

TRUE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

by Rev. Edward J. Sutfin

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FOREWORD

It is a pleasant experience to be requested by educators to assist them in teaching the liturgy to children. The occasion for the writing of these notes was the Ursuline Educational Conference which took place at Mount Merici Academy in Waterville, Maine, on February 23, 1953. I am deeply indebted to Mother Gonzaga L'Heureux and to Reverend Mother Therese Walsh for their encouragement and enthusiasm.

Many of the suggestions contained in these notes may appear to be alien to our present-day American mentality. The treasury of world literature and custom, however, should be more appreciated in our country than in any other country in the world, for our nation is made up of nearly every race and culture. Obviously, coordination and integration is necessary in order to synthesize our own cosmopolitan approach. It would be impossible to execute all of the suggestions which are offered here. Our purpose has been principally to develop the fundamental dogmatic background of the Christmas Liturgy, and then to suggest ideas of every sort by which the spirit of the Church may be brought to children. The application of one or many of these ideas must depend upon the home, school and cultural circumstances in which they are tried.

Even in Europe many charming folk traditions have been abandoned. Our own ancestors often felt forced to adopt the customs and language of the new world too eagerly. Folk-lore in the recent past was regarded by many Americans as old fashioned and crude. Today, we are beginning to realize that the vivid and lively traditions of Europe are necessary in building up our own culture. Children find in folk-lore a natural, unsophisticated outlet of expression. We speak of our children as the hope of our nation. Allow them to profit by liturgy and folk tradition, and they shall integrate a truly American culture which is both contemporary and open-minded to history and to the world at large. The Church always finds old and new treasures of grace in her storehouse of scripture and tradition. We must take every means of helping our children to find them.

Three other educators have constantly been in mind while writing these notes: My first grade teacher, Sister Mary Joan O.P., who has done such admirable work upon the grade school curriculum at the Catholic University of America; Miss Alma Savage of New York City, who is the literary mother of so many American children; and Miss Sara B. O'Neill, whose devotion to children, the liturgy and Catholic books has helped so greatly to bring the fullness of Christ to Catholics in our country.

EDWARD J. SUTFIN
MARIAWALD,
(Our Lady of the Snows, 1955)

CHAPTER 1

THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

(Station at St. Mary Major)

THE Collect Prayer of the first Sunday in Advent is an impassioned plea which arouses family and school from the lethargy of "just ordinary days." It begins, "Stir up Thy power, we beseech Thee, O Lord, and come!" What a change and what a stir the realization that we have come upon the first Sunday in Advent makes within the soul! The warmth of new life and of a new year courses through our veins, and everything inspires us with hope, longing and excitement.

Therese Mueller, in "Our Children's Year of Grace," gives us some idea of what should inspire Christian parents at the opening of Advent: "With the beginning of a new year of grace, we parents face the responsibility of keeping our children in close touch with Mother Church, for she shows us the way to a fuller understanding of the sacred mysteries of our religion, wisely represented in the course of the liturgical seasons. Then let us use in the 'mother school' or 'home school' everything that helps our children to understand and to penetrate deeper into their faith. There must be no exclusion of the little ones, for they are still so near to the wisdom of paradise that they often express things in simple ways more clearly than we do with many words. So we tell the children that Advent means arrival, coming, and emphasize that it stands first of all for the approach of the promised Messiah, and secondly for the return of the ascended Christ at the end of the world. Both thoughts are expressed in the liturgy of the Advent and Christmas season, including the feast of the Epiphany, which not only celebrates the revelation of the divinity of Christ...but also the final revelation of his Kingship in the last judgment."¹

During the week before the beginning of Advent, the father of the family has to stir himself from his easy chair and take the children out into the forest. Even if the family lives in a big city, he has to make a trip to his friend the florist, or to one of his friends who has a larger garden or a patch of woodland. Evergreens of some sort must be gathered for the Advent wreath. Because his boys are good scouts, they all choose branches which will not harm the trees nor mar their beauty. Besides the Advent wreath, a few extra branches should be gleaned in order to decorate the Jerusalem of their home. Are not the pine cones which they gather on the forest floor a wonderful reminder of the need of new life?

Mother must make a shopping expedition with her daughters; and what a job it is to find some violet ribbon, not too dark, not too gay, but just the right hue to express the longing of the Advent season. Then the candles must be obtained. Perhaps these could be sought at church, for blessed candles lend solemnity to the occasion and remind us of the pure beeswax which symbolizes the wholesome and pure body of the resurrected Saviour. Of course, we could buy several other things now, but it is so much more fun to make several trips to the stores. This way each succeeding feast of the season becomes a "special occasion."

On the Saturday evening before the first Sunday, the family gathers to put the wreath together. The children learn that the circle of the wreath represents eternity, or the unceasing flow of the sun following its prescribed course; the four candles divide the time, representing the "four thousand" years of waiting for the arrival of the Saviour. When all is in readiness, the wreath is suspended at some prominent place in the house, or else it may be placed upon a table which serves as a family altar. Then the family prepares for the Sunday Mass. "The King, the Saviour, will come, let us adore Him" (Invitatory for Matins).

The first spiritual preparation of the family centers about a full understanding of Holy Mass, of the three comings of our Lord: as the child at Bethlehem, as the Judge at the end of the world, and in sanctifying grace each day, provided we stay away from sin, and remain always ready to offer Him the thanksgiving which is the Mass and to incorporate ourselves into Him at Holy Communion. At the end of this preparation, or at the Sunday dinner, the father of the family begins the family prayer with the blessing of the wreath, and the oration for the First Sunday. In the light of the single candle the children lift up their voices in an Advent song.

We may scarcely neglect the importance of music in the education of the children, and we should do well to educate their tastes by good music with verses which are theologically sound. Perhaps it would be for the best if we were to forget many of the songs which we as adults know and love, and place the musical education of our children upon a basis as objective as possible. If we remember the "Motu Proprio" of Pius X and the various documents of Mother Church on the subject of religious music, we shall wisely apply their sound counsel to the musical education of our children. Instead of having the children learn "Jingle Bells," "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas," "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town" and the like, let us turn to better and more appropriate melodies and verses. The children will hear enough of all the paganized versions of Christmas songs from mid-November on--the stores and shops assure that. Further, it is not yet the time, when we have come to the First Sunday of Advent, to be singing Christmas songs. We shall sing these when Christmas arrives.

There are four songs which are appropriate and readily available for early Advent. The first one is, of course, the "Rorate Coeli" (well-translated into a singable English version, available from St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minn.) The longing of the ancient world for the coming of the Saviour, expressed in the words of Isaias, is adequately voiced in this love song. Learn it well, and the children will look forward to this hymn as the beginning of the joyous Christmastide.

The Vesper hymn of Advent is even more simple and appealing to children:

"Creator of the stars of night,
Thy people's everlasting light,
Jesus, Redeemer, save us all
And hear Thy servants when they call...."

Indeed, this Vesper hymn pertains to the very liturgy itself, and along with the "Alma Redemptoris Mater" should become the theme song of Advent. The latter antiphon may be sung on the simple or the solemn tone. Some children seem to prefer the solemn one, and you may well imagine the joy in Mary's heart when she hears children singing "Loving Mother of the Redeemer!" An old German mediaeval carol may be added to our list, a splendid little Advent song based on an ancient legend: "Maria Walks amid the Thorn." The recurrent "Kyrie eleison" will help to teach the children the Advent-like quality of the Kyrie at Holy Mass--the longing appeal to the mercy of the Trinity through the Incarnation and Redemption. May Isaias and our Blessed Mother be the heart and soul of our children's Advent carols!

Life is not so simple, however, once Advent has begun. As Florence Berger remarks in "Cooking for Christ": "At the very First Sunday of Advent, we women hear the warning to get busy; 'Stir up Thy power, we beseech Thee, O Lord, and come!' It is the time to hurry home and stir up your plum puddings. In England even today this is known as 'Stir-up Sunday.' The more you can stir a pudding the better. Each member of the family should come and give a good stir. Plum puddings are deliberate affairs. It takes a bit of gathering and garnering before we begin. Look over your favorite recipe for plum pudding.... Let it make the children long for it during the entire Advent. If Advent is not a season for Christmas parties, it is at least a season to mortify the soul by good smells."²

Before our discussion of the first week of Advent becomes too extensive, let's consider some appropriate readings for the season. There are few better than the Scripture readings of Isaias according to the Roman Breviary, the Rorate Mass of the Blessed Virgin during Advent, the text of the Sundays of Advent in the Missal, the "Christmas cycle" of Pius Parsch in "Das Jahr des Heiles," or of Abbot Gueranger in "The Liturgical Year." A hidden treasure chest of inspirations and ideas may be discovered by digging about and uncovering the contents of these volumes. In addition, there are many collections of Christmas stories, some of which are associated with Advent. Perhaps you may choose the story of "The Other Wise Man" by Henry Van Dyke. But of all the stories, none are comparable to the liturgy itself, and Pius Parsch does wonderfully well in offering it to our twentieth century. The great advantage of his work lies in the fact that he centers our attention upon Holy Mass, the Divine Office and the Ritual. With these, and a profound understanding and imagination of our own, we cannot lead the children far astray.

One last comment. Children in the Middle Ages were taught the Psalter instead of being obliged to memorize so many useless ditties such as "Little Orphan Annie." The Advent psalms are psalms 24, 79, 84 and 18. It must be admitted that the psalm of the first week in Advent, psalm 24, is indeed a little difficult for children to understand. But after all, this psalm is the constant refrain of the First Sunday in Advent. Learn about it yourself, meditate upon it a while, and then see if it is really so difficult that you cannot interest children in its beauty.

ST. NICHOLAS (December 6)

Even though we resolve not to celebrate Christmas parties during the season of Advent, Mother Church always seems to find some reason or other to rejoice even during her most solemn penitential seasons. The Spouse just cannot be unhappy and joyless as long as the Bridegroom is present each day at Holy Mass. Even during Holy Week we hear of the "happy fault" of Adam, the "blessed Passion" of Christ, and the Cross becomes a symbol of triumph, the joy of Christians. Almost at the very outset of Advent, we gather the children together on the eve of St. Nicholas to celebrate the feast of this famous bishop.

St. Nicholas is the patron of many different groups of people, and for hundreds of years has been a popular saint in the East and in the West, greatly venerated as a wonder-worker. He is the patron of mariners, bankers, pawn-brokers, scholars and thieves! One legend tells of an occasion when the saints were gathered in heaven to converse and drink a little wine together. St. Basil filled the golden cups from a golden jug, and while all were engaged in conversation, it was noticed that St. Nicholas was nodding. One of the blessed nudged him until he awoke, and asked the cause for his slumbers. "Well, you see," he told them, "the enemy has raised a fearful storm in the Aegean. My body was dozing, perhaps, but my spirit was bringing the ships safe to shore."

He is especially the saint of children, and is known in various countries as Santa Claus, Kris Kringle and Pelznickel. Servants have been invented to accompany him and to deal with those children who have been disobedient and naughty. Since St. Nicholas is considered too kind to give scoldings and punishments, in Austria it is Krampus, in Germany Knecht Ruprecht, and in Holland Black Peter who goes along with him armed with a stout switch, while St. Nicholas merely hands gifts to the children without even noticing the bad little boys and girls. A very old legend tells of his kindness to three daughters of a poor nobleman. Since they had no dowry, they were to be sold into slavery. St. Nicholas learned of this and on three successive nights dropped a bag of gold for them down the chimney. This is said to explain the three balls over the shops of pawnbrokers, and why St. Nicholas drops his gifts for children down the chimney.

Nicholas was born at Patara in Lycia in the third century. His parents, who had been growing old without having a child, are said to have obtained him by force of prayer. Nicholas, losing his father and mother at an early age, devoted his life to the poor and afflicted of every kind. Late in his life, after he had been made Bishop of Myra in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey) Nicholas suffered imprisonment for his faith. He died tranquilly in his episcopal city pronouncing the words, "Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit"--words which have become the short responsory of Compline. Since 1087 his relics have been preserved at Bari in Italy.

Devotion to St. Nicholas began in his native Asia Minor, and was brought to Russia by an emperor who was witness to his miraculous works. The devotion spread through Lapland and into Scandinavia, thence to all Europe and across to the New World. In early times, Nicholas was pictured as a kind, lean, ascetic bishop, but in America he became fat and jolly. His miter turned into a winter bonnet, his vestments became a snow suit. He retained his reindeer from Lapland, his love for chimneys from his own Asia Minor, and his love of children from all time.

A French legend relates that Our Lady once gave him the whole of the province of Lorraine as a reward for his kindness. As the children of that province hang up their stockings, they say:

"Saint Nicholas, mon bon patron,
Envoyez-moi quelque chose de bon."

In Holland, St. Nicholas puts in an appearance on the eve of his feast, accompanied by Black Peter. As the children sing, the door flies open and candies and nuts begin to fly all over the floor. After the jolly saint leaves, hot punch, chocolate and boiled chestnuts with butter and sugar are served. The following morning children find their shoes filled with candy hearts spice cakes, letter bankets (candies or cake bearing the child's initials), ginger cakes, or tai-tai in patterns of birds and fish, and even in the form of the saint.

In Switzerland, St. Nicholas parades the streets with his arms full of red apples, cookies and prunes for the children. In Austria and Germany he throws gilded nuts in at the door while Krampus or Rupprecht may throw in a few birch twigs. In Poland, if there is a red sunset on Saint Nicholas' day, it is said to be because angels are busy baking the saint's honey cakes.

With this much background of legend and adventure, all sorts of ideas could be brought to the fore for a celebration and party for the children on the eve or on the feast of St. Nicholas. Ordinarily, it would be well to have the party on the vigil as a preparation for the Mass of St. Nicholas on the following day. After Mass the children could return home to find their stockings filled with all sorts of good things. The person who takes the part of St. Nicholas should really look like a bishop, and preferably be dressed in the costume of an early Oriental bishop. What a wonderful opportunity to study ecclesiastical attire in the early Church as mothers and friends make vestments for St. Nicholas and the costume of his servant! Each child may be addressed personally by name by the bishop, praised for his good deeds, given a little gift. The party could continue with appropriate games and songs, with the story of St. Nicholas, and explanations of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany. There is no longer any need for mothers and fathers to delude their children with nonsense about mythical Santas in outlandish snowsuits. Let us christianize our children's lives by retaining veracity and reality and substituting for Santa Claus the lean and kind ascetic bishop St. Nicholas. For inspiration and variety a little imagination and a prayer to St. Nicholas will do the trick. Perhaps at the party a prayer could be offered for the poor and orphan children of the world.

As far as songs and poems are concerned, we remember well the poem of Clement C. Moore, "A Visit From St. Nicholas" ("Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house...."); also the song "Jolly Old St. Nicholas, lend your ear this way...."; and in French the "Legende de St. Nicholas."

Recipes for the feast are never wanting. Florence Berger's "Cooking for Christ," mentioned above, and Katherine Burton and Helmut Ripperger's "Feast Day Cookbook" supply the need for "speculatus," "ciastka miadowe" (honey cakes), and "rozijnon hoekies" (raisin cookies). A little "bishopwyn" for the cold vigil makes the parents glow with happiness. "Dutch Treat," an Advent cooky, goes well with that.

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

With such a glorious feast as this during the month of December, we are almost tempted to give up all hope of doing much penance during the season of Advent. On December 8 we celebrate the wondrous moment when the Blessed Virgin began her existence in this world. At the same time we celebrate the sublime privilege by which Mary, alone among all human beings and in virtue of the future merits of Christ, was preserved at the very first moment of conception from the stain of original sin. It is true, of course, that in origin and in principle this great feast does not have any relationship with the time of Advent. It was fixed on December 8 in order to separate the feast by nine months from the date of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin on September 8. However, in celebrating this feast we may easily enter into the spirit of Christmastide, for the feast is like the dawn of the Sun of Christmas. Mary is our hope, guide, and mother along the path of salvation.

The vigil of the Immaculate Conception is an opportune time to introduce the children to the practice of lighting a special Advent candle in Mary's honor. The Advent candle expresses symbolically the words of Isaias, "There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of this root." A beautiful candle is placed in a candleholder, which is covered with a white silk cloth tied together with ribbon. The candle is then placed before an image, statue or ikon of our Lady before which the family prays to the Mother of God. This ancient custom preaches its lesson with an eloquent simplicity which is comprehensible to little children. The covered candleholder represents the rod out of the root of Jesse, Our Lady, from whose womb will come the Saviour of the world. The candle represents Christ, the Light of the World, who

shall come to dispel all darkness and stain of sin. In conjunction with this little ceremony, one of the family could tell of the purity and childlike simplicity of our Blessed Mother, and of how she came to be the mother of us all.

Some of the prophetic lessons of Isaias could also be read, along with Gertrude von le Fort's poem to Our Lady of Advent, from "Hymns to the Church." The singing of the "Alma Redemptoris Mater," or the beautiful "Tota Pulchra Es" of Dom Pothier would be a suitable conclusion for the little ceremony.

