to be used at family Advent devotions on the last seven days before Christmas. The seven windows in the tower mask seven symbols of Christ, each of which is the theme of one of the seven O Antiphons.

The "O's" of Advent are the great gems of liturgical song which are sung each evening at the Magnificat at Vespers, from December 17 to December 23. Addressing Christ with seven magnificent titles, they beg Him with mounting impatience to come to save His people. The window in the roof of the tower masks the Christmas scene, and should be opened on Christmas Eve.

The Twelve Days of Christmas book contains a Christmas Novena during which the windows in the Advent Tower are opened. But the windows may also be opened very simply with the reading of the appropriate anti-phon, and the praying of the Magnificat.

## THE "O'S" OF ADVENT

December 17—O WISDOM, who came from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from end to end and ordering all things mightily and sweetly—COME! and teach us the way of prudence.

December 18—O LORD AND GIVER of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the flame of the burning bush, and gave him the law on Sinai—COME! and redeem us with outstretched arm.

December 19—O ROOT OF JESSE, who stands for an ensign of the people, before whom kings shall keep silence, and unto whom the Gentiles shall make supplication—COME! to deliver us, and tarry not.

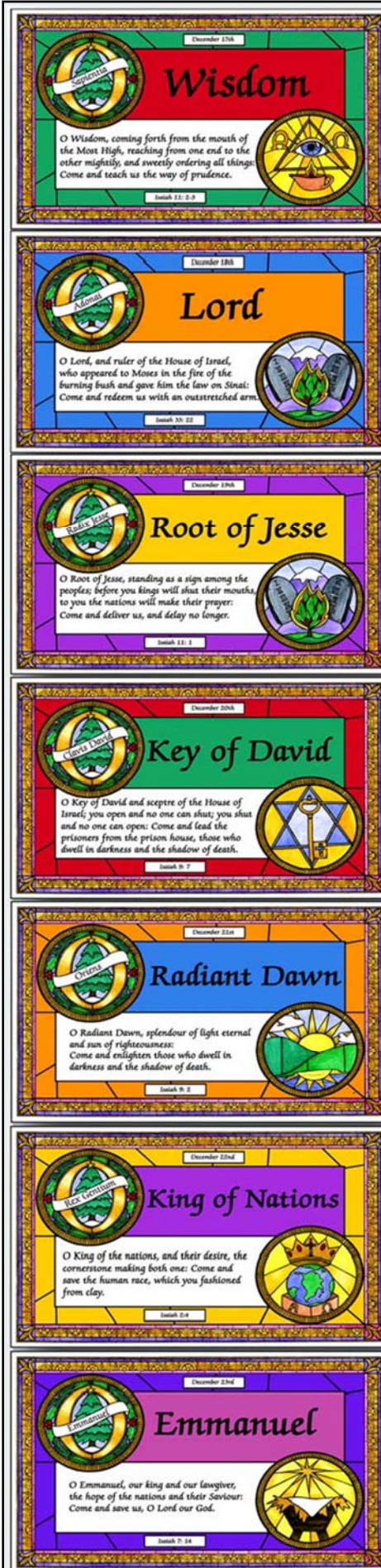
December 20—O KEY OF DAVID, and Sceptre of the House of Israel, who opens and no man shuts, who shuts, and no man opens—COME! and bring forth the captive from his prison, he who sits in darkness and in the shadow of death.

December 21—O DAWN OF THE EAST, brightness of the light eternal, and Sun of Justice—COME! and enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

December 22—O KING OF THE GENTILES and their desired One, the Cornerstone that makes both one—COME! and deliver man, whom You formed out of the dust of the earth.

December 23—O EMMANUEL, our King and Lawgiver, the expected of the nations and their Savior—COME! to save us, O Lord our God.

**Prayer Source:** Twelve Days of Christmas Kit by Grailville Writing Center, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1955. **Graphics:** Office of Youth Ministry, Roman Catholic Diocese of Prince Albert



## DIES NATALIS SOLIS INVICTI (CHRISTMAS)

During the first two centuries after Christ's death, Christmas was not celebrated. In 245 AD, when a group of scholars attempted to pinpoint the exact date of Christ's birth, a Church council denounced the endeavour, declaring that it would be wrong to celebrate the birth of Christ "as though He were a King Pharaoh".

In spite of official disapproval, various attempts were made to pinpoint the Nativity resulting in a confusion of dates: January 1, January 6, March 25 and May 20. The May date became the favoured one because the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2:8 ff) reports that the shepherds who received the announcement of Christ's birth were watching their sheep by night. Shepherds guarded their flocks day and night only at lambing time, which was in the spring. In winter, the animals were generally kept in corrals, unwatched.

By the middle of the fourth century, December 25 was associated as the birth day of Christ. Pope Julius (337-352) formally selected December 25 as the day for Christmas in 349 AD.



Prior to the celebration of Christmas, December 25 was already a widely celebrated day in the Roman World. On that date citizens observed the Natalis Solis Invicti (the Birthday of the Unconquerable Sun) in honour of the Sun God Mithras. The festival took place just after the winter solstice of the Julian calendar. Many modern Christmas customs such as decorating a house with greenery, exchanging gifts and enjoying festive meals, originated with this pagan celebration.

Scholars believe that Pope Julius selected December 25 as the date of the Nativity in order to win over followers of the Sun God Mithras, as well as giving Christians an opportunity to honour Christ on his birth date.

The origin of Xmas, an abbreviation for Christmas, originated with Greek Christians. 'X' is the first letter of the Greek word for Christ (Xristos). By the sixteenth century, Xmas was widely used throughout Europe among Christians who understood that it meant 'Christ's Mass'. Later, Christians unfamiliar with the Greek origin, mistook the 'X' as a sign of disrespect, and an attempt by unbelievers to rid Christmas of its central meaning. Some Christians still disapprove of the abbreviation claiming, incorrectly, that it takes the "Christ out of Christmas".

Victor M. Parachin, *St. Anthony Messenger*

## WHY THE PSALMS



...the Psalms not only form our minds according to the mind of the Church, not only direct our thoughts and affections to God, but they establish us in God, they unite us to Christ. But they do this only if our hearts follow their thoughts and words back to the inspired source....

Therefore the sentiments of the Psalmist, which are the thoughts and sentiments of God Himself in His Church, must lead us into the hidden sanctuary of God. Where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also. The function of the Psalms is to reveal to us God as the "treasure" whom we love because He has first loved us, to hide us, heart and soul, in the depths of His infinite Light.

The Psalms, therefore, lead us to contemplation.

Thomas Merton, OCSO, *Praying the Psalms*, Page 9



**M**y soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.

He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Luke 1:46-55 (NRSV)

## ORDO

### DECEMBER

- 25 **Nativity of the Lord. Solemnity**
- 26 Stephen, First Martyr.  
Feast
- 27 John, Apostle. Feast
- 28 Holy Innocents, Martyrs,  
Feast (Week I)

### JANUARY

- 1 **Mary, Mother of God. Solemnity** (Week 1 begins tomorrow)
- 2 Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, Bishops, Doctors of the Church.  
Memorial
- 4 **Epiphany Solemnity** (Week II)
- 5 John Neumann, Bishop,  
Memorial
- 11 **Baptism of the Lord** (Week I of Ordinary Time begins tomorrow)
- 15 Maur and Placid, Disciples of Benedict. Patrons of Oblates. Memorial

## ST. BASIL THE GREAT: JANUARY 2

*"Or what book of the holy Catholic Fathers does not loudly proclaim how we may come by a straight course to our Creator? Then the Conferences and the Institutes and the Lives of the Fathers, as also the Rule of our holy Father Basil -- what else are they but tools of virtue for right-living and obedient monks?" RB 73:4-5*



The present time is indeed most suitable for us and the place provides tranquility and complete freedom from outside disturbances. So then. Let us pray for one another, that we, for our part, may give to your fellow servants their portion of food in due time and that you, for your part, may receive the word like the good earth and bring forth a mature and manifold fruit in righteousness, as it is written.

I appeal to you therefore, by the love of our Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins, let us take thought for our souls! Let us lament the vanity of our former life! Let us, for the sake of the things to come, take up combat for the glory of God and his Christ and of the worshipful and Holy Spirit. Let us not remain stuck fast in this indifference and carelessness, ever losing the present opportunity through indifference and putting off a beginning of our labours till tomorrow or some other time. Otherwise we shall be overtaken without any supply of good works by him who requires our souls and be banished from the joy of the bridal chamber. Then shall we weep vain and profitless tears, deploring the time of our life that we spent so wastefully, when there shall be no more scope for repentance.

Now is the acceptable time, says the Apostle, now is the day of salvation. This is the season for repentance, that for recompense, this for patient endurance, that for consolation. Now, God is the helper of those who turn from the evil way; then, he will be the dread and inexorable examiner of all human deeds, words, and motives.

Now we enjoy his forbearance, then we shall know his justice, when we shall rise again, some to eternal punishment, others to eternal life and each shall receive according to his works.

Until what occasion are we going to put off our obedience to Christ, who has called us to his heavenly Kingdom? When-ever are we going to become sober? Whenever are we going to recall ourselves from our habitual life to the strict way of the Gospel? Whenever are we going to set before our eyes that dread and manifest day of the Lord? On that day, those who by their good works draw near to the Lord's right hand shall be welcomed into the Kingdom of heaven, whereas those who for their barrenness of good works have been placed on his left hand shall be engulfed in the Gehenna of fire and everlasting darkness. In that place, he says, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (taken from: *The Asketikon of St. Basil the Great*, Anna M. Silvas.

**The January meeting of the Oblates will be on the 18th at 3:30 unless otherwise announced.**