



St. Mary Magdala Spiritual Center is the ministry center of The Community of the Cross, an intentional community of Christians affiliated with the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America. ALL ARE WELCOME



St. Mary Magdala Spiritual Center

FIRST SUNDAY

December 2018, Vol 12, Issue 12

2800 Rolston Street, Fort Wayne, IN 46825

HAPPY NEW YEAR

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Sunday Liturgy

10:00 AM
2800 Rolston Street
Fort Wayne

All are Welcome!

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This Sunday begins the new Church year for the Western world. Since we follow the Western calendar for the most part, it is the beginning of our new year also. Advent, the season where we look forward to the coming of Christ as a human person; God entering God's creation and living among us as God-With-Us, Emmanuel. "*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*" (Jn 1:14) So during this season of Advent you'll notice that the colors are a dark blue. Blue represents hope, expectation, and heaven. It is also the color associated with the Blessed Virgin Mary in art and iconography. Advent is a time of hope and expectation. It could easily be a Marian month as it is she that is pregnant with the Child at this time but we're not focused on re-living the past. Advent is an "already but not yet" time for sure. Jesus has come already but it is not yet complete.

Deep blue is the color of the clear, predawn sky, the color that covers the earth in the hours before the sun rises in the east. Most of us are not looking at the sky at that hour – perhaps we're still asleep, or too weary to notice it as we get into our car for our commute. Nonetheless, a deep, dark blue is the color that covers us in the dark, cold hours before the dawn. It is the last color our eyes see before the light returns. In fact, the first reading for midnight mass on Christmas is from Isaiah 9:2, "*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined.*" Thus we use deep blue for Advent to shade the season with a hint of expectation and anticipation of the dawn of Christ.

And as we wait in expectation, we need to prepare. Prepare is perhaps the best verb to use for Advent - prepare the way of the Lord as John the Baptist preaches. Make the way for our God smooth. Wow, we have a lot of work to do in this "Almost-but-not-yet" season. The expectation that God will return sets the stage for us to make straight and level God's path. If God's coming back soon (remember this is an allegorical way of speaking - God is here - God hasn't left us) I am not sure the path is ready for an easy landing. We've got some re-arranging to do. Luke's gospel tells us in the prayer of Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, 1:78-79 "*By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*" We've got a lot of preparing to do and it's not just putting up Christmas decorations, it's the hard type of preparing, of making peace which only begins in our hearts and in our families and then spreads to others. As Janet Sullivan Whitaker says in her song, "We're trying to get ready!"

+John

REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS

At this time of year, pray especially for the people and city of Bethlehem - the Palestinian town where Jesus was born which is now surrounded again by occupying forces and a huge wall, separating it from Jerusalem and other parts of Palestine.

Pray for all people in those places that are experiencing or have experienced violence, destruction or any other events causing suffering.

Prayers of thanksgiving for Buzz who is home from Cleveland Clinic and patiently healing. Continue to keep him and his family in your prayers as he faces several weeks of recovery.

Continue to remember Joni Weber who fell and broke her hip and wrist. She is home now. Pray that she might have patience as healing takes time.

Remember all those who are sick. May they heal quickly and may their family be strengthened in these times of need.

Pray for victims of violence and injustice. Pray most of all for justice - justice would prevent so much of the misery and problems that we face in our world and in our communities.

Pray for a sense of outrage at the violence, greed and waste in our world.

Remember all of the Church in your prayers, each of us is struggling with something. We all have challenges as we go on our journeys.

Pray for those who are unemployed or under employed, for those who are lonely and alone.

Honor the earth, the waters and the sky and do what you can to stop pollution.

Pray for an end to genocide, apartheid and the displacement of people from their lands all over the globe. Let go of any form of racism, sexism, homophobia, agism and other forms of hatred and bigotry.

Pray that we may all grow stronger to be able to witness to the true Gospel message, a message of good news that God is Love and we who love God love our neighbor - God is here and we are one - all else is failing.

Pray for our country and for all those who feel excluded for any reason.

CHRISTMAS ANGELS

Thank you for being so generous and participating in the Christmas Angels program for the St. Martin de Porres Ministry of St. Mary's Catholic Church. The gifts need to be turned in by Sunday, December 16 so they can be prepared. Don't forget to label each gift with the person's number and letter. See the directions sheets in the back of church if you have any questions - or ask Fr. Cliff.

Some reflective readings for Advent

SAINT NICHOLAS OF MYRA Archbishop Peter

This lovely prayer celebrates St Nicholas just perfectly, I think.

You revealed yourself, O saint, in Myra as a priest,
For you fulfilled the Gospel of Christ
By giving up your soul for your people,
And saving the innocent from death.
Therefore you are blessed as one become
wise in the grace of God.

Nicholas the future bishop and saint was born at the end of the third century, in Patara, on the south coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). The bishop of that place recognized holiness in Nicholas, and he was ordained in the usual progression of reader, then priest. Later he was elected bishop of Myra, also in Asia Minor along the southern coast. Myra was an important town at that time and a metropolitan see. It was a place where St Paul, years before, had changed ships on his travel to Rome.

The good bishop, and that's not hyperbole, was tortured during the persecution of the Emperors Diocletian and Maximian, but survived. Some time after his death, his remains was moved to Bari, in

southern Italy. This past year, Pope Francis hosted a large number of Orthodox bishops in a pilgrimage to the saint's resting place.

So...who is the real guy? He is one of the few saints (St Patrick is another) honored in both east and west, and celebrated in a variety of guises. He is a unifying saint, a shared kinship for all Christians.

During his life, Nicholas demonstrated great courage. He is said to have slapped the heretic Arias during the First Ecumenical Council. He confronted paganism and dismantled some temples.

He's also seen as a man of great faith. Legend has it that he saved Myra from a devastating famine by his prayers. And many icons show him saving a ship in distress in turbulent seas, causing one of the passengers who had fallen into the sea to be miraculously transported home.

And our custom of stockings hung by the fireplace is traced to the saint. When still a priest, he learned that a man in the town had become impoverished and couldn't provide dowries for his three daughters. In the quiet of a dark night, he went to the man's home and tossed a bag of coins through a window when a dowry was needed.

His memory is so popular that he is the patron saint of, well, just about everyone: children, sailors, prisoners, those faultlessly accused, workers for justice, innocent victims...and of course he's patron of young women wanting to get married.

So, we honor him in the fabulous lighted Santa display downtown, and in its own way that is very appropriate, though probably, Nicholas would have preferred our focus be on Jesus. We can honor him in the quiet of our hearts and lives because he is for us a three-fold blessing. First, it is no mean thing that he is a shared saint, across the many households of faith.

Secondly, he is a model of servant leadership, (see Philippians 2: 7, 8) "exhibiting accountability rather than authority" (as Metropolitan Jonah said of him). And thirdly, he was gentle (as with the three daughters) but also tough as nails (as with Arias).

THE NATIVITY OF JESUS

The poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti concludes his poem, "Christ climbed down" with this stanza (check out the entire poem on line):

Christ climbed down
from His bare Tree
this year
and softly stole away into
some anonymous Mary's womb again
where in the darkest night
of everybody's anonymous soul
He awaits again
an unimaginable
and impossibly
Immaculate Reconciliation
the very craziest of Second Comings

All y'all know that I'm quite happy with Advent and Christmas festivities. But when I curl up on my overstuffed sofa, having wrapped myself in a warm, woolen throw, and read what our forebearers wrote about Christmas, I actually lament that we've lost much which is elegant and even mystical.

I won't print it here, but as a premier example of elegant writing about the Incarnation, find the [Nativity Homily of St John Chrysostom](#). Wonderful! And look at this couplet, which in nine words reveals beautifully the theology of the coming to earth of the Divine:

Make ready O Bethlehem
for Paradise hath been opened.

We hear that "Jesus is the reason for the season," and a popular ceramic has a baby Jesus in a creche being worshipped by a kneeling Santa Claus. My image of this event is rendering: the sky-curtain torn open, causing stars to fly all over

(hence “shooting stars), and on earth a cold world pacing nervously, anxiously, for that which will transform it back into what? Into earth’s own memory of Eden. Williams Shakespeare in *Richard II* (Act 2, scene 1), writes of England as a demi-paradise. Let’s look at it, and as you read, conjure in your imagination your own vision of what here and now is Edenesque:

This royal throne of kings, this scepter’d isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands,—
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm,
this England.

Imagine! A land which is a *royal* throne, a *place* of majesty, and *almost* a paradise. Also not only *majestical*, but where *war* and *infection* have no home. Indeed, this paradisaical setting is home to a *happy breed*, cherished as *precious* and blessed.

Isn’t this what we hope for when we welcome God into our lives, our neighborhood, our world? It is this sense of ourselves and the created which the great writers of the churches have sung about each December.

I am one of those hungry, inhabiting a place which seems at times too regular bereft of the divine comforts. And so, at heart a man who wants to believe and believe well, I rejoice at the seasonal observances. The Eucharist celebrated in the midst of darkest night on Christmas; the blessing of waters early in the new year—recalling Jesus’ own baptism in the

Jordan, but blessing the great power of the natural world, Christianizing it. And the many signs and symbols of healing and restoration: sages and simple, smelly peasant herdsmen; sparkling water and cold nights; stars and darkness. These are for this old man not just rituals to be observed but moments to be immersed in the very Mystery we celebrate during the cold winter nights and days.

Bethlehem opened Eden, come let us behold;
We have found joy in this hidden place;
come let us seize
The pleasures of Paradise within the cave;
There appeared an unwatered root which sprouted forgiveness;
There was found an undug well
From which David once yearned to drink;
And there the Virgin brought forth an infant
Who at once quenched their thirst, that of Adam and of David.
Come, then, let us hasten to this place
where there has been born
A newborn babe, the God before time.

Blessings and peace, everyone.

Archbishop Peter

NOVEMBER 29

UN INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

The United Nations has declared November 29 the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People (IDOS). As you know, the Palestinian people have exhibited a great amount of courage, faith, and resilience in 2018, even as it has been beset upon outrage and after outrage, ancient olive trees destroyed for new settlements, laws passed delegitimizing Palestinian citizen and claims to their ancestral lands, destruction of Palestinian homes, increasing torture and imprisonment of Palestinian children by Israeli military, and more, not to even mention the US administration’s (and much to our chagrin, the US Congress, too) despicable full-

throated support for all things Israel.

Yet, as the carol puts it ... "yet in they dark streets shineth, the everlasting light..."

It is the light that shines through incarnated love, whose rule is justice, whose kingdom is peace. For Christians, we see this embodied in a Palestinian Jew who lived nobly and courageously under occupation 2000 years ago. But for all of us, religious or not, theist or not, we see this very dignity and steadfastness incarnated in the everyday lives of Palestinians, many of whom we know, many who we do not know, who live under a current illegal, brutal occupation.

So today, in solidarity, we remember our friends in Palestine, Jew, Christian, and Muslim, who witness to us the real meaning of Christmas, two poems, one by a contemporary Palestinian poet, Dareen Tatour, (read Dareen's poem slowly, rhythmically), and the second, for Christians, a young Palestinian Jewish maiden 2000 years ago after discovering she was with child, the words now updated, a "modern Magnificat," a call for divine justice and joy (the original is found in Luke 1.460-55).

In solidarity,
Michael

L. Michael Spath, DMin, PhD
Indiana Center for Middle East Peace
Friends of Sabeel North America
ICAHD-USA

I... Who Am I?

By Dareen Tatour

The wind asks... who am I?
You are Me,
Voice of mine.

I am the woman of the Departed One,
The one who was wronged on that foggy night,
Or write, instead, the women of the
Transformed One.

I walk ahead without a step to either side,

I desire the life that exists in Nowhere,
I go on, as my ghost has no desire to remain
My freedom...

Lies in the sound of women.

And the sea asks... who am I?

I am the pearl buried in the heart of the deep,
The patience embedded in the sands of time.

I am Me...

A storm of angry waves at sunset,

Its breathing strangled in the grip of the winds.

But as I draw near the question pulls away,

And I keep on asking: "Who am I?"

A nation asks... who am I?

I am Here.

Brought forth from a womb of misery,

A child encircled by pain,

A teardrop shackled by anger.

I am the very love of the nation.

I have lived in this land,

Growing up in the byways of Nazareth,

Which became a song of peace for the birth of
desires.

And I remained here, steadfast,

Building for it an eternal dream.

The palm tree asks... who am I?

I am just like him.

Against the sun, standing tall.

I rise up, my shadow standing there,

On the ground before me. I will not die,

Unless amputated, uprooted from my crying
out

The sound of silence.

The soul asks... who am I?

I am the confession of the conscience.

A person who reveals the question:

Am I living among reality?

Or am I a phantasm of imagination?

I am confused in a world that has sold its
beliefs,

One now covered over in devastation,

Life itself, come and drink and slake your thirst,

For the clouds will come to revitalize us.

TWO. A Modern Magnificat

Bishop John Shelby Spong's website, A New Christianity for a New World, December 19, 2007

My soul sings in gratitude.
I'm dancing in the mystery of God.
The light of the Holy One is within me
and I am blessed, so truly blessed.
This goes deeper than human thinking.

I am filled with awe
at Love whose only condition
is to be received.

The gift is not for the proud,
for they have no room for it.
The strong and self-sufficient ones
don't have this awareness.
But those who know their emptiness
can rejoice in Love's fullness.
It's the Love that we are made for,
the reason for our being.
It fills our inmost heart space
and brings to birth in us, the Holy One.

JOIN US SUNDAY DECEMBER 9

To Commemorate the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Speaker: Rev Graylan Haglar of the Poor
People's Campaign, Washington DC

Music by Union Baptist Church with Songleader
Luci Murphy, Poor People's Campaign

Readings - Martin Luther King Jr.; Kairos,
South Africa; Universal Declaration of Human
Rights; Mahmoud Darwish; Howard Thurman
and others

Child Care Provided

**Next Sunday Evening 6:30 PM at
Plymouth Congregational Church
501 West Berry Street, Fort Wayne**

READINGS FOR DECEMBER

First Sunday of Advent (Cycle C)

December 2, 2018

Jeremiah 33:14-16 Psalm 25:1-10
1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 Luke 21:25-36

Second Sunday of Advent

December 9, 2018

Baruch 5:1-9 or Malachi 3:1-4
Luke 1:68-79 Philippians 1:3-11
Luke 3:1-6

Third Sunday of Advent

December 16, 2018

Zephaniah 3:14-20 Isaiah 12:2-6
Philippians 4:4-7 Luke 3:7-18

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 23, 2018

Micah 5:2-5a Luke 1:46b-55
Hebrews 10:5-10 Luke 1:39-55

Nativity of the Lord - Proper I

December 24 & 25, 2018

Isaiah 9:2-7 Psalm 96 Titus
2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)

First Sunday after Christmas Day

December 30, 2018

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26 Psalm 148
Colossians 3:12-17 Luke 2:41-52

Epiphany of the Lord

January 6, 2019

Isaiah 60:1-6 Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14
Ephesians 3:1-12 Matthew 2:1-12

CLERGY FOR DECEMBER

Dec 2	Cliff+	Advent 1
Dec 9	+John	Advent 2
Dec 16	+Peter	Advent 3
Dec 23	Charlene+	Advent 4
Dec 25	Cliff+	Christmas Day
Dec 30	Charlene+	Christmas 1
Jan 1	+Peter	New Years
Jan 6	+John/Anita	Epiphany