Several remarks may be added concerning the hymns which we teach children in honor of Our Lady. Much bad taste, musical and theological, has entered into the praises of Our Lady. It would indeed be wise always to teach children only the best, and that which is always truthful and in accord with reality. Would we dare to compare "Macula non est in te," "Mother Dear, O Pray for Me," "On This Day, O Beautiful Mother," or "Bring Flowers of the Rarest," with the "Ave, Maris Stella" (sung in English, perhaps; but you will find that the children easily come to love and understand the Latin); the "Ave Maria," as edited by Solesmes; the sequence "Inviolata"; the hymn "Maria Mater Gratiae," or the "Tota Pulchra Es" of Dom Pothier?

Mother Church recommends the "Ave Maris Stella," which is the vesper hymn of the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Compare the theology of this hymn with the sentimental ballads which are customarily taught to children in honor of their heavenly Mother and Mediatrix:

Ave, Star of ocean,
Child divine who bearest,
Mother, ever Virgin,
Heaven's portal fairest.

Taking that sweet Ave
Erst by Gabriel spoken,
Eva's name reversing,
Be of peace the token.

Break the sinner's fetters,
Light to blind restoring,
All our ills dispelling,
Every boon imploring.

Show thyself a mother
In thy supplication,
He will hear who chose thee
At His Incarnation.

Maid all maids excelling,
Passing meek and lowly,
Win for sinners pardon,
Make us chaste and holy.

As we onward journey
Aid our weak endeavor,
Till we gaze on Jesus
And rejoice forever.

Father, Son, and Spirit,
Three in One confessing,
Give we equal glory
Equal praise and blessing.

--Ethelstan Riley translation

Should we desire other hymns in honor of the Immaculate Conception, we may choose such hymns and carols as "A Child Is Born in Bethlehem," or the superb German Advent carol "Behold, a Branch Is Growing." The latter, a fifteenth-century carol harmonized by Praetorius, is given below:

Behold a branch is growing
Of loveliest form and grace.
As prophets sung, foreknowing;
It springs from Jesse's race.
 And bears one little flower.
In midst of coldest winter,
At deepest midnight hour.
Isaiah hath foretold it
In words of promise sure,
And Mary's arms enfold it,
A Virgin meek and pure.
 Through God's eternal will,
This Child to her is given
At midnight calm and still.

Even the cook is not allowed respite during the octave of the Immaculate Conception, for it is time to make Moravian "Spritz" for the children. Ordinarily these gingerbread cookies are made for the vigil of the Immaculate Conception since Mary, too, "gave forth sweet smell like cinnamon and aromatic balm and yielded a sweet odor like the best myrrh." These cookies are loaded with fine, aromatic spices, tempting the appetites of any child of Mary. The spirit of mortification enters in readily, for the cookies must stand for ten days in the refrigerator before baking, and are then shaped into Christmas figures, especially hearts and liturgical symbols. Later on in the season, when we come to Candlemas, we could cut the cookies into the form of candles and turtle-doves.

The Immaculate Conception is the Patroness of the United States. How often our Holy Father has stated in recent years that the hope of peace in the world does not lie in force of arms, but rather in prayers and recourse to the intercession of Our Lady. The octave of the Immaculate Conception furnishes an admirable occasion for a renewal of true love for our country. Children should be reminded that the part played by the Church in the development of the United States was a very important one. The flag could be raised over the school building each day during the octave, and after the pledge of allegiance, it would be most appropriate to sing a hymn in honor of our Patroness. The whole week should foster in the minds and hearts of the children a true conception of the meaning of piety, for piety is essentially the devotion and love of the child for his parents and homeland. It should never be forgotten, moreover, that St. Thomas Aquinas associates the virtue of piety with religion as a part of the cardinal virtue of justice.

ENDNOTES

1. p. 9.
2. p. 3.

CHAPTER 2

THE SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

(Station at the Holy Cross of Jerusalem)

THE theme of this Sunday and of the entire week is the preparation of the Spouse and her city, Jerusalem, for the coming of the Bridegroom, the Saviour, at Christmas and the Epiphany. This is the week during which the children should be made enthusiastic about preparation for the Christmas decorations of their home. A teacher, mother or father with a little imagination may introduce the children to a little archeology. The youngsters could be told how, long, long ago people lived in Asia, and how with succeeding ages and civilizations and new peoples, cities became covered with dust, and other people built cities upon the foundations of the old. The stational church of today is the Basilica of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem, which always meant to the Romans their own city of Jerusalem. This most ancient city was that of the Jews, where Our Lord Himself began His divine mission of salvation. The Jerusalem of Christianity, the Holy Church, has supplanted this city with the new Jerusalem of the law of charity. Today the Saviour is to come into the Church, into the Jerusalem of the Christians. Upon the rock of the Church is built the heavenly Jerusalem which shall be the permanent home of the blessed. But the Saviour wishes also to come into a fourth Jerusalem, that of our souls and it is especially important that we decorate and adorn this last Jerusalem for the coming of the Redeemer.

At the Epiphany the Church announces a message of great joy: "Be lighted, O Jerusalem, for the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." This is the purpose of all Christmas decorations Today, in order to receive the visit of the Great King we must prepare ourselves in the Jerusalem of our souls. The Church tells us today to "awaken our hearts in order to prepare the ways for Thy unique Son, that we may serve Him with purified heart" (Oration). The proper of the entire Mass of the Second Sunday in Advent centers about this preparation, which takes place in the Church and in the souls of all Christians: "Rise up and stand upon the heights, O Jerusalem, and see the joy which comes from Thy God!"(Communion).

The theological content of the preparation of the city and the "ways" may easily be conveyed to children. Let the home or the classroom become their "Jerusalem." It must then be swept and kept very dean, and must be beautifully decorated The home and the classroom become a symbol of the interior preparation of their souls for the coming of the Christ Child. At home, the children prepare a backdrop for their crib in the living room, with a silhouette of Jerusalem in the distance; at school, a corner of the blackboard could be decorated with a sketch of the city. A few garlands of evergreen decorated with ribbons and pine cones and other floral adjuncts may be added as the children endeavor to prepare themselves more and more for Christmas.

It is high time this week to be thinking of the construction of the crib and its figures, and of the ornamentation of the Christmas tree.

The crib should be different each year. It may easily become a family or classroom project, and each individual should contribute something to this community enterprise. All the talents of the girls and boys for carving, sewing, designing, construction and the like should be utilized in the making of this little home-like representation. The children should be inflamed with the same love and the same enthusiasm which led St. Francis of Assisi to popularize the crib. Cheap statuary must cautiously be avoided since everything contributes to the formation of the child: his "being" is proportionately diminished by anything in any respect inferior. This does not mean that the most rare and expensive figurines should be purchased for the crib. Far from it. For if the statues are bought, even though they may be exquisite in art and craftsmanship, they are not the product of the creative spirit of the children. As the great St. Thomas would put it, the child should be encouraged in every manner to exercise his right as "second cause." It is the glory of rational creation that it is able to exercise its causality with the materials which are used in co-operation with the Creator of his soul. Therefore allow the children to construct their own crib--a new one each year.

The office of the teacher, according to St. Augustine in his "De Magistro," consists in one of two things: (1) to allow the First Cause to operate freely, or (2) to provide the occasion for the student to learn directly from the created things themselves. The parent or the teacher would do well to describe the city of Jerusalem and of Bethlehem to the children. Accompany the description with all the aids of visual education, such as slides, pictures, paintings, or movies. Art begins with a real foundation in things. The symbolic value of art and purity of form, however, should never be neglected in the formation of the child. The teacher should present the children with samples, either pictures or real objects, of excellent models of cribs. Even the most modern and most cleverly imaginative forms should not be neglected. Perhaps even the rather charming and humorous sets made by Lambert-Rucki would appeal to the children.¹ After this, the teacher should allow free reign to the operation of grace, imagination and craftsmanship in the children, guiding them suavely only according to their needs.

Honorable mention must be made of certain figures which are often left out of crib sets. Where is Isaias, the great prophet of Advent? Where is St. John the Baptist, whose spirit of penance and preparation overshadows the whole season? It is remarkable that after all this time the suite of the Great King never seems to surround the Saviour: St. Stephen, St. John the Evangelist, the Holy Innocents, St. Anna and St. Simeon! Depending upon the ingenuity of the children and their teachers, as well as the size of the crib, all these figures should enter at the proper season to offer their homage and gifts at the foot of the Incarnate Lamb.

It is evident, moreover, that not all the figures that appear in the Christmas cycle should appear at the crib simultaneously, except perhaps during the octave of the Epiphany. From this Sunday on, or as soon as the crib is completed, the various personages who appear during the cycle make their entry at the children's crib as they prepare the crib for the coming of the Son, the boys may be taught to imagine that they are either Isaias or St. John the Baptist; the girls may imitate our Blessed Lady.

In the spirit of the season of Advent the children should also be preparing their own visit to the crib, bearing their own spiritual or material gifts in homage to the Lord. The greatest gift is the spiritual glorification of the Saviour by an act of adoration, thanksgiving and gratitude. This is done chiefly by the offering of the greatest act of thanksgiving, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass each day. At Mass, reality replaces the external and the symbolic. Other gifts concern love of neighbor as well as acts and objects offered at Holy Mass which represent any or all the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The teacher must always, in season and out of season, lead children to understand that the gift is brought to the Saviour in the reality of His sacrificial Banquet, and that the crib is but a poor, human exteriorization of what takes place upon the altar of God. What a crime it is to divert the attention of children from the altar of sacrifice to the crib to such an extent that the first thing which catches their eye upon entering church is the crib rather than the altar or the Eucharistic Host! Great care must be taken to make the children understand that the crib is a homey little reminder of the altar.

Need anything be said at all concerning the charlatanism of an angel at the crib, who bows his head to say "thank you" as the pennies of babies are brought to the Christ Child? Pictures and stories from missionary society publications about children and orphans in many lands foster the spirit of the Association of the Holy Childhood. It is so very wonderful to children to see how other little children from far-away lands celebrate the coming of the Infant Saviour. Could anything more easily be employed to teach children the mark of the universality of the Church?

The next exterior object which customarily decorates the Jerusalem of our homes and school is the Christmas tree. During the second week in Advent, those who go into the woods to cut their own tree should be off to a picnic into the forest. City children, for practical reasons, are perhaps obliged to purchase their trees a little later on. Our concern at this time, however, is rather for the future decoration of the tree. The ornaments of the tree as well as the figurines and design of the crib should be made by the children themselves and changed each year, so that creative imagination may be developed and not stagnate. A little competition at school, with suitable little prizes in impeccably good taste and quality, might stimulate zeal.

Fundamentally there are two major elements associated with the Christmas tree. First, there is the tree itself, which preferably should be a living evergreen. (It is sad indeed that trees, at least in rural communities are

not left with the roots on and later replanted). The second element is that of the lights, which are the most glamorous decoration of the tree. We realize, of course, that the Christmas tree is a relatively modern seasonal decoration and that its symbolism may have had pagan beginnings. With things as they are, however, the tree may be "baptized" as a symbol of the Tree of Life, who is Christ Himself; and the lights become symbols of the Light of the World. Holy Mass is divided into two distinct parts: the fore-Mass or the Mass of the Catechumens where the Light (PHOS) of faith is sought; and the Mass of the Faithful, where we are given life (ZOE) by becoming incorporated into Christ, the living Vine, the Tree of Life. The Christmas tree then becomes a symbol of Holy Mass!

Since the Mass is symbolized by the Christmas tree, we may carry our symbolism even further. Christ is the Tree of Life (Genesis 2,9; Apocalypse 22,2), and His Incarnation brings youth and springtime to the Jerusalem of our souls. A "Chi-Rho," the ancient Greek symbol for Christ, may very appropriately be placed either at the top or in the midst of the tree. What other decorations would most suitably be prepared by truly Christian children for their Christmas tree? Let the children surprise you.

Regina Laudis, a Benedictine foundation in Bethlehem, Conn., has offered the public in recent years some very appropriate decorations based principally upon the "O antiphons." They are made of plywood, gilded and decorated with gayly colored symbols. This idea could very easily and inexpensively be extended even to manufactured ornaments, let alone original "creations" of the children. For example, if we were to adopt the designs for the "O antiphons" which were executed by Gerald Bonnette in "Worship," (December, 1952) ordinary tree globes from the five-and-ten-cent store could be painted with these symbols. On each of the last nine days before Christmas Eve, a new ornament could be added to the tree as the antiphon is sung. Other appropriate symbols are the "Morning Star" (Ps. 109, 3), Or the Lamb of God. Myriads of symbols, designs and shapes must replace the tawdry and meaningless ornaments with which we ordinarily allow our trees to be decorated. Would not an ornament in the form of a rose symbolize the martyr Stephen, a lily the virginity of St. John the Apostle, and violet ornaments, edged with white, the multitude of the Holy Innocents? If inexpensive ornaments could not be made, or purchased and retouched, then the girls could busy themselves in the kitchen making goodies and candies appropriately wrapped so as to represent the various symbols of the season. Candy canes could represent the staffs of the twelve Apostles, apples could become martyrs, marshmallows the Holy Innocents. Cookies in the form of crowns, keys, stars and candles could become "O antiphons." Indeed, it is time for the children to busy themselves with the ornaments for their very own Christmas tree! The tree will be part of their decoration of the home Jerusalem, and not a surprise party brought in by Santa Claus.

At Sunday dinner, or perhaps the evening before the Second Sunday in Advent as the Mass of the Sunday is prepared together with the children, the second candle on the Advent wreath, along with the first, is lighted. The oration of the Mass is read as the family prayer. Psalm 79, the psalm of the week, could be memorized at least in part with the father and the rest of the family alternately reciting the verses:

"Give ear, O shepherd of Israel, thou who leadest
Joseph like a flock.
Thou who sittest above the Cherubim, shine forth
before Ephraim, and Benjamin, and Manasses.
Arouse thy strength and come to save us.
O God, restore us and cause Thy face to shine,
that we may be saved...."

In speaking of the Third Sunday in Advent we shall treat more extensively of the second element of the "preparation of the ways" which lead to the city.

ST. LUCY (December 13)

With the feast of the valiant virgin-martyr, Lucy, we arrive at another increase of the light of Christ, which shines across the entire season of Advent. St. Lucy's name is privileged to be in the canon of Holy Mass, along with the other "winter" virgins, Cecilia, Agnes and Agatha. These four virginal lights illuminate the season of physical darkness. Lucy succeeded in imitating Mary's purity in her own life, and her feast is in

perfect harmony with the octave of the Immaculate Virgin. She was a virgin of Syracuse in Sicily, noted for her love of the poor and for her virginity. What a wonderful handmaid of Our Lady during the octave of the Immaculate Conception!

The Gospel of the feast is imbued with the spirit of Advent. It offers three parables of Jerusalem, the kingdom of God. The kingdom is like a hidden treasure or a priceless pearl, for which we sell all that we own; the Church is like a net which catches all sorts of fish, which, at the second coming of Christ, the Advent at the end of time, are separated--the good from the bad. Our Advent preparation for the coming of Christ by grace at Christmas is a reminder of that final coming, or "parousia" when we shall remain in eternal possession of Christ in His kingdom.

The feast of St. Lucy is a beautiful one, especially for little girls. Somehow or other, despite his great kindness for the three girls, St. Nicholas seems to be of special interest to boys. Now the girls are not neglected in being offered such a wonderful model and patron as St. Lucy. In Sweden, Lucy's feast is the opening of the Christmas season, and is celebrated with gay singing and dancing. Lively children would really find folk dancing very vigorous and interesting at their parties (cf. Bibliography for books on folk dancing). Games may abound, and the queen of the feast who is chosen each year to represent St. Lucy is crowned with a garland studded with several candles! Since little girls are supposed to take a particular fancy to kittens, a special recipe for the feast is to be found in "St. Lucy's cats." Yellow buns are shaped into the form of cats, having eyes of black raisins, and these are the specialty of the day. In "Cooking for Christ," Mrs. Berger makes a rather interesting comment about her own experience in making St. Lucy's cats:

"Since I was the one who wanted a cat in the first place, I bake Saint Lucy's cats and feel like an old witch. It was an ancient superstition, you know, that if you wanted to get rid of someone or something you told the witch. She would make an image or effigy of the hated one out of dough. After scorching him nicely in the bonfire, she would eat him and charge you a pretty penny. This is where our gingerbread men came from."² (What a wonderful day to tell the children the story of Hansel and Gretel!)

If a party may be held on this day, it would be a real feast for the little girls of the classroom or family. A tableau could be presented with Our Lady as the center of attraction. She could be surrounded by the winter virgins, as well as many others, such as St. Catherine, St. Bibiana, St. Barbara, St. Anastasia, St. Prisca, St. Martina, and St. Scholastica. This is an excellent occasion for girls to learn about their own patron saints, and perhaps each girl could tell a story of her patron and the meaning of her name. This could be in the form of a tableau, or pantomime, or silhouette, or even a guessing game. After a prayer in honor of St. Lucy (taken from the Mass of her feast), the queen of the feast then distributes her cats. St. Cecilia sings a song, St. Catherine distributes taffy kisses as they do in French Canada. St. Agnes serves her lamb cakes, and St. Agatha is the good hostess and helpmate of her sister virgin St. Lucy. Lucy herself is the lady in waiting to whom Our Lady would have the children honor on her feast day.

ENDNOTES

1. Cf. "L'Art d'Eglise," 1951-1952, n. 2, p. 128; St. Andre, Bruges, Belgium.

2. Cf. "Cooking for Christ," p. 10.

CHAPTER 3

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

(Station at St. Peter's)

THIS Sunday introduces us into the second half of the season of Advent, and at the opening of Matins our anxiety and joy are given impetus: "The Lord is already near. Come, let us adore Him!" (Invitatory) The entire week is one of the richest of the entire year of grace, for during this week fall the magnificent Ember Days and the beginning of the "O antiphons."

All of us are children this Sunday, for we are unable to restrain our impatience at the coming of the Saviour. Our joy urges us to celebrate in the great basilica of St. Peter, so that all mankind may share it with us. The penitential violet of Advent is changed to rose, and at the Gospel even the Precursor announces to the city that "He is in our midst." Christ the Lord is even today present through grace, as He will be with us forever in glory.

In our explanation of the Second Sunday in Advent we spoke of the meaning of Jerusalem; today we speak of the "preparation of the ways." Last Sunday the city was alerted to make itself ready for the arrival of the King of Peace; today His scout and messenger arrives to announce that He is almost there. ("The Life of Christ" by Ricciotti, and one by Willam contain splendid background material, based upon reality useful for this Sunday.) The children should be led in spirit into the far-off Orient, where there are deep blue skies and starry nights, and where caravans from distant lands enter the oasis across the deserts and wildernesses. Whenever a great potentate is to visit one of the cities, there is great preparation, and the city is decorated and embellished. Rare foods and spices are brought in: all reflects the perfume of the Oriental night. The people of the East, moreover, go even further in their preparations. A long, straight, triumphal road is constructed in order that the caravan of the potentate may arrive in splendor for the very first view of the great city. The preparation of this road requires the efforts and gifts of the entire city. It must be straight and wide, the valleys must be filled in, and the mountains and hills leveled off. Spiritually this means that our love must turn directly to God and we must not be distressed by the temptations of creation--pleasure, riches or power. The valleys are our sins of omission, our shirking of homework, our catechism, the duties in our state in life. The hills and mountains are the sins of commission, our actually doing wrong by swearing, disobedience, fighting and gossip. The messenger, St. John the Baptist, comes as a herald of the King, in order that we may hasten to finish our immediate preparations for the great reception in the city.

On the Saturday evening before this Sunday, or at the Sunday dinner, we gather together with the family to light the third candle on the Advent wreath. The brighter the lighting becomes, the more impatient we become for the arrival of the Redeemer. The most appropriate prayer for the evening is psalm 81, for at the Sunday Mass it constitutes the dominant chant sung at the Introit, the Offertory and the Communion. This psalm of redemption should become an old friend during Advent, for on the First Sunday in Advent we heard it at the Alleluia and at the Communion. On the Second Sunday we heard it again at the Offertory, and we shall hear it once again during the night of Christmas:

"Show us, O Lord, Thy mercy, and grant us Thy salvation....
Mercy and faithfulness shall unite; justice and peace shall
embrace.
Faithfulness shall sprout from the earth, and justice shall
look down from heaven.
The Lord will also give prosperity, and our land shall yield
its produce.
Justice shall go before Him, and salvation in His
footsteps."

--Frey translation

THE "O ANTIPHONS"

December 17! This day always falls during the third week in Advent, and the children will be very busy that night. That evening the family gathers to put up the Christmas tree and to begin to decorate it, for at the Vesper hour of December 17 the Church surrounds the Canticle of our Blessed Mother with the first of the "O antiphons." These are the final preparation and the most ardent appeal of Holy Mother Church for the coming of her Bridegroom. They serve as the introductory theme and conclusion to Mary's hymn of praise.

Let us begin with the Christmas tree. After the tree has been firmly set up and the lights arranged, the program of the evening begins with the blessing of the tree. The blessing, which may be found inside the cover of the "Leaflet Missal" for the Christmas Masses, may be led by the parents or by the children. The blessing, even though it is not to be found in the "Ritual," has a character very much in accord with the customary form of the blessing of objects. Psalm 95 has been chosen for the blessing because of the verses which are used as antiphon: "Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for He is come." After this psalm has been antiphonated by the family, one of the children reads a lesson from the prophet Ezechiel:

"Thus saith the Lord God: I myself will take the top of the high cedar, and will set it: I will crop off a tender twig from the top of the branches thereof, and I will plant it on a mountain high and eminent. On the high mountains of Israel will I plant it, and it shall become a great cedar: and all birds shall dwell under it, and every fowl shall make its nest under the shadows of the branches thereof. And all the trees of the country shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, and exalted the low tree: and have dried up the green tree, and have caused the dry tree to flourish. I the Lord have spoken, and have done it." (17, 22-24)

After the customary verses and responses, the oration recalls the need for us to be incorporated into the Mystical Body: "Holy Lord, Father almighty, eternal God, who hast caused Thy Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, to be planted like a tree of life in Thy Church by being born of the most holy Virgin Mary, bless, we beseech Thee, this tree that all who see it may be filled with a holy desire to be ingrafted as living branches into the same Lord Jesus Christ..." Once the tree has been blessed, one of the children may place the Chi-Rho at the top or in the center of the tree in order to symbolize Christ as the Tree of Life into which all must be grafted. After this, the Advent candle in honor of our Blessed Mother is placed before the tree. Light and Life become the theme of the season: Holy Mass is the core and center of our Christmas celebration.

As an evening prayer, it is very appropriate for the family to sing the Magnificat of Our Lady, repeating before and after it on each successive evening the appropriate "O antiphon" as one of the children places upon the Christmas tree an ornament decorated with a symbol of the antiphon. In each of these antiphons, the ardent imploring of the Old Testament and of the pagan world for the Redeemer is manifest; they are the "Rorate coeli" of humanity. In each of them, there is a progression of thought. In the first antiphon (O Wisdom) we see the Son of God in His eternal life before all creation; in the second, third and fourth (O Adonai, O Root of Jesse, O Key of David), we see Him in the Old Law; in the fifth (O Orient) we see Him in the natural created world; in the sixth (O King of the Gentiles), we see Him as the Redeemer of the pagan world; and in the seventh and last (O Emmanuel), we see Him as "God with us," the Redeemer who is come, who gives us Light and Life in Holy Mass and the promise of eternal glory at His Second Coming.

After the singing of the Magnificat with its appropriate "O antiphon," the family concludes with the singing of an appropriate Advent song possibly emphasizing the "Rorate coeli" on the seventeenth, "Behold a Branch Is Growing" on the nineteenth, "Emmanuel" for the twenty-third. Perhaps a single song would be easier for the family, and if so the "Veni, Emmanuel" from the Westminster Hymnal should be chosen, since its seven verses are arranged in such manner that each verse correlates with one of the great antiphons. On the shortest day of the year, December 21, when darkness lies longest over the land, the children could be told how the Church sings to the Expected One: "O Orient, splendor of eternal light, Sun of Justice: come, and shine with Thy light upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death."

Florence Berger offers a word concerning the culinary "treats" of the "O antiphon" days:

"Another old custom which we revived is giving family treats. In the monasteries long years ago, the different monks furnished extra treats on these days before Christ's birthday. The gardener gave the community some of his finest dried or preserved fruits on December 19 when he called on Christ: "O Root of Jesse, come to deliver us and tarry not." The cellarer unlocked the best wine for his treat as he called: "O Key of David, come, and come quickly." Finally, on December 23, the abbot gave his extra gift to the brothers. Expense accounts which are still extant show how generous and extensive a list of foods were used on the abbot's 'O Day.'

"Each one in our family keeps his gift a deep, dark secret until suppertime. We begin with the smallest child. Her treat may be only a graham cracker for dessert. Freddie cracked and picked some black walnuts for us. All pounding didn't give it away because little boys are so often pounding. Ann made some Advent wreath cookies and used up all the cinnamon drops for decoration on the cookies, her face and her fingers. Mary made a big casserole of baked beans and we couldn't quite decide whether she was treating herself or the family. Finally, it was Mother's turn, and then, at last Father's turn to produce something really outstanding. At dessert time Father rose from the table without a word, put on his hat and coat without a smile, and left us sitting at the table with our mouths open in amazement. After five minutes which seemed like hours he stomped back into the house--with a big bowl of snow ice cream. The squeals of delight would have pleased an abbot."¹

The twenty-first of December, feast of St. Thomas, is celebrated by charity to the poor and by the baking of pies. In Gloucestershire, England, the poor went "a-Thomasing" for gifts; in the Tyrol, it is pie day. "A great meat pie is baked for the whole family. It is marked with the Cross and sprinkled with holy water. Along with the great pie in the hot oven are smaller pies--one for each maid-servant in the house. When the crusts are golden brown, the pies are cooled and frozen. This is very easy to do in the bitter Tyrolean winters. Each maid takes her pie home to her family. On the feast of the Epiphany, the pies are thawed, reheated and eaten. The father of the house makes quite a ceremony of cutting the Christmas pie which is baked in a rectangular pan to resemble the manger."² French Canada has continued this custom with the familiar "Tourquiere." Noel and "le Jour de l'An" would never be the same without those wonderful meat pies.

ENDNOTES

1. Ibid., p. 12.

2. Ibid, p. 13.

CHAPTER 4

EMBER DAYS AND THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

THE Ember Days mark a very pronounced advance in preparation for Christmas. We were told that the King shall come. Jerusalem is made ready, and the ways are made straight. By grace He is in our midst. Today the Church teaches us that the King will first arrive in human form: He will assume the humble garment of our human nature. The Masses of the winter Ember Days and of the Fourth Sunday of Advent present us with the antecedents of the birth and coming of the Saviour.

EMBER WEDNESDAY

(Station at St. Mary Major)

In many respects, Ember Wednesday is the very heart of the season of Advent. The stational church brings us once again to the basilica of the crib and under the guidance of Mary as the central figure--after Christ--of the Christmas cycle. The theme of the Mass is one of thanksgiving for the harvest, a day of praise and thankfulness for the benefits of the past season. These material gifts, and especially the harvest of oil, are mere shadows of the real Gift who is to come. Our eyes turn at once to the golden mystery, the Incarnation of the Son of God in the womb of Mary. Despite all the wonderful gifts which God has bestowed upon us in the past, the joy of our hearts moves towards the perfect act of thanksgiving, Holy Mass, the continual Sacrifice of the Incarnate Saviour

The Mass of Ember Wednesday is known as the "Missa Aurea," or Golden Mass, because on this day the Church celebrates the "golden mystery" of the Faith: Mary's "fiat" at the Annunciation brought about the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity in her womb. Throughout the ages, this Mass has been celebrated with great solemnity. In the Middle Ages, the great St. Bernard of Clairvaux preached his homilies on the Gospel of the day which begins with the words "Missus est." If it is at all possible, we should teach our children to observe this solemnity, first of all by participating as a family and parochial group at the solemn Mass of the day. Monsignor Hellriegel offers some very interesting material concerning the "golden Mass," and suggests an offering for the poor as an appropriate act of thanksgiving:

"Here at Holy Cross we celebrate, after proper instructions, this day with great solemnity. The sanctuary is adorned with many candle lights so that we may be more forcefully reminded of the Light that shone into darkness. All the children receive Communion in this Golden Mass, and while approaching the holy table they chant the significant Communion anthem, 'Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel.' Part of the celebration is an offering for the poor, which the children, all of them, the first graders included, make at the offertory of the Mass. Near the altar we erect two large tables, covered with linen and burning candles, on which the gifts are deposited. Every child offers something: some bring fruit or preserves, others canned food, and the poorer ones perhaps a potato or two; but all gifts are wrapped in white tissue paper and neatly bound with a red ribbon. It is a grateful giving to Him who, by His Incarnation, gives Himself to us. After Holy Mass these offerings receive a special blessing and are then carried from the altar of Christ, the Head, to the poor, the 'feet of Christ,' as the early Church loved to call the indigent members of the community, in order to make their Christmas more joyful and blessed."¹

This is indeed the day to collect all the "Christmas baskets" for the poor. It would seem that nobody was more fully imbued with "the Christmas spirit" than was Pope St. Leo the Great in the sermon which he gives us during the second nocturn of Matins of the Third Sunday of Advent.

"The season of the year with its customary devotions reminds us, dearly beloved, that it is our duty as shepherd of your souls to exhort you to the observance of the December fast. Now that all the fruits of the earth have been gathered in, it is most fitting that this sacrifice of abstinence should be offered to God, who has so bountifully bestowed them upon us. And what can be more useful to this end than fasting? For by its observance we draw near to God, we resist the devil, and overcome the temptations of sin. For fasting has

always been food for the strong. Moreover, from abstinence proceed chaste thoughts, rational desires, and sound counsels; and by voluntary afflictions the flesh dies to its evil desires and the spirit is renewed in strength. But since fasting alone will not obtain health for our souls, let us add to our fasting, works of mercy to the poor. Let us spend in good works what we deny to indulgence. Let the abstinence of him who fasts become the banquet of the poor. Let us be zealous in the protection of widows, in the support of orphans, let us strive to comfort the afflicted, to reconcile those who are at variance. Let us receive the stranger, and help the oppressed, let us clothe the naked and care for the sick. And then may every one of us who shall have spent himself in offering this sacrifice of devotion to God the Author of all good, deserve to receive from Him the reward of the heavenly kingdom. On Wednesday and Friday, therefore, let us fast; on Saturday, however, let us celebrate the vigil at the tomb of the Apostle Peter, by whose merits may we be able to obtain what we ask through our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen."2

Mother and father and teacher may easily explain the merits of "giving up" things for God and neighbor in thanksgiving; how to become courteous and thoughtful of others; how always to give good example; how to avoid "fights" and quarrels; how to share toys and gifts as well as self with the other children.

These gifts for the poor become even more sacred by being offered before the altar of God. Another quality of sacredness is added if we acquaint the children with the simple and beautiful blessings of many of those objects in the "Roman Ritual." Father Weller's translation of the blessings ("Roman Ritual," Vol. 3) makes them available in English to all the faithful. After the Offertory and the blessings, the children should indeed have their share in the distribution of the gifts. Priests, teachers and parents should help and guide them in discretion and charity.

The students at Grailville offer some interesting suggestions for a re-enactment of the Gospel story of the Annunciation:

"As at Christmas, the Nativity is simply re-enacted in many Christian homes, why not on Ember Wednesday in preparation for Christmas re-enact the Gospel of the angelic message of Redemption? No scripts are needed, no elaborate costume, no long rehearsals. The family or group could gather together and in a prayerful spirit simply relive the words of the Gospel. The play could be in two parts: (1) Prophecy and (2) Fulfillment.

"The first part is the reading of Isaias from the (Lesson and Epistle of Wednesday) morning's Mass prophesying the virgin birth of Jesus Christ (Isaias, 2: 2-5 and 7: 10-15). This might be done to illustrate the foreshadowing of the advent of Christ in the Old Testament. The song 'O Come, O Come Emmanuel' could be sung as an interim. In the next part of the presentation the fulfillment takes place. As a reader speaks the words of the Gospel (Luke 1: 26-38) Mary is seen praying in her chamber, and the angel appears to her. The play could be concluded with everyone singing 'A Rose Sprang Up Unheeded' or another Advent song."3

This little tableau could easily be performed either at school or at home in the evening.

As dinnertime approaches, it is often difficult to find an appropriate menu for a fast day. This need not be the case for this Ember Wednesday, for we recall that on the feast of the Annunciation the Swedish people serve excellent waffles. We could anticipate the Vaffeldagen by about three months and make a fitting fast day repast. It would be more than we could expect to be able to use the little heart-shaped irons which Swedish ladies have to make the waffles an even more enticing delight.

After dinner, with the singing of the "Magnificat" and the "O antiphon," we may teach the children the last great Advent psalm, number 18 since it fits in so perfectly with the Mass of the day. The Introit of Ember Wednesday and the fourth Sunday of Advent both employ this beautiful psalm:

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament
proclaims the work of His hands
There He has set up His tabernacle for the sun, which goes

forth like a bridegroom from his chamber and rejoices

like a giant, to run the course.

From one end of the heaven is its rising, and its course ends
at the other, nothing is hidden from its heat."

--Frey translation

No more appropriate day could be chosen, however, to explain to the children the beautiful custom of the recitation of the Angelus. All of this beautiful prayer is taken from the liturgy of Advent, and especially from the Golden Mass. The first two versicles and responses are taken directly from the Gospel of Ember Wednesday; the third versicle and response are taken from the Last Gospel of St. John. The oration at the end is the Post-communion prayer of the Mass "Rorate," which is the Mass of Our Lady on Saturdays in Advent, and is really a simplification of the Ember Wednesday Mass. The evening Angelus, which is recited in honor of the Incarnation, is the most ancient of all. It began long, long ago with the recitation of three orations by the monks after Compline. Later on, the Hail Mary was introduced as an antiphon, and three "Aves" in honor of the Incarnation became popular at least by the thirteenth century. In a Franciscan decree (1263 or 1269), the faithful were encouraged to follow the monastic custom of reciting three Hail Marys after evening prayer in honor of the Incarnation of Our Lord; for it was currently believed that it was at this time that the Virgin Mary was greeted by the Angel Gabriel. There was a special ringing of bells during the recitation of the prayer. Our present method of having the bells rung during the Angelus proceeded from this custom.

The children should be told the history and meaning of this ancient custom of reciting the Angelus in honor of Christ and Our Lady in the hope that, once they have understood its meaning well, they will adopt this little custom for a lifetime. As they add on another "O antiphon" symbol to the tree at evening prayers tonight, they could string some golden tinsel around the tree in honor of the Golden Mass, and also add on a few little bells to remind them of the evening Angelus in honor of the Incarnation of their Saviour. It would be a splendid family tradition if the whole family could assemble each day for the recitation of the Angelus, especially at eveningtide. Each member could take turns at reciting the prayers and ringing the bell.

Together with this new knowledge about the Angelus, the children should be taught a little more about the beautiful Angelical Salutation, and how this greeting became our familiar prayer. We recall that the first part of this beautiful prayer is in memory of the Annunciation: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1:28). The next part is taken from the scene of the Visitation: "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (Luke 1:42): the greeting of St. Elizabeth. The remainder was composed by the Church as a prayer for sinners. It is really remarkable how much our beloved Hail Mary is associated with the prayer life of the medieval Church. As devotion to Mary developed, the "Ave" began to be used frequently in the Divine Office as an antiphon, and in Holy Mass at the Offertory (cf. our present Offertory at the Mass of the Fourth Sunday in Advent).

Given this background of the Angelus and the Hail Mary, our children may be brought to understand that the most authentic sources of our prayers and devotions are always to be found in Holy Mass and in the Divine Office.

EMBER FRIDAY

(Station at the Twelve Apostles)

The theme of Ember Friday follows closely upon that of the Golden Mass: the second mystery of the Incarnation was that of the visitation of Our Lady to St. Elizabeth. If a single word could be made to express the spirit of the day, it would be the word "Christopher." We honor our Blessed Mother as the Christ-bearer "par excellence," and we ourselves endeavor always to bear Him with us in a soul filled with the purity of sanctifying grace.

The church of reconciliation is the stational Church of the Twelve Holy Apostles. The penitents of the city of Rome received absolution there on Holy Thursday. On the Fridays of each of the Ember Weeks of the year we are called upon to expiate and to do penance for the sins committed in the past quarter year. The Church of the Twelve Holy Apostles is the only church in Rome constructed in the style of the Greeks, and it was always considered as a symbol of the union of all peoples, Eastern and Western, in Christ through the sacrament of Baptism. The spiritual renewal and unity of faith expressed in the Mass today lead all immediately to preparation for the coming of the Saviour. We are purified and repent of our sins as a preparation for the visit of Christ at Christmastide. As the Blessed Mother brings the quickening grace of her Son to St. Elizabeth and to St. John the Baptist, so we are taught to increase His grace in our souls in order that we may carry the sanctifying power of that Life into the world.

On Ember Friday, the children could present a tableau of the Visitation in much the same manner as that of the Annunciation. The prophecy of Isaias in the Lesson at Holy Mass could be explained, and this would be particularly appropriate for the older children, who may soon be receiving the sacrament of Confirmation. The gifts of the Holy Spirit repose in plenitude upon the flower that springs from the Root of Jesse. The fulfillment, it would be shown, is in the visitation of Mary with her Son. Centering our playlet about the "Hail Mary" and the meaning of being Christophers, we shall find that this is an appropriate occasion to tell the children the legend of St. Christopher, and why he is the patron of those who travel. For the older children, it would not be too early to let them read some of the literature of the Christopher movement. It is time for them to learn what it means to act as confirmed adult Christians who possess the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and who are called upon to carry Christ into the world. The Advent candle is the center of attraction in the home today. It impresses the meaning of being a Christopher very simply and very forcefully upon the mind of the child. Mary is our best model if we would increase in grace and become bearers of Christ to others. St. John the Baptist is our model of penance and the preparation of the ways.

Besides the other customs which we have mentioned in association with evening prayer and the Angelus, this is the seasonable moment to begin our caroling. The children should bring Christ to others by means of song, which is really an exterior expression of love and piety. From now on, Advent songs may be sung from home to home, and the children could be taught many wonderful and doctrinally sound carols which would impress the meaning of Advent and of the coming of the Saviour upon their neighbors.

EMBER SATURDAY

(Station at St. Peter's)

The celebration of this last Ember Day constitutes a resume of all that has been developed in the Advent season. The Mass is quite different in character from the themes of Wednesday and Friday, which had an intimate and familiar flavor appealing to the imagination and to the senses of the children. Today the universal Church celebrates a solemn vigil in the great basilica of St. Peter's. The symbol of the passage from darkness into light is quite apparent throughout the Mass, especially in view of the fact that this Mass was formerly celebrated as the conclusion of the Saturday night vigils. It was on this day that the ancient Church held the rite of ordinations in preparation for the Christ Mass. Priests were ordained as shepherds of the Church commissioned by Christ to guard over His flock until He shall come, especially in His second coming at the end of time.

It is somewhat more difficult to suggest appropriate material by means of which the children could be brought to realize the significance of this solemn watch. Probably the point to emphasize would be the virtue of piety, as we explain to them the nature of filial love toward the Church and toward parents. If the cathedral church of the diocese is nearby, a little pilgrimage may be organized to this see of the apostle, which is their own St. Peter's. At least a visit to the parish church should be part of the program of the day, and perhaps a little gift could be made to the pastor in gratitude to the shepherd of their spiritual life and in remembrance of his ordination to the priesthood.

This evening the children may be allowed to stay up a little later than usual. There should be a little more serious note about the occasion, recalling the Gospel of the First Sunday of Advent, with its rather fearful descriptions of the last days and the coming of Christ at the end of time. For if Christ comes at Christmas,

the purpose of His incarnation was our redemption from sin. He is present to us at Holy Mass and by means of the sacraments, and especially through the other-Christ's who serve as shepherds and ministers of His flock. Finally, when all of the many centuries have passed, He will come once more to bring us to our heavenly home forever. A gay note, however, enters into all the seriousness of the evening. The Gospel tells us in the person of St. John the Baptist that Christmas is almost here: "Make ready the way of the Lord, make straight His paths. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways smooth; and all mankind shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3: 5-6).

THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

(Station at the Twelve Apostles)

Today's Mass is really a celebration of the Advent Ember Days for those people who were unable to come to church during the preceding week. Formerly the Saturday Ember Day Mass was actually celebrated early Sunday morning, and the Mass of this Sunday is now a composite of the Masses of the Ember Days.

With the lighting of the fourth and last candle on the Advent wreath, the children are made to realize that the Saviour is almost at the gate of their souls. Jerusalem awaits the great King and Saviour in silent and awed expectancy. With the singing of the Magnificat and the "O antiphon" of the day, a little pageant could be organized to suggest the Mass of this Sunday. The first figure (Introit) represents the first two weeks of Advent, the long and ardent awaiting of the ancient world. The second figure represent St. John the Baptist, who sounds the joyous trumpet announcing the arrival of "Him who is to follow", it is he who leads the Groom (Christ) to the Spouse (the Church), as we read in the Gospel. The third and final figure is our Blessed Lady. The Hail Mary of the Offertory tells us that the period of preparation is drawing to a close. During all the Mass of the Faithful, it is Mary who is our shepherd and guide. On Sunday evening, Marian Advent hymns and carols remind home and neighborhood that our hearts must be made ready for the coming of Christ. The valleys must be filled and the hills leveled. What an apostolic reminder of the need for a good confession before Christmas! That is why the stational church of this Sunday is the Basilica of Reconciliation. By means of the divinely instituted powers given to the shepherds of the flock, the sacrament of Penance makes us ready for the coming of the Redeemer. The purity and simplicity of the children may remind their elders that in order to enter heaven they must become as little children.

Now that Advent is almost completed and the children are truly prepared for rejoicing upon the heights of the Christmas-Epiphany feasts, they should begin the preparation of their seasonal greeting cards. Since the fullness of the Advent preparation is achieved on the Feast of the Epiphany rather than on Christmas, it is more in the spirit of the Church to send cards representative of the themes of the Epiphany. We all realize very well that the custom of sending Christmas cards has received commercially inspired encouragement, which often impedes our celebration of the solemnities of Advent because of social obligations. This may be averted somewhat by placing our emphasis upon the liturgically greater feast.

The children could very easily carve upon linoleum blocks simple symbols which represent the major themes of the Epiphany of the Saviour and they could hand print their own cards. The antiphon to the Benedictus of Lauds of the feast of Epiphany (or the antiphon of the Magnificat of second Vespers) could be used as a text for the cards: "This day hath the Church been joined to her heavenly Spouse, for Christ hath cleansed her crimes in the Jordan; with gifts the Magi hasten to the royal nuptials, and the guests are gladdened with wine made from water, alleluia." The symbols and drawings made by the children may be varied in many possible combinations, and free rein given to the artistic talents of the child. The result of making these cards on the days that follow would be for the child an increase of interest and knowledge of the mind of the Church, a development of his own talent and imagination with a corresponding possibility of an increase in grace. For the recipient it would be a highly personalized and spiritually inspirational Christmas card.

ENDNOTES

1. "Orate Fratres," Vol. xvi, Nov. 30, 1941.
2. "Liturgical Readings," 3rd Sunday in Advent.
3. "Advent Ember Days," p. 8.

CHAPTER 5

THE VIGIL AND FEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF THE SAVIOUR

(December 24-25)

OF all the feasts throughout the year the celebration of Christmas Day and Christmas Eve are the most popular of all, both for children and for adults. There are more traditions and customs associated with Christmas in all Christian countries than with any other feast. It is true, of course, that the logical culmination of Advent is attained with the Epiphany; the season of preparation, however, truly ends with the Nativity. The celebration of these two feasts may be explained only upon an historical basis. Christmas is the Occidental celebration of the Nativity of the Lord, and the Epiphany is the Christmas of the Orient. There is a very important difference to be noted between the two great Paschal feasts and the two great Christmas feasts. In the Easter cycle, Pentecost, with the mission of the Paraclete, represents an organic development in the work of our salvation; in the Christmas cycle, Christmas and the Epiphany center about an identical theme: the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity as Saviour and King of Kings. The East adopted Christmas from the West; the Occident received the feast of the Epiphany from the Orient. These two Christmas feasts are a venerable spiritual monument of the union of the Church in East and West. In the Roman rite, the third, or Day-Mass, of Christmas is really a Mass of Manifestation or Epiphany. The Station at St. Peter's is the same station as that of the Epiphany and the Mass is intended to be truly one manifestation of the new-born Saviour to the City and to the World.

To Christians of the Western world, Christmas always seems to be more important than the Epiphany, despite the fact that the latter feast is of higher rank. It is very true that Advent, and the period of waiting and preparation are concluded with the feast of Christmas. The texts of the liturgy indicate this by saying that "Tomorrow original sin shall be destroyed," and "Open, ye Eternal Gates, that the King of Glory may enter in." The realization of the glorious visit of the great King which dominates the whole of Advent is not accomplished, however until the feast of the Epiphany. The East has enlarged our perspective of the spiritual meaning of the Incarnation. We are elevated above the historical fact related by the Gospels to a perspective of the kingship of Christ, which dominates all time and space. At Christmas, we may be said to be reborn with Christ as the Sun of the Nativity rises over the town of Bethlehem; at the Epiphany, we celebrate the mystical wedding of the King with His Spouse, the Church: the glory of the Lord shines forth in noontide splendor over Jerusalem. On the feast of Christmas, Christ is born to us in the intimacy of the family represented by Mary and the shepherds; at the Epiphany, He manifests to the entire world His glory and His kingship, which are represented by the adoration of the Magi, the baptism in the Jordan, and the marriage feast of Cana.

It is necessary, furthermore, before offering suggestions for the celebration of Christmas in our cities and homes, to note some of the historical developments of a truly Christian conception of the holiday season. A readily available source of information for families concerning the history of Christmas and its tradition is to be found in "The Christmas Book" by Francis X. Weiser, S.J. There is no historical record nor even a well-founded tradition which gives the date of the birth of Christ. The date of December 25 was established about the year 320, and the Popes seem to have chosen the twenty-fifth day of December principally to divert the attention of the people from the celebration of a pagan feast of the Mithras cult which was called the "Birthday of the Unconquered Sun" (Natalis Solis Invicti). This does not in any manner indicate that Christmas is merely a "christianized" pagan feast, for Christians of that time realized with St. John Chrysostom: "The pagans call December 25 the Birthday of the Unconquered. Who is indeed so unconquered as Our Lord?... or, if they say that it is the birthday of the Sun, He is the Sun of Justice."¹

Throughout the Middle Ages, Christmas came to be celebrated more and more. Especially during the period from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries all the arts and crafts of the Christian nations were made serviceable to the festivities associated with the Nativity of the Saviour. Plays and songs, carols and dances, spices and flowers, images and statues--all creation was made to serve the celebration of the feast. The foundation of all these customs and traditions was always Holy Mass--the Christ-Mass--the Divine Office and the sacramentals. In many countries of Europe a sharp change in the Christmas solemnities came with

the Reformation during the sixteenth century. The spiritual and scriptural foundation of the liturgy, including the Mass itself, was ridiculed and forbidden. The Calvinists and Puritans in particular condemned all religious celebration of the feast, and when the "new" method of celebrating Christmas was revived it tended to become only a more or less pagan feast of good-natured and humanitarian reveling. The attempt was particularly successful in England, and post-Reformation English attitudes concerning Christmas have affected most of our own notions concerning the celebration of the holidays.

When the Puritans came to political power in England, they immediately proceeded to outlaw Christmas. It was their contention that no feast of human institution should ever outrank the Sabbath (Sunday). Since Christmas was the most important of the non-Sunday festivals, it was abolished altogether. The first ordinances issued forbidding church services and civic festivities on Christmas came in 1642, finally, on June 3, 1647, Parliament enacted a ruling that the feast should no longer be observed under pain of punishment. Riots and strife broke out among the people, but the government stood firm and even broke up celebrations by force of arms, though the punishments were not too severely inflicted. With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, the observance of the "old" Christmas returned with a "new" attitude. The religious observance of Christmas was almost entirely replaced by amusement and reveling over plum pudding, goose, capon, minced pie and roast beef, with decorations of mistletoe, holly and ivy, and the yule log. Two of the best exemplifications of this "new Christmas without Christ" are to be found in the "Christmas Stories" of Charles Dickens, and the "Sketch Book" of Washington Irving. We must admit that our present-day celebration of Christmas is greatly affected by these works. The only thing that may be said in favor of these well-written books is that they do contain interesting stories upholding a spirit of good will to men and of generosity to the poor. Christ the Saviour and the King of Kings is indeed very remote in the background.

The unfortunate zeal of the Puritans has certainly influenced the American celebration of Christmas. It is very difficult in our day to realize that Christmas was outlawed in New England until the second half of the last century. As late as 1870, classes were held in the public schools of Boston on Christmas day, and any truant pupil was gravely punished or even publicly dismissed from school. Through the influx of German, Irish and French immigrants, together with the multiple immigrations from all the European nations, Christmas has been more fully restored within the last seventy years in this country. Two currents are now manifest: the pagan, good-natured humanitarian sort of celebration represented upon Christmas cards by sleigh bells, Santa Claus, peppermint sticks and the like; and the Christian spiritual and traditional customs originating from medieval Christian Europe. In view of the objective principles found in the liturgy of Holy Mass, the Divine Office and the sacramentals, we shall try to outline certain ancient and modern customs which are truly Christian in foundation and based upon Christian Doctrine and practice.

THE VIGIL OF THE NATIVITY

(December 24: Station at St. Mary Major)

Christmas Eve is unique among all vigils. Joyous anticipation fills the hearts of both child and adult, and all the Christian world has tried to express this sentiment in a superabundance of images, customs and traditions. It would be impossible to consider all of them. Not only nations but even individual families have devised splendid little customs to celebrate Christmas. Let us first of all outline briefly the spiritual foundation for these customs as it is found in the Mass, Office and Martyrology of Christmas Eve.

The entire liturgy of Christmas Eve is consecrated to the anticipation of the certain and sure arrival of the Saviour: "Today you shall know that the Lord shall come and tomorrow you shall see His glory" (Invitatory of Matins for the Vigil of the Nativity). Throughout Advent we have seen how the preparation for Jesus' coming became more and more precise. Isaias, John the Baptist and the Virgin Mother appeared throughout the season announcing and foretelling the coming of the King. We learn today that Christ according to His human nature is born at Bethlehem of the House of David of the Virgin Mary, and that according to His divine nature He is conceived of the Spirit of holiness, the Son of God and the Second Person of the Trinity.

The certitude of His coming is made clear in two images. The first is that of the closed gate of paradise. Since our first parents were cast forth from the earthly paradise the gate has been closed and a cherubim

stands guard with flaming sword. The Redeemer alone is able to open this door and enter in. On Christmas Eve we stand before the gate of paradise, and it is for this reason that psalm 23 is the theme of the vigil:

"Lift up your gates, O princes,
Open wide, eternal gates,
That the King of Glory may enter in...."

The Introit, Offertory, and Communion of the Mass are entirely consecrated to this image. The second image is that of the Blessed Mother. The last historical development of the season of Advent is expressed in the Gospel of today. The great suffering and doubt of St. Joseph concerning his spouse is allayed by the reassurance of an angel. He who is to be born is not of Joseph but truly of the Holy Spirit: "She shall conceive a child and you shall give Him the name of Jesus (Saviour), for He shall ransom His people of their sins."

Since the Vigil of Christmas is a fast day it is only normal that the odor of cooking throughout the house all day long should accentuate our anticipation of the feast. Where is the victory where there is no fight? Even the children should be restrained from nibbling at all the delicacies reserved for Christmas. In our country this day of fast and abstinence is quite difficult. It is truly in the spirit of Advent, and it requires the patience of Job not to celebrate ahead of time. Popular custom has made Christmas Eve a feast day, since the majority of people tend to have parties, exchange presents, and carry on general feasting throughout the eve. Is it asking too much to request the penance of resisting over-anxiety? The anxiety should be there, and so should the spirit of joyful anticipation, but Mother Church still demands a final mortification before we taste of the heavenly joys of Christmas. Perhaps Christmas night would not fall so flat in many families if Christmas Eve were observed as a true vigil. It is our last preparatory offering to the Christ-Child, who accepted the humiliation of the stable at Bethlehem.

Culinary art has exceeded itself at this season. Since tomorrow is the feast, the greater portion of the cooking must be done in advance. "Cooking for Christ" and the "Feast Day Cookbook" should be consulted in detail. Swiss "krabeli," Greek "malachrino" (spice cake), and German "lebkuchen" and "stollen" would delight the hearts of all. The very shape of "stollen" is supposed to represent the Christ Child, and the folds on top of the loaf swaddling clothes. "Lebkuchen" or life cake is an excellent reminder of the Bread of Life. Among English recipes are to be found everything from boar's head to plum pudding, with accent upon hot buttered rum and eggnog.

Since the vigil is a fast day, fish is in order. Whereas in Brittany the codfish takes the honors of the day, American custom associates piping hot oyster stew with Christmas Eve. Sponge cake or an Italian cream tart would make an excellent dessert, quickly prepared by the older girls. The Polish Christmas Eve supper, called the "wigilia," is perhaps the most complicated culinary celebration of the vigil. "In the homes of that country," the "Feast Day Cook Book" tells us, "stalks of grain are placed in the four corners of the dining room with a prayer for plenty in the years to come. Then bits of hay, symbolic of the manger in Bethlehem, are strewn beneath the tablecloth, which must be hand woven. The youngest child is set to watch for the first star of the evening, and when it appears he runs to tell the rest of the family. Then supper begins, as tradition has ordered it, with the breaking of the "oplatek," a semi-transparent unleavened wafer made in an iron mold and stamped with scenes of the Nativity.

Each one at the table breaks off a piece and eats it as a symbol of their unity in Christ....² The soups are three in number, followed by three fish dishes accompanied by noodles, cabbage and dumplings. The desserts are also three, one of which is always a fruit compote with twelve dried fruits symbolic of the Twelve Apostles. At the end of the supper, carols are sung and presents are exchanged. The remainder of the food is often given to the animals in the hope that all living things may prosper by the food served in memory of Our Lord's first night on earth.

"In Austria on Christmas Eve, every house is filled with the aroma of "fruchtbrot" as it receives the visit of the "anglockler" or bell-ringers, who go from place to place singing carols, sometimes two of their number impersonating Mary and Joseph seeking shelter at the inn. In Germany the Christmas observances go back to the start of Advent, when a wreath is hung, usually from the ceiling of the dining room, and to it a silver star is added each day, and each week a red candle. Also in advance is prepared the "Christstollen" (a long

loaf of bread made with dried fruits and citron) as well as the "lebkuchen" and the marzipan, regarded as important holiday foods. On Christmas Eve the family gathers beneath the Advent wreath and sings carols. Then the Christmas tree is lighted and the gifts are distributed."³

The opening of the eternal gates through which the King of Glory may enter is indicated by the wreath on the door of our homes at Christmastide. The Advent wreath, which accompanied the family throughout the season of preparation may be taken down. The violet ribbons are removed, and it is gloriously decorated with white and gold. It is then placed upon the door as a symbol of the welcome of Christ into our city, our home and our hearts. On Christmas Eve the whole house should be strewn with garlands and made ready for the Light of the World. The crib is set in a special place of honor, for tonight the central figure of the Nativity scene is to arrive.

The Jews celebrate their feast of lights (Hannukah) during the month of December in honor of the rededication of the Temple. Tonight we celebrate the arrival of the Messiah who is the light and life of the world. The liturgy itself has preserved the symbolism of light as representative of the Redeemer, and this is most dramatically brought out in the blessing of the paschal candle at Easter. On Christmas Eve, a huge candle is set up in the home. It was often the custom to surround this candle with a laurel wreath, symbolic of victory over Satan, and then to keep the light burning throughout the holy night and every night during the festival season. Nearly every nation has adopted the Christmas candle. In Ireland the family lights a holly-bedecked candle and prays for the living and the dead. The Ukrainians place their candle in a loaf of bread, reminiscent of the Bread of Life and the Light of the Nations. In South America the candle is sometimes placed in a paper lantern decorated with Nativity scenes. In France the Christmas light often consisted in the molding of three individual candles into one at the base in order to give honor to the Most Holy Trinity. In Germany the Christmas candle was sometimes placed upon the "lichtstock," a wooden pole decorated with evergreens. The pyramid of candles which later became customary was replaced by the Christmas tree during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The Irish are particularly fond of placing a candle in the window. During the English persecutions priests were obliged to go into hiding, and it was the hope of every Irish family to have the refugee come into their home for the celebration of Mass on Christmas Eve. The candle in the window indicated his welcome into their home. When the English authorities requested an explanation of this custom the Irish simply explained that they lit the candles and kept the doors unlocked so that if Mary and Joseph were looking for a place to stay they knew that they would be welcome. This "superstition" was considered harmless by the English, and the Irish were often rewarded by the Real Presence of Christ at Holy Mass.

The Christmas fires burning on the peaks of the Alps in central Europe are a colorful sight. As Father Weiser writes: "Like flaming stars they hang in the dark heavens during Holy Night, burning brightly and silently as the farmers from around the mountainsides walk through the winter night down into the valley for midnight Mass. Each person carries a lantern, swinging it to and fro; the night seems alive with hundreds of glow worms converging towards the great light at the foot of the mountains--the parish church--shining and sparkling, a 'Feast of Lights' indeed. No one who has witnessed this scene on Christmas Eve in Austria, Bavaria or Switzerland will ever forget it."⁴

This is the evening for the telling of Christmas stories to the children. The collection of Christmas stories in "Christmastide" by William J. Rohrenbeck would serve well both for tonight and throughout the holiday season. During the long evening before the midnight Mass a story could be read. The little Christmas Eve program available from Conception Abbey, Conception, Mo., with its readings from the Martyrology and the Gospel of St. Luke could be enacted. The last preparations of the Christmas tree and crib are made. The close association between the evergreen tree as the symbol of life, and the Christmas candle as the symbol of light should be retained. When the great Ansgar preached Christ to the Vikings he referred to the fir tree as a symbol of the faith, for "it was as high as hope, as wide as love, and bore the sign of the cross on every bough." Instead of exchanging presents and having a little feast during the evening, we should imitate the bountiful "Reveillon" breakfast after the midnight Mass. The fasting is over and the joys of Christmas are at hand; with the Giver of all gifts we extend our gifts and love to family and friends.

The singing of hymns and carols is the natural adornment of Christmas customs and stories at home. The great wealth of Christmas carols from many times and many lands should be discovered by American families. Most of these carols have a popular appeal and nearly all of the important ones have been translated into singable English. Many indeed are available in recordings, both in the original tongue and in English. For this reason we have omitted the mention of familiar American and English carols, as well as such hymns and carols as "Silent Night" and "Adeste Fideles"; these are all well known to American homes and shall indeed be fostered by our people. Ancient Latin and foreign carols broaden our understanding of Christmas. They are easily understood by children since they belong to the international treasury of folklore. The children may be given an early appreciation of the universality of the love which all nations have offered to the Infant Saviour.

The hymns which are nearest to the heart of the Church as the Bride of the heavenly Spouse are those which are found in her liturgical books. It would be very appropriate, for example, on this holy night to sing the Vesper antiphon, "Jerusalem gaude," followed by the Magnificat of our Blessed Lady on the solemn tone. The Vesper hymn "Jesu Redemptor omnium" reflects a movement of joyous peace which lies at the heart of Christmas. Some of the simpler elements from the Masses of Christmas are easily sung by children. This is clearly seen as we listen to the recordings of Father Hellriegel's choir of children. For example, the English version of the rhythmic fourteenth-century Latin carol called "Quem pastores laudavere" is pleasing to the pure minds of children.

It would be totally impossible to mention all of the carols which come from various countries in celebration of Christmas Eve. For Christmas Eve we recommend in particular the following carols: "Come, All Ye Shepherds" (Czech); "Behold a Branch Is Growing," "Sing, O Sing" (German); "Carol of the Children of Bethlehem" (Austrian); and the French carols "Bring Your Torches, Jeannette, Isabelle," "Whence, O Shepherd Maiden" (inspired by the responsory of the second nocturn of the Sunday within the octave of the Nativity), and "Oh, Publish the Glad Story."

This last-named song is often executed in Austria, France and the Spanish countries. Father Weiser describes it, saying: "It is a dramatic rendition of the Holy Family's fruitless efforts to find a shelter in Bethlehem. Joseph and Mary, tired and weary, knock at door after door, humbly asking for a place to stay. Realizing that they are poor, the owners refuse their request with harsh words, until the Holy Family finally decide to seek shelter in a stable. Usually the whole performance is sung and often it is followed by a happy ending showing a tableau of the cave with the Nativity scene.... A similar custom is the Spanish "Posada" (the Inn), traditional in South-American countries, especially Mexico. On an evening between December 16 and 24, several neighboring families gather in one house, where they prepare a shrine, handsomely decorated, and beside it a crib with all its traditional figures, but the manger is empty. At night a priest comes to the house, reads prayers and burns incense before the pictures of Mary and Joseph. Then a procession is formed, the two images carried at the head. The group moves through the house, reciting a litany and chanting hymns until it reaches a room on the top floor where a carol is sung in which St. Joseph begs for a shelter. The people stationed within the room respond, refusing St. Joseph's request as part of the carol. The procession then proceeds to the place where the altar has been prepared. Pictures of Joseph and Mary are put in the shrine, venerated with prayer and incense, and all those present are blessed by the priest. Thus the religious part of the "Posada" ends. Then comes a gay party for the adults consisting of games and refreshments, while the children are entertained with the "pinata." This is a fragile clay jar suspended from the ceiling and filled with candy and other goodies. The object is to break the jar with a stick so the contents spill and everybody rushes pell-mell for some of its treasures."⁵ Should you wish to try this type of Nativity play with your children, an Austrian version may be found in the "Trapp Family Book of Christmas Songs."⁶

Children love to sing and to light candles. They also love the ringing of bells, and they should be given every opportunity to do so with the arrival of the Saviour at midnight on Holy Night. In many churches the bells are rung during the solemn vigil which precedes the midnight Mass. In other places a concert of chimes and carillon music is rung from all the towers and steeples. There is a quaint medieval custom which is observed in some places in the British Isles. It is symbolic of the renewal of the life of grace which was brought about by the new Adam. One hour before midnight the big bell of the church begins to toll as if for a funeral. This continues for a whole hour, but at the stroke of twelve the joy of the world is expressed by a glorious ringing out of Christmas joy and redemption.

The temptation to speak of myriads of other interesting customs which solemnize the vigil is very great. Though a complete account here is impossible, it is our hope that these few suggestions may inflame the imagination of our American families and inspire them to go more deeply into the spiritual meaning and wealth of the Holy Night. Among the Slavic nations, for example, the small children are permitted by their parents to sleep on the floor in a bedding of hay and straw before the midnight Mass. While this practice is scarcely advisable in our own country--where so many have no access to a rural environment anyway--parents may wish to permit children to make some small sacrifice of comfort on this night of nights, in order to share in the humble circumstances of the Saviour's birth. After the midnight Mass, as they come home for the "reveillon" around the crib and the Christmas tree to receive their presents, their joy would be even greater, for they would have experienced some little reminder of the sufferings of the Christ Child. St. Gregory Nazianzen has vividly summarized this spirit of the Gospel and of St. Paul: "Let us be as Christ, for Christ is also as we. Let us become gods for His sake, for He also was made man for us. He took upon Himself what was poorer than He might give what was more glorious; He was made poor that we might be enriched by that poverty; He took the form of a servant that we might be set at liberty. He descended that we might be elevated.... Let everyone give all things; let him offer all things to Him who gave Himself as the price of redemption for us and as a recompense for our fault. But he can give nothing as great as when, rightly understanding this mystery he offers himself and becomes for the sake of Him everything which He has become for our sake." (Second nocturn of Easter Sunday.) 7

CHRISTMAS: THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY

(December 25)

During the past few centuries the only vigil which has been celebrated with the nocturnal Office and Holy Mass was that of Christmas. Happily our present Holy Father has decreed that the vigil of Easter should be restored to its proper place of supreme importance. These two feasts are the only ones in the Roman rite which are fully celebrated by the people as a whole, and in consequence their importance should be emphasized more forcibly.

The ancient Church had made the night office a permanent institution. As Our Lord very often went up on to the mountain to pray during the night, so the Church offered her night watch for the "parousia" of the Saviour. Night was made for a prayer or meditation of love and not merely for sleep. In the spirit of the liturgy the nocturns of Matins in monastic houses are still assigned to the night. Many religious still rise from sleep in order to pray and watch with the Church. About ten thirty or eleven o'clock on Christmas Eve the bells are rung calling the monks to Matins of Christmas. It is a splendid privilege to be able to join them at the monastery in their bounteous celebration of the Nativity. It would, of course, be beyond our range here to explain in detail the ceremonies of Matins: this may be found in the works of Parsch and Graf concerning the Breviary.

In Germany a beautiful arrangement of the Christmas Gospel has been made on the tone of Christmas Matins ("Die Frohbotschaft der Geburt des Herrn"). It would be excellent if this could be translated and placed in the hands of American parents to be sung around the home crib before the family goes to the midnight Mass.

The children in this country would at least enjoy some echo of the more complete spiritual celebration with which the Church receives her Bridegroom. The only substitute which we could recommend at present is a common reading or meditation on the birth of Christ as found in the readings and psalms of the Divine Office. Reading, however, is a rather remote substitute for children as it is likewise for adults. We prefer to do, to see, to hear and to sing ourselves.

The explanation of the reason for the celebration of three Masses on Christmas day is so very simple and clear in "Das Jahr des Heiles" of Pius Parsch that we feel obliged to translate. When this great work is translated completely into English, every family should read it frequently during Christmastide. It is replete with the Christmas spirit.

"The holy day of Christmas is characterized by a triple Eucharistic Sacrifice. The ancient Roman Church followed, in this matter, the example of the venerable Church of Jerusalem. The faithful there assembled during the night at the grotto of the Nativity in order to sanctify the hour of the birth of the Lord by the celebration of Holy Mass. At the end of this Mass they returned to Jerusalem. In the Church of the Resurrection in that city, what better means could they take than to celebrate Christmas with the shepherds? This was the second Mass. During the day they again assembled in church for the solemn Office of the feast. In this manner it became customary to celebrate three Masses on Christmas Day. This custom was initiated at Rome. The first Mass was celebrated during the night in the church of the crib at St. Mary Major (the stational church of St. Mary Major was considered to be the Bethlehem of the Roman people). The second Mass was celebrated in the Roman church of the Resurrection. The third Mass was celebrated at the basilica of St. Peter. This custom spread from Rome to the entire Occidental church. Since the time when priests of the Roman rite were permitted to celebrate Mass each day the custom became established that every priest might celebrate three Masses on Christmas Day.

"Three elements unite in each Mass: the divine Light, the corresponding time of the day or night, and the historic fact expressed in the Gospel for that hour. In the three Masses, there is a progressive development of the feast. The spirit of Advent is still noticeable in the first Mass. The God of Majesty, surrounded by light, manifests Himself. Luminous angels fly above the earth, and the Mother, the most pure Virgin, is the only earthly creature who approaches the divine Infant. Humanity is still waiting in the shadows of the night. The meaning of Christmas develops with the second Mass, which is celebrated at dawn at the rising of the sun. That divine Light which appeared mysteriously upon earth, clothed in the garments of night, rises for us like the sun. He is full of creative power and enters into relation with us as our Saviour. In the third Mass, the meaning of Christmas attains its perfect development: Jesus is manifested in all His power to all men.

"Christmas is a feast of light. This is evident from its very beginning. The date of December 25 is not the historical day of the birth of the Saviour (this day is unknown). This day of the winter solstice was chosen in order to supplant the pagan feast of the sun god ("sol invictus"), and to substitute a Christian feast on that day. Christ is the true God and Sun who combats the powers of darkness and overcomes them. This is the reason why the feast of His birth is well placed at the very moment when the sun begins its ascension. The thought of light, so touchingly expressed by the Christian people by their illuminated Christmas tree, is to be found in all three Masses. The symbolism of light is particularly noteworthy at the midnight Mass; at the second Mass the rising sun offers a living symbol, and that is why the Introit sings out with joy: 'A Light shines for us today.' At the third Mass the symbol of Light is to be found in the Gospel itself: 'The Light shines in the darkness.'"8

The spirit of the Masses of Christmas may be expressed in the following division:

Midnight: The birth of the Son of God in Eternity by His procession from the Father. Mary alone, overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, witnesses and recognizes Him in His historic birth at Bethlehem.

Dawn: The birth of the Son of God upon earth by means of the Incarnation is recognized by the chosen people, represented by the shepherds. He becomes our redeemer, the Saviour and Head of His Mystical Body and Spouse, the Church.

Noonday: The birth of the King in majesty, the God-Man who is revealed as the Redeemer of all men and King of all creation. All mankind, by rebirth in grace, and in virtue of His victory over the kingdom of Satan, may wait in joy and expectancy for the opening of the eternal gates of heaven by the Lamb who was slain: the "parousia," or final coming of the Saviour at our death, and especially at the end of the world.

The celebration at home on Christmas Day should be filled with joy and rest, as is emphasized in the Matins for the feast: "Our Saviour is born today. Dearly beloved, let us rejoice! It would be unlawful to be sad today, when it is the birthday of Life: the birthday of that Life which, for us dying creatures, takes away the sting of death and brings the bright promise of eternal life hereafter. No one is shut out from a share in this happiness. All men have an equal share in the great cause of our joy, for Our Lord...is come to make all free."⁹ The great King for whom we have been preparing during the whole season of Advent has come, and we may no longer fast now that the Bridegroom is in our midst.

Christmas dinner is customarily the high point of the family celebration. It should be remembered that the feast is not the time for the mother of the family to spend long hours in the kitchen. The greater portion of the meal should have been prepared beforehand, and help in serving and dishwashing is a mark of the charity of all. The blessing for the meal should be taken directly from the "Ritual" today, and if possible, all could sing it.¹⁰

Community reading, caroling and folk-dancing are traditionally appropriate. We suggest that many ideas for the celebration of the holiday season may be found in "The Christmas Book."

It is interesting to learn how Christmas was celebrated in the Middle Ages, to read about the nativity plays, including even a sample of an Epiphany play as presented by the Huron and Algonquin Indians, and to glean information about all the flowers and decorations used everywhere at Christmastide--the holly, mistletoe, ivy, laurel, rosemary, bay, cherry and poinsettia. Many stories can be read to the children and a play may be enacted after the Christmas dinner.

In the event that Mother has received a poinsettia plant, the children could enact the legend telling why the Mexican people call this the "flower of the Holy Night." Father Weiser recounts it thus: "On a Christmas eve long ago a poor little boy went to church in great sadness because he had no gift to bring to the Holy Child. He dared not enter the church and, kneeling humbly on the ground outside the house of God, he prayed fervently, and assured Our Lord with tears how much he desired to offer Him some lovely present. 'But I am very poor and dread to approach You with empty hands.' When he finally rose from his knees he saw springing up at his feet a green plant with gorgeous blooms of dazzling red. His prayer had been answered; he broke some of the beautiful twigs from the plant and joyously entered the church to lay his gift at the foot of the Christ Child. Since then the plant has spread over the whole country; it blooms every year at Christmas time with such glorious abandon that men are filled with the true holiday spirit at the mere sight of the Christmas flower, symbolic of the Saviour's birth."¹¹

Children and adults both enjoy caroling, either at home or going from house to house. Besides the customary American and English carols, we should suggest a few of the following ones. The hymn for Christmas Lauds, "O Solis Ortus," has been well-arranged for vernacular singing in "Hymns of the Church."¹² Two Latin hymns have a catchy melody which children love: "Puer natus in Bethlehem,"¹³ and "Resonet in laudibus," an excellent fourteenth-century carol which may be found in the "St. Gregory Hymnal." The latter melody is so popular and modern that some young people are reminded by it of the advertisement for Super Suds.

"The Trapp Family Book of Christmas Songs" is replete with songs and ideas. From it we recommend the following songs for Christmas Day: A "Child Is Born in Bethlehem," "We Whom Joyous Shepherd Praised" (a moving fourteenth-century Latin carol), "Maria on the Mountain" (a lullaby carol traditional in Germany), "The Darkness is Falling" (an Austrian carol which could serve as a Christmas night prayer for the children); and "Fum, Fum, Fum" (full of the rhythm of Christmas in Spain).

The word carol comes from the Greek word "choraulein," which is constructed from the two words "choros," the dance, and "aulein," to play the flute. The ancient Greeks and Romans danced in ring form. Their carols were brought in Roman times to Britain and Gaul. Even in medieval England a carol meant a ring-dance accompanied by singing: the children's game of ring-around-a-rosy very likely comes from the Middle Ages. Sweden and Austria still maintain the dance-carol. Gradually the meaning of the word carol came to be applied to the song itself rather than the dance. A carol usually pertains to folklore and is joyful and festive. However, in our day we apply the word carol to all Christmas songs, including many which are more solemn and should more appropriately be called hymns. The birthplace of the true Christmas carol was Italy. Besides the gift of the Christmas crib to the world, modern caroling may be ascribed to St. Francis of Assisi. From Italy the carol extended to Spain, France, and finally to all Europe. The earliest modern English carol was a lullaby-carol.

The old forms of the dance-carol persisted even in church itself, relates Father Weiser. "Dance carols, usually ring-dances accompanied by singing, were greatly favored in medieval times. The altar boys, for

example, in the Cathedral of Seville, Spain, used to dance before the altar on Christmas and other feast days accompanied by song and the sound of castanets. In the Cathedral of York, England, until the end of the sixteenth century choir boys performed a dance in the aisle of the church after morning prayer on Christmas Day. In France it was customary to dance a "bergette" (shepherd's dance) in churches at Christmas time. Dancing in churches was prohibited by an ecclesiastical council at Toledo in 590, but the custom had become so much a part of the Christmas festivities that in some places dancing survived until the thirteenth and fourteenth century, and in England, right up to the Reformation (in Spain even longer)."¹⁴

It is for these reasons that we greatly favor caroling and folk-dancing for the children during Christmastide. In the bibliography may be found several books on folk-dancing which will be very useful even to the amateur. Parents should wisely familiarize their children with simple folk dances and melodies before they become too spoiled by our modern tunes and dances, the greater portion of which do not compare in interest and culture with the earlier carols and dances. It must be remembered that folk-dancing and caroling really belong to the people, and in consequence they are essentially attractive to children and adults alike. They are, in addition to being of the people, usually based upon the folk celebration of the liturgical feast itself.

A final remark concerning caroling at Christmas is to encourage the reader to plumb the mysteries of yodeling. We are not all Swiss and Austrian and yodeling is not particularly easy. Yet it is a very popular form of music in mountainous countries, and one beloved by the people. Should you desire to try a little yodeling with the children, we recommend the Austrian yodel-carol from the Tyrol, "To Christ Our Lord We Raise This Song."¹⁵ The children will like it as if by instinct.

For those families who are more sophisticated in taste, or whose talents are not developed for self-expression, Christmas night often brings dull moments and a nostalgic loneliness. Very beautiful and inspiring substitutes for Christmas cheer may be found in concerts and recordings. It is desirable at this season to take the older children to a performance of Handel's "Messiah" or to listen to the Christmas compositions of Corelli and Vivaldi, for example. Children indeed should at an early age be introduced to refinement in music. Folk singing and dancing serve as foundation blocks to modern musical compositions. The movements of concertos, partitas, sonatas and various other musical forms are essentially dance forms whose origin is to be found in mediaeval folklore. Parents and teachers in our country may balance the self-expression of children in using their own talents with a graduated development of interest and understanding of more developed musical compositions. In music as in all the arts the classic is that which is the common heritage of all peoples, imitations and the exaggeration of rugged individualists soon pass away.

"From lands that see the sun arise
To earth's remotest boundaries,
The Virgin-born today we sing
The Son of Mary, Christ the King."

--Lauds for the Nativity¹⁶

ENDNOTES

1. St. John Chrysostom, "On the Solstice and Equinox," quoted in "Catholic Encyclopedia," Vol. III, pg. 727.
2. Burton-Ripperger, "Feast Day Cook Book," p. 155 ff.
3. Ibid., pp. 159-160.
4. "The Christmas Book," pp. 114-115.
5. Ibid., pp. 98-100.

6. "The Trapp Family Book of Christmas Songs," p. 77.
7. From the Benedictine Office, "Liturgical Readings," St. Meinrad's Abbey.
8. Parsch, Pius, "Das Jahr des Heiles," Vol. I, pp. 239-31.
9. Homily of St. Leo from the second nocturn of Matins.
10. Cf. Weller, "The Roman Ritual," Vol. III: "The Blessings."
11. "The Christmas Book," pp. 133-134.
12. Dom Ermin Vitry, p. 11.
13. "Cantus," Fisher and Bros., N.Y., pp. 24-25.
14. "The Christmas Book," p. 71.
15. Weiser, "The Christmas Book," pp. 77-78.
16. J. M. Neale translation.

CHAPTER 6

THE COURT OF THE KING-SAVIOR

ST. STEPHEN (December 26)

(Station at St. Stephen's on Mt. Coelius)

ANCIENT tradition tells us that while Advent brought God to man through the Incarnation of the Word, so the twelve days between Christmas and the Epiphany were to bring man to God. On the very first day after Christmas we meet the first member of the suite of the Great King. The Saviour's immediate attendant is St. Stephen of Jerusalem, the first martyr, for there is no greater love for the newborn King than to lay down one's life for Him. Even though the Mass of the day indicates that this feast was originally independent of the Christmas cycle, the Divine Office unites this feast with Christmas in the most intimate fashion. The children, especially small boys, would be happy to hear the story of St. Stephen as it is written in Matins of his feast day:

"Yesterday we celebrated the temporal birth of our Eternal King; today we celebrate the triumphant passion of His soldier. For yesterday our King, clothed in the garb of our flesh and coming from the palace of the virginal womb, deigned to visit the world; today the soldier, leaving the tent of the body, has gone to heaven in triumph. The one, while preserving the majesty of the everlasting God, putting on the servile girdle of flesh, entered into the field of this world ready for the fray. The other, laying aside the perishable garment of the body, ascended to the palace of heaven to reign eternally. The One descended, veiled in flesh; the other ascended, crowned with blood.

"The latter ascended while the Jews were stoning him because the former descended while the angels were rejoicing. 'Glory to God in the highest,' sang the exulting angels yesterday; today rejoicing, they received Stephen into their company. Yesterday the Lord came forth from the womb of the Virgin; today the soldier of Christ has passed from the prison of the flesh.

"Yesterday Christ was wrapped in swathing bands for our sake; today Stephen is clothed by Him in the robe of immortality. Yesterday the narrow confines of the crib held the Infant Christ; today the immensity of heaven has received the triumphant Stephen. The Lord descended alone that He might raise up many; our King has humbled Himself that He might exalt His soldiers. It is necessary for us, nevertheless, brethren, to acknowledge with what arms Stephen was girded and able to overcome the cruelty of the Jews that thus he merited so happily to triumph.

"Stephen, therefore, that he might merit to obtain the crown his name signifies, had as his weapon charity, and by means of that he was completely victorious. Because of love for God, he did not flee the raging Jews: because of his love of neighbor he interceded for those stoning him. Because of love he convinced the erring of their errors, that they might be corrected; because of love, he prayed for those stoning him that they might not be punished. Supported by the strength of charity, he overcame Saul, who was so cruelly raging against him; and him whom he had as a persecutor on earth, he deserved to have as a companion in heaven." (St. Fulgentius, Third Sermon on St. Stephen)¹

The charity of St. Stephen is the reason for the songs and customs which have become the traditional manner of celebrating his feast. The old English carol "Good King Wenceslaus" tells the children how King Wenceslaus went out on St. Stephen's day to bring charity to the poor. The snow was covered with the blood of his freezing feet: "Heat was in the very sod which the saint had printed." The good king knew that whatever he did to the least of his subjects he did for Christ in honor of the first holy martyr. In Yorkshire, England, large goose pies were made and distributed to the poor. Indeed, the feast was known as Boxing Day, since the earthen banks or boxes of the apprentices were filled with money gifts by their masters. This was the direct forerunner of the piggy bank. Would it not be appropriate if the children's piggy banks were painted red, or had a streak of red on them in memory of the charity of the martyr, Stephen? Mothers and

fathers often buy banks for children to teach them saving. This is an excellent practice. Would it not be wise as well to teach them to be frugal with themselves in order to share their charity with their neighbor?

One of the oldest folk-songs of Sweden, "Saint Stephen was Riding" (Staffansvisa) is sung at Christmastide in honor of St. Stephen, telling the delightful "Miracle of the Cock." According to this story, Herod would not believe Stephen when he was told that "One greater than thou has been born this holy night." The proof of his words came when a roasted cock rose up out of the gravy and crowed as he had crowed at the break of day. "The "Staffan" of the song has the features of two entirely different personalities, those of the deacon, St. Stephen of Jerusalem, whose feast is celebrated on December 26 and therefore closely connected with Christmas, and those of the eleventh century missionary, Staffan, who traveled far in the north. The latter was killed by pagans; and an unbroken foal brought his body to Norrala, where a chapel was built over his grave. In all Germanic lands he became the patron of health and of horses, and being confused with St. Stephen of Jerusalem he shares in his honors on December 26, such as the 'Stephen-Cup,' drunk to good health, and horseback rides around churches and through villages."²

With St. Stephen as their teacher the children learn quickly that as Christ came to us on Christmas Day so we must follow in the footsteps of the holy martyrs in our way to God. Psalm 62, used on the feast of St. Stephen, is the first lesson which the young deacon teaches the children:

"O God, Thou art my God: earnestly do I seek Thee,
My soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh longs for Thee,
like a dry and thirsty land, without water.
So do I gaze upon Thee in the sanctuary, to see Thy
might and Thy glory...."

Antiphon: My soul cleaves to Thee, because my flesh was stoned for Thee, my God. (Lauds for the feast of St. Stephen, 3rd Psalm and Antiphon)

ST. JOHN THE APOSTLE (December 27)

(Station at St. Mary Major)

The second teacher in the suite of the great King is the beloved disciple St. John. So greatly did Christ love this disciple that He confided His own Mother, the Blessed Virgin, to his care. That is the reason why the feast of St. John is celebrated in the great Basilica of Our Lady. The dominant theme of the feast and the basis for its corporate unity with the coming of the Saviour is to be found in the Mass of the day. At the Gradual, Gospel and Communion, we read: "I wish him to remain thus until I come." Yesterday we celebrated the charity of the Saviour in the martyrdom of St. Stephen; today we celebrate the virginity of St. John. Our Lord wishes the children to learn from St. John that they must retain an innocence and purity of life similar to that of His beloved disciple in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. The Virgin Mother whom He gave on the Cross to the virgin disciple became the Mother of us all. Through her guiding hand and intercession the entire world comes to the Saviour.

St. John is particularly noted for his great charity. As he became a very aged man in Ephesus, much of his time was spent in teaching the precept of his Master: "Little children, love one another." The "Roman Ritual" contains a blessing for wine on his feast day "in remembrance and in honor of St. John who without any ill effects drank a cup of poisoned wine." After the last Gospel of the feast the priest blesses the wine or other beverages, reciting the psalm of the Good Shepherd. The oration speaks of the apostolic care necessary for all who are on their journey to God:

"Holy God, Father almighty, eternal God, who didst will that thy Son, equal to Thee in eternity and substance should descend from heaven and in the fullness of time take temporal birth of the most holy Virgin Mary, so that He could seek the lost and wayward sheep and carry it on His shoulders to the sheepfold, and could cure the man fallen among robbers of his wounds by pouring in oil and wine, do Thou bless and sanctify this wine which Thou hast vintaged for man's drink. Whoever partakes of it on this holy solemnity, grant him life

in body and soul. By Thy goodness let it be to him strength in the pilgrimage to prosper him on the way, that his journey may come to a happy termination. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

"O Lord Jesus Christ, who didst call Thyself the true vine and Thy holy apostles the branches, and didst desire to plant a chosen vineyard of all who love Thee, bless this wine and impart to it the power of Thy benediction. And as Thy beloved disciple John, Apostle and Evangelist intercedes for them that partake thereof, grant them security from all deadly and poisonous afflictions and constant good health of soul and body. Who livest and reignest forever. Amen."3

This is a very good occasion to teach children the proper usage of spirituous beverages. The introduction of a little blessed red wine on the feast of St. John at the principal meal of the day would have only a salutary effect upon the children. Theresa Mueller makes the following comments upon the days immediately following Christmas:

"The liturgy, then, which we study night after night before the crib, sees to it that we do not get lost in the concentration on the childhood of our Saviour, calling our attention on the day after Christmas to the great martyrdom of St. Stephen the Deacon, who died praying for his enemies. On the third day is the feast of St. John, the Apostle, 'whom Jesus loved.' A beautiful custom in some old countries is the drinking of 'St. John's love' on that day. Wine, blessed with a special blessing and prayers, is served in the home before the main meal: the father lifts the cup towards the mother. 'I drink you the love of St. John'; she having answered: 'I thank you for the love of St. John,' drinks to the eldest child and so on including guests and servants. The simple beauty of this ceremony gives character and dignity to our family supper, too, especially if there is a John in the family, who celebrates the day of his patron saint."4

If any of the young boys of the family happens to belong to the Boy Scouts, it should not be forgotten that the eagle, which represents the highest Scout rank, symbolizes the apostle St. John. His wings spread for flight towards the Sun of Justice, whose rays give light and life. By the strength of sanctifying grace which comes from the Saviour, the scout is able to turn from the world, the flesh and the devil and to soar with the strength of the eagle drawn heavenwards to the heights of the resurrected and ascended Christ.

THE HOLY INNOCENTS (December 28)

(Station at St. Paul's)

After the feast of the martyr and the virgin apostle we celebrate the feast of the infant martyrs. In this respect, today's feast represents a high point in our reception of the suite of the King-Redeemer. The Church is very dynamic in her consideration of the Holy Innocents and does not stop at a mere meditation upon these historical figures. The infant saints completely realize the ideal of the early Church based upon the Apocalypse of St. John as found in the lesson for the Mass of the feast. Adorned with the purple of martyrdom and the white lily of virginity, they form the escort of honor of the Lamb.

Modern piety expresses a tendency to center attention about the crib and all of the heartwarming aspects of childhood. We tend to forget that the Incarnation is the beginning of the redemptive act of the Word of God. It would be wise indeed to teach the children by means of word, song and example that the crib and the cross go together. In ancient times this fourth day in the octave of the Nativity was not consecrated to the Holy Innocents, but rather to the exile of Christ, the flight into Egypt. Both of those themes mingle together as they actually do in the Gospel of the day and in the Divine Office. At Matins we hear the psalm characteristic of the feast:

"Why are the nations in tumult, and why do the
peoples devise vain things?
The kings of the earth rise up, and the princes
take counsel together against the Lord and
against His Anointed...."

--Psalm 2

We have already heard this ominous note on Christmas Day, in the martyrdom of Stephen, and in the poisoned drink of St. John. We shall hear it again on the Sunday within the octave and on the feast of the Circumcision, when the Child shall shed His first blood for our redemption. This reminder constitutes a transition from the Christmas cycle to the Easter cycle, for the Incarnation is but the prelude to the great sacrifice of the redemption.

Since ancient times the bodies of five of the Innocents have been honored in the station church of St. Paul. Their bodies are interred in a sarcophagus which is deposited in a place of distinction beneath the apse of the basilica.

The second and third nocturns of Matins develop the Gospel account of the feast. In the second nocturn St. Augustine tells us that "Today we honor the birthday of those infants whom the text of the Gospel relates to have been slain by Herod, that most cruel king. And therefore let the earth rejoice with the greatest exultation as the fruitful parents of his heavenly throng and of such great virtues. Behold, this wicked enemy could never have so greatly benefited the blessed children by honor as he did by hate. For as today's most sacred feast shows, as much as iniquity did abound against the blessed children, so much the more did the grace of benediction flow out upon them. Blessed art thou, O Bethlehem in the land of Judea, which endured the cruelty of King Herod in the slaughter of thy children; who deserved to offer to God at one time a snow white army of defenseless infants. Fittingly, indeed, do we celebrate the birthday of those whom the world brought forth into eternal life more happily than did birth from their mothers' wombs. Indeed, they possessed the dignity of eternal life before they partook of the enjoyment of the present."⁵

In the third nocturn emphasis is placed upon the flight into Egypt in the homily of St. Jerome: "When Joseph took the Child and His Mother to flee into Egypt he took them in the night and in the darkness, because he left the night of ignorance to those infidels from whom he fled. But when he returned into Judea, neither night nor darkness are mentioned in the Gospel because at the end of the world the Jews shall be enlightened, receiving faith as if receiving Christ returning from Egypt."⁶

There are many ways by which the great themes of the feast of the Holy Innocents may be made comprehensible to children. Many pastors, for example, invite the mothers to bring their children to church on that day or on the following Sunday, in order to receive a special blessing. (We shall treat of this blessing in our development of the Sunday within the octave of the Nativity.) In schools and convents the youngest are given a turn at being "Superior"; and at home they may preside at the table, offering their own ideas on how to sing and pray, eat and play. There are, moreover, several beautiful carols which are particularly suitable. The "Coventry Carol" was sung in the fifteenth century "Pageant of the Shearman and Tailors" by the women of Bethlehem, just before Herod's soldiers came to slaughter their children:

"Lulla, lulla, thou little tiny child,
By by, lully lullay.
Thou little tiny child,
By by, lully lullay
. . . Herod the king in his raging,
Charged he hath this day
His men of might
In his own sight,
All young children to slay...."

A seventeenth century Italian carol, "Herod Dead," is again in keeping with the feast as is the lovely traditional German carol, "Maria on the Mountain."

A birthday cake in honor of the birthday into heaven of the little saints would make a timely dessert. Mrs. Berger tells us that "German cooks created a Bavarian cream with either a strawberry or cherry sauce to symbolize the blood spilled. They felt that blanc-mange would be suitable for little children and grownups after too much Christmas feasting."⁷

ENDNOTES

1. "Liturgical Readings," St. Meinrad's Abbey, pp. 22-23.
2. "The Trapp Family Book of Christmas Songs," p. 128.
3. Weller, "The Roman Ritual," Vol. 3: "The Blessings," pp. 33 and 35.
4. "Our Children's Year of Grace," p. 17.
5. "Liturgical Readings," pp. 27-28.
6. Ibid., pp. 28-29.
7. "Cooking for Christ," pp. 27-28.

CHAPTER 7

SUNDAY IN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

THE FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION AND THE HOLY NAME

THE link which unites the nativity of Christ with His passion and resurrection is very apparent in the Mass of this Sunday. The theme of the Sunday transports us already to the time of the presentation of the Child in the Temple: He is established "for the fall and the resurrection of many...and as a sign of contradiction." The soul of Mary shall be pierced as by a lance. The Mass today, although replete with the joy of the nativity of the Saviour, is at once a forceful reminder of the purpose of the Incarnation. Insofar as the instruction of children is concerned, we may leave off a full explanation of the mysteries developed in the liturgy of this Sunday in order to dwell upon them more fully during the succeeding feasts.

This would be a most apt day to emphasize the blessings for infants and children which are contained in the "Ritual." Psalm 112, "Ye children, sing praise to the Lord..." could be explained to the children, and they could use it as their morning and evening prayer. If it is possible, the pastor may provide an occasion this afternoon for the formal blessing of the children in church:

"O Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, born before all ages, in time Thou didst will to become an infant, for Thou lovest the innocence of such. Thou who when children were brought to Thee didst lovingly embrace them and bless them, hasten with Thy sweetest blessings to this infant and keep its mind free from malice. Ask him to advance in wisdom, age and grace, thereby ever pleasing Thee, who livest and reignest with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. Amen."¹

This Sunday as well as all of the days in the octave of the Nativity are called "daft days" in Scotland. We are in the midst of the holiday season, and even work hours should become happy and sacred. Insofar as the children are concerned, they shall enjoy the parties and sports of the season with few responsibilities of school and study. It should be remembered that if we have restrained them from the celebration of Christmas parties during the time of Advent, now is the time for all sorts of joyous and innocent, even holy, recreation. These are the days of caroling at home and on the streets. On this Sunday within the octave, we recommend in particular the traditional Spanish carol "A la Nanita Nana."

THE FEAST OF THE CIRCUMCISION

(Station at St. Mary across the Tiber)

THE FEAST OF THE HOLY NAME OF JESUS

(Sunday between the Circumcision and the Epiphany, or if this does not occur according to the calendar, on January 2)

The Feast of the Circumcision is probably the most ancient feast of the Virgin Mother. Formerly the venerable church of St. Mary of the Martyrs, the ancient Pantheon, was the stationary church where the Pope celebrated Mass on this feast. The Church is most grateful to Mary because of the great part which she played in both the Incarnation and the Redemption wrought by the Saviour. The first effusion of the blood of Christ conjures up thoughts of His supreme sacrifice of love on the cross. Today for the first time Mary is co-offerer of the sacrifice.

Truly, the first day of the year is a family feast. In imitation of the Canadian custom, the children should receive the benediction of their father the first thing in the morning. Our Lord came into the world to do the will of the heavenly Father, and remained obedient and submissive to Joseph and Mary throughout most of

His life. The children learn that all their little sacrifices throughout the year should be in union with these of the Child of Bethlehem.

For centuries the beginning of a new year has been the source of many customs and ceremonies in every land. We find the Druids with their boughs of mistletoe, the wassail bowl, the "rauchnacht" or incense night in Austria, the search for the "elbetrith," the Roman celebrations in honor of the two-faced Janus, the "etrennes" of the "Jour de l'An." When the Roman emperors were Christianized, they did not prohibit all the customs which came from pagan times, but an attempt was made to "baptize" them, or at least to avoid any superstitious practices among Christians.

The Church celebrates the octave of the Nativity and the feast of the Circumcision on the first day of the year. As a loving mother, she recognizes that the first day of the civil year is a holiday in every land, and as a consequence has made this day a holyday of obligation, desiring that we bring our first thanksgiving and homage to God. May the New Year cause all men to remember that the precious gift of time which God has given us is to be used according to His divine providence in the attainment of eternity.

New Year's Eve, along with its innocent gaiety, is really a day for serious reflection. It is true that for the Christian the real beginning of the year takes place with the First Sunday in Advent, and the children should be taught to make their annual day of recollection before that Sunday, which celebrates the New Year of grace. However, on the eve of the civil New Year as well the children may join their parents in prayer and thanksgiving for the gifts and benefits which God has given them in the past year, and pray for necessary graces in the forthcoming civil year. After all, the first fruits of the blood of the Infant Saviour were offered on this feast day of the Circumcision. We too should offer the "new beginning" as a morning prayer in honor of the Most Holy Trinity.

One of the most profitable and interesting things which the children may do on the last day of the year would be to help mother prepare a Scripture Cake. There is nothing quite like the kitchen to stir up an interest in Scripture. Following the Douay Version of the Bible, the Feastday Cookbook² offers this intriguing recipe:

- (1) Four and one half cups of Ill Kings, iv, 22;
- (2) One and one half cups of Judges, v, 25;
- (3) Two cups of Jeremias vi, 20;
- (4) Two cups of I Kings, xxx, 12;
- (5) Two cups of Nahum iii, 12;
- (6) One cup of Numbers, xvii, 8;
- (7) Two tablespoons of I Kings, xiv, 25;
- (8) Six articles of Jeremias xvii, 11;
- (9) A pinch of Leviticus, ii, 13;
- (10) A teaspoon of Amos, iv, 5;
- (11) Season to taste with II Paralipomenon ix, 9;
- (12) Add citron and follow Solomon's advice for making a good boy, Proverbs, xxiii, 14, and you will have a good cake.

If the kitchen is not completely upset by this time, perhaps some snowballs could be made according to Mrs. Berger's recipe,³ who says they are a traditional treat for New Year's, when

"...as the birds lighting upon the earth, He scattereth snow: and the falling down thereof is as the coming down of locusts. The eye admireth at the beauty of the whiteness thereof: and the heart is astonished at the shower thereof."

--Ecclesiasticus 43, 19-20

The Grailville publication, "New Life for New Year's Eve," contains several good suggestions both for adults and for children. The theme chosen as motif for the evening is that of the bells. It is suggested that bells as a symbol of the gathering of Christians be used upon the invitation cards, that bell cookies and cakes be served, and that the bell be rung gloriously at midnight, especially in the event that there is a

Midnight Mass in the parish. "Bells have always been connected with New Year's, and are pictured on our greeting cards, but we've pretty much forgotten what bells signify. The meaning of the bell reaches far back in human history. The bells have called Christians of many ages to pray, to rejoice, to mourn, as one. They summon us to Mass, announce marriages, toll deaths, ring out the feasts. Thus the theme of the bells can bring to mind the Christian life which we share in common. The bells serve as a beautiful symbol introducing a new year to be spent together as a community of families or a group working in the lay apostolate."⁴

Bells indeed are the traditional means of calling the Christian community to prayer. Even at home bells should be readily associated with the Angelus and the familiar call to Sunday Mass. Children love to ring bells just as they are fond of lighting candles and playing with matches. Each child should have his turn at ringing the Angelus at home, preferably at the same time that it is rung at church. On New Year's Eve, the whole family could participate in ringing bells as they sing the "Gloria in Excelsis Deo," the "Te Deum," or one of the psalms of praise. A little extra glamour is added by playing a good recording of cathedral bells.

Before using an object it is excellent pedagogy to instruct the child concerning the meaning and symbolism of the object. Since bells and candles, wassail and the yule log are seen so very often upon Christmas greetings and New Year's cards, the children should be taught what they mean. In this country, New Year is replete with old English tradition. The decking of the halls and the lighting of holiday candles should be associated with the Christmas wreath and the Advent candles. The yule log, an old custom connected with the winter solstice, when the time of light is shortest, is a pagan custom which may be Christianized. Gathering around a fire denotes unity, and the lighting of the fire and candles signifies the dispelling of darkness when the Light came into the world at Christmas. The Grailville booklet wisely suggests that the yule log be blessed by a prayer adapted from the first Mass of Christmas day. After the children carry the log or large Christmas candle into the room, the father explains its meaning and lights it saying, "O God, who hast made this most holy season to shine forth with the brightness of the true Light, grant, we beseech Thee, that we who have known the mystery of His light upon earth may attain the enjoyment of His happiness in heaven. Who with Thee liveth and reigneth in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, world without end. Amen."

As light and fire symbolize the coming of the Redeemer and the unity of all men in Christ, so the wassail bowl is associated with the charity of St. John. The ringing of bells and singing of Christmas songs echo the purity of heart which is the cause of rejoicing for the family. New Year's Eve is an excellent day to explain to the children the meaning of the blessing of church bells. The booklet published by the Newman Press could be reviewed, quoted, and its content explained. Songs such as "Deck the Hall," the "Wassail Song," "The Holly and the Ivy," and the "Coventry Carol" are in season, as well as poems such as "Ring out, Wild Bells," sections of Tennyson's "In Memoriam," and "The Bells" by Poe.

Hospitality is a hallmark of the evening. Christmas spirit should embrace the aged, the stranger, the poor and the lonely. None should be excluded from the family festivities on New Year's Eve. The Chinese, who are particularly devoted to elderly members of the family, could be imitated in their respect and deference to the aged. Family spirit during this season shows love and kindness to the patriarchs and matriarchs of the family.

A serious note is added to the evening by an "Hour of Watching." The prayer hour should be carefully timed so that it reaches a climax at midnight. There is no better way to conclude the closing of the civil year and the opening of the New Year than by family prayer followed by midnight Mass. There should be contrition and thanksgiving for the past, and a prayer of peace and holiness during the oncoming year. The easiest way to conceive this midnight service of the New Year liturgically is to compare it with the Ember Days. We recall that Ember Wednesdays are consecrated to our Blessed Mother, Ember Fridays are days of penance and prayer for the past, and Ember Saturdays are days of thanksgiving and renewal concluding with a vigil service which leads into the Sunday. The New Year hour of prayer should contain practically the same themes, concluding with the ringing of the bells and assistance at midnight Mass. Further treatment of this material may be found in "Deo Gratias" by M. B. Hellriegel.

Today and on the Feast of the Holy Name, which is but a complement to the feast of the Circumcision (the Gospel is indeed the same), the name of the Saviour should be explained to the children. During Advent

Isaias called the Messiah Emmanuel, but this is not to be taken as a personal or proper name but rather as a symbolic name meaning "God with us." St. Paul always called Him the Christ-Jesus. The word "Christ" was not originally a proper name, but always designated Our Lord in virtue of His ministry as the Anointed One, the Redeemer. The name "Jesus" is His own personal name, which is preferred today by modern piety even though the "Christ-Jesus" of St. Paul is preferred by the objective piety of the liturgy. When we speak of "Christ" we think of the divine High Priest who renews His sacrifice upon the altar, or the divine King seated upon the throne of God, who shall come to judge the living and the dead. The proper name of the Lord, Jesus, refers more to the human side of Christ insofar as He was the God-Man who lived and died for us, who is the Good Shepherd leading our souls to heaven. It is because the name "Jesus" is proper to the God-Man that an inclination of the head is prescribed at that name rather than at the title of Christ. "At the name of Jesus all who are in heaven, on earth or in hell must bow; and all tongues must confess that our Lord Jesus-Christ is in the glory of the Father." (Introit of the Feast of the Holy Name). This is the only name by which salvation shall be attained.

Beside caroling and family festivity on these feast days of Mary and Jesus, a little guessing game may interest the children. About our various parish churches there are some mysterious signs whose meaning could be guessed. What is the meaning of the "Chi-Rho," the IHC and the IHS? Why should the fish be a symbol of Christ? What is the "Majestas Domini"? The Christmas tree recalls the meaning of PHOS and ZOE, which form a monogram in the form of a cross. The proper song for the day is naturally the simple little Vesper hymn of the Holy Name: "Jesus, the very Thought of Thee" (Jesu Dulcis Memoria). What happened to the decoration of the Scripture Cake? Well, of course, it must be decorated with one of the monograms of the name of Jesus. Perhaps it could even be shaped as a fish-mold with the ICTHUS written in red icing: Jesus-Christ, the Son of God, the Savior.

For the contentment and edification of the mother of the family and the little girls, it is well to point out that January 2 is the feast of St. Macarius, patron of pastry cooks and confectioners. Until middle life, St. Macarius the Younger was a sugarplum merchant. These sweetmeats were formerly used to designate candied fruits, but the word has come to be applied to all forms of pastry and candy. By making or eating sugarplums or glaceed fruits on his feast day, we can honor this patron--who became a great hermit and who was known for his kindness to animals.

ENDNOTES

1. Weller, *Ibid.*, p. 19.
2. P. 7.
3. "Cooking for Christ," p. 32.
4. P. 5.

CHAPTER 8

JANUARY 6: THE EPIPHANY

(Station at St. Peter's)

THE entire Christmas cycle may be compared with a trip up into the mountains. We start from the plain, slowly mounting the gentle grade of the time of Advent until we arrive at the first peak, the feast of Christmas. The liturgy clearly indicates that the feast of the Nativity marks the end of the penitential season of preparation for the coming of the Saviour. Despite this entry into the joyous feast days, however, we have felt constantly that there is a gradual ascent towards an even higher summit, that the true culmination of Advent preparation comes only with the great theophany, or manifestation of the Saviour as King of the Universe. This second great peak, which we reach by continuing our joyous walk along the crest of the range, is the great feast of the Epiphany. After this celebration we gradually descend again onto the plains, the ordinary or ferial days which complete the Christmas cycle and lead to its conclusion on the Feast of the Purification.

Another concept of the Christmas cycle which is very apparent in the liturgy is to view the entire winter season as the celebration of a great marriage feast. It is very probably true, historically, that the cycle of the Incarnation marks the conclusion of the liturgical year rather than its beginning. The age of the Church fathers was always turned toward the second coming of the Saviour at the end of time, when the Church becomes the heavenly Spouse of the Saviour for all eternity. Pius Parsch¹ has outlined this marriage festival in a very illuminating manner:

Subject of the Mystery: the manifestation by Grace of the Divine Groom.

A. The Drama begins (Advent): Preparations for the arrival of the Groom.

I. He comes:

1. He is seen in the distance (First Sunday in Advent);
2. Jerusalem, the Spouse (the Church) prepares for His arrival. (Second Sunday in Advent.)

II. He is already near:

1. First joy at His coming (Third Sunday in Advent);
2. The King vests in the humble garments of our human nature (Ember Days),
3. Last-minute preparations and ardent appeals of the Spouse (O Antiphons);
4. Before the eternal gates (The Vigil of Christmas.)

B. The high point of the drama

I. The King comes in His garment of a slave (Christmas);

1. His suite:
 - a. The martyr (St. Stephen);
 - b. The virgins (St. John the Apostle);
 - c. The children (virgin-martyrs. The Holy Innocents);
2. He looks towards the cross (Sunday in the Octave of Christmas).

II. The King comes in majesty (The Epiphany)

1. He assembles the guests for His nuptials (The Magi);
2. He purifies His spouse (Baptism in the Jordan) (Octave Day of the Epiphany);
3. He gives His nuptial banquet (Second Sunday after the Epiphany.)

III. The Spouse prepares her nuptial robe (Candlemas: the Purification).

C. The drama is completed (Sundays after the Epiphany);

- I. The Saviour: Gentiles and sinners enter into His kingdom (Third Sunday)
- II. The Conqueror: He calms the tempest of combat against Satan by His paschal victory (interior enemies) (Fourth Sunday)
- III. The Wise Judge: He separates the good and the evil at the end of time (Exterior enemies) psalm 96: (Fifth Sunday);
- IV. The increase of His Kingdom: (Sixth Sunday)

Exteriorly: as the mustard seed which becomes a great tree whose branches are inhabited by the birds (all the peoples),

Interiorly: as the yeast which penetrates the entire loaf (the whole being of men) and increases the dough in size (the Church as the ever-growing Mystical Body of Christ).

According to either one of these very profound and penetrating symbols, King and Bridegroom, we easily realize that we have arrived at the great climax of the Christmas cycle. The Epiphany is the feast of Christ the King. He is manifested (as we see in the choice of the stational church of the world, St. Peter's), as God and Man, as the Saviour, King and Messiah who shall redeem all nations. He gathers them into the bosom of His Church, the Spouse, in order to incorporate them all into His Mystical Body which is so agreeable to the heavenly Father. The establishment of the kingdom of Christ is the perfect creative work of the most Holy Trinity by which all men enter the intimate life of God for eternity.

All these theological considerations may seem to be impractical in our effort to teach children to know and to love God by means of the liturgy. In point of fact, it is most necessary to understand Scripture, tradition and theology if we are to guide children with a sure hand. The feast of the Epiphany is Oriental in tone and is above all a feast of the Saviour. Whereas Christmas is the intimate celebration of the Christian family, the Epiphany is a world-wide feast of the universal Church. At Matins of the Epiphany, Pope St. Leo distinguishes these feasts with classical precision: "He who on that day the Virgin bore, on this, the world acknowledged."

On the feast of Christmas we celebrate an historical event. The people rejoice at the thought that Christ is born, and gather about the manger to sing Him carols of Christian love and homage. Few seem to meditate upon the directive idea of the feast: the coming of the Redeemer. On the feast of the Epiphany there is less celebration of an event than of an idea: the world recognizes Christ as God. On Christmas we celebrate the fact that God actually became man and dwelt among us. This is an historical fact, the most magnificent and important fact of all history. But it is quite another matter, and one which requires proof, to show that this Man, this humble Child, is God. This is the very reason for the feast of the Epiphany: to manifest that Jesus, the Son of Mary, is the Son of God. The birth of Christ would have little meaning for us unless we were to recognize that He is God. This is the reason why this second great peak of the cycle is truly a theophany. It is in proof that the Second Person of the Trinity appeared in the world not only by assuming our human nature, but also manifested Himself as God, in His divine nature and personality.

How did Christ manifest to the world that He is God? The signs and miracles of Christ had but one purpose: to demonstrate to man that He was the Son of God. Indeed, His entire life on earth is a manifestation of His divinity. During the Christmas cycle, three important miracles are used by the Church to prove the divinity of Christ:

"A day holy and adorned with three mysteries we are celebrating:

- (1) This day a star has led the Magi to the manger,
- (2) This day wine has been made from water at the wedding;
- (3) This day at the Jordan Christ willed to be baptized in order to save us, alleluia."

--Antiphon to the Magnificat, second vespers of the Epiphany

The West has nearly always been impressed with the historical event of the arrival of the Magi at the crib. There is a profound reason for this. The Magi were the first pagans who received faith to recognize the Son of God; we of the West, the successors of these Gentiles, celebrate the gift of faith which came to the pagan world. Since the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth, the Church, we receive both faith and grace through the Spouse to whom God confided the keys of His kingdom.

Whereas we Christians of the West prefer to call the Epiphany the feast of the Kings, oriental Christians call it the feast of the Jordan. If we wish to understand the feast more deeply it will be necessary to consider the customs of Oriental wedding feasts. In the East whenever a great sovereign visits a city in solemnity he is received after many preparations and only after the city has been decorated and illuminated. Upon his arrival over the principal highway into the city he declares a sumptuous feast and offers many gifts and privileges to the inhabitants. This is called an "apparition" or an "epiphany" at which all the elements of magnificence and munificence are displayed. In the event of a royal wedding feast the arrival of the groom-king would require even greater solemnity. The several days which are required in order to celebrate Oriental marriage-feasts long since became a symbol of happy and opulent life. The Offertory and the Communion banquets are readily symbolized by the wedding festivities.

The baptism of Christ marks, at the very outset of His public life, the consecration of His mission of vicarious atonement. The redemption of humanity by the waters of baptism is shown by His offering to make satisfaction in our place for offenses against God. He who is without sin takes on the sins of the world in order that His Spouse, the Church, which is His kingdom on earth, may be purified from all sin, original and actual. His substitution for the Church at the Baptism in the Jordan is truly a substitution for all of us. The public acts of redemption begin with His baptism in the Jordan. The marriage feast at Cana recalls the first miracle which He performed at the beginning of His public career during which he manifested that He is truly God, the Messiah who has come, the Redeemer of all mankind. At the Epiphany, Christ celebrates His marriage with the Church and with our souls. The light of faith and of grace shines as brilliant as the noonday sun over the manger.

Our Christmas tree takes on a new meaning. Light is at its fullest through the faith which comes through baptism and purifies us from the darkness of sin; life comes from our offering of human gifts which are transformed into the Eucharist at the sacrificial feast of Christ the King. The entire mystery is concisely and superbly expressed in the antiphon to the Benedictus of the Epiphany:

"This day hath the Church been joined to her heavenly Spouse, for Christ hath cleansed her crimes in the Jordan; with gifts the Magi hasten to the royal nuptials, and the guests are gladdened with wine made from water, alleluia."

In view of the foregoing considerations, we readily comprehend why it is that the Advent preparation is really completed only by the Feast of the Epiphany. The purpose of Advent is the preparation of our souls for union with Christ as our Redeemer, that we may witness His manifestation as God and the Messiah who found His kingdom that all men may be saved. This is the fundamental reason why it would be more to the point to send Epiphany rather than Christmas cards, and that the exchange of presents belongs essentially to the Epiphany. The Magi represent our gift to God in return for the perfect gift of union which He has given us.

The Epiphany is such a glorious and significant feast that it is impossible to celebrate it within the space of a single day. An entire octave, and several successive Sundays are necessary in order that we may be able to assimilate and comprehend all of the content of the feast. In much the same way that the Church allows us twenty-four Sundays after the feast of Pentecost to meditate upon the operation of the Holy Spirit in the

Church, so she extends the celebration of the Epiphany for six Sundays in order that we may celebrate their nuptials and learn about the extension of the kingdom of Christ. During the octave itself there are many intervening highlights. These various feasts and Sundays could be taken separately, but since they form an integral part of the feast itself and are contained therein, it would seem expedient to offer a wealth of material for the children, leaving a choice of emphasis from one year to another. We shall make only a most general division realizing that what is in itself one great feast must be taken in succession because of the immensity of its symbolism and importance.

THE TWELFTH NIGHT

(January 5)

Twelfth Night is more a feast day than a vigil, and has lost all character of penance. The Mass of the day, with the exception of the gospel is the same as that of the Sunday within the Octave of the Nativity, and we find it in its proper place as a transition between Christmas and the Epiphany. Since time immemorial it has been an evening of plays, parties and carnivals: for adults, Falstaff and Sir Toby Belch are found at rollicking parties. A more serious and joyful meaning should be attached to the vigil because of the splendid symbolism and total joy of abandon which the feast contains.

During the twelve days after Christmas the crib has occupied a central place in the home; perhaps the Magi were seen in some far-off easterly corner of the room gradually approaching the Christ-Child. This evening it is time to rearrange the crib and to transform it into a throne worthy of the Mighty King: "Behold the Lord, the Ruler is come: and the Kingdom is in His Hand, and power, and dominion." Let the children scout around the house for some pieces of gold, some regal tapestry, or whatever else may be considered as worthy of the Infant King. Gold cloth and purple or red velvet line the crib; the Savior receives a crown and a royal sceptre, and the entire crib should take on the character of a throne-room. These changes in the aspect of the crib are easy and simple but their meaning brings across the significance of this feast of Christ the King very forcibly to the children. The contrast between the quiet, home-like and humble arrival at Christmas and the triumphant world manifestation at the Epiphany is eloquently expressed in this simple custom.

The mass of the feast may be prepared before the crib. It is one of the most beautiful and moving Masses of the entire year: the lesson from Isaiah is a summary of all the Advent preparation; the gospel shows how all nations adore the Savior and bring Him gifts. The entire family should bring their gifts neatly wrapped in beautiful Christmas motifs--fit for a king--and place them before the crib. The mother and father add to these gifts an offering of gold, frankincense and myrrh for the blessing the following morning. Looking ahead just a little we recall the beautiful Epiphany blessing of the symbolic gifts of the Magi after the Mass of the Epiphany. It would be a beautiful custom if the children were to bring their own gifts for family and friends and the poor to Mass the following morning, offering them to the Christ-Child for His blessing. If they are too large, perhaps the greeting cards which are often tied on to the packages could be taken to Mass as symbols of the gifts. The children will readily understand how their gifts thus assume a spiritual and sacramental value which they did not previously possess, and that the Advent sacrifices which made these gifts possible, are offered to God.

The responsory to the first lesson of Matins during the octave tells us very succinctly the meaning of the gifts of the Magi:

"There were three precious gifts which the Magi offered the Lord in that day, and they contain in them a divine mystery:

Gold, that it may show His Kingly power,

Incense, that we may recognize Him as the great high Priest; and

Myrrh, in honor of the burial of the Lord."

St. Gregory the Great offers us a very beautiful explanation of these symbolic gifts in his homily on the third day within the octave:

"The Magi offer gold, frankincense, and myrrh. God indeed is fitting for a king; incense is offered in sacrifice to God, while the bodies of the deceased are embalmed with myrrh. Therefore the Wise Men proclaim also by their mystic gifts Him whom they adore: by the gold they proclaim Him King; by frankincense, God; by myrrh, a mortal Man. However, there are some heretics who believe that He is God, but by no means believe that He reigns over all. These indeed offer Him frankincense, but they do not wish to offer Him gold too. And there are some who recognize Him as King, but deny that He is God. Hence these offer Him gold, but will not offer incense.

"And there are some who acknowledge Him both as God and King, but they deny that He assumed mortal flesh. These, of course, offer Him gold and frankincense, but they refuse to offer the myrrh of assumed mortality. Let us, therefore, offer gold to our newborn Lord, that we may confess that He reigns over all; let us offer frankincense that we may believe that He who has appeared in time, existed as God before all times; let us offer myrrh in order that we may believe that He whom we knew to be immortal in His divinity also became mortal in our flesh.

"However, in the gold, frankincense, and myrrh something else can also be understood. For by gold wisdom is designated, as Solomon testifies, who says: 'A desirable treasure abideth in the mouth of the wise.' But by frankincense, which is burned unto God the power of prayer is expressed, as the Psalmist testifies, who says: 'Let my prayer be directed as incense in thy sight.' And by myrrh the mortification of our flesh is symbolized. From this Holy Church says of her laborers who strive for God even unto death: 'My hands have dropped myrrh.'"

Gold, frankincense and myrrh are blessed in church in memory of the symbolic gifts of the wise men. Gold may be offered for the sacred vessels of the parish, incense may be brought home to be used at family prayer; myrrh may be used on the little cuts and sores which occur so often in the family. What a beautiful day for the blessing of gold rings and medals and other little sacramentals! A note could be added here regarding the blessed chalk, but we shall speak of this later along with the blessing of the home.

After an explanation of the meaning of their gifts, it would be an excellent time before the children go to bed to tell them one or two little Epiphany stories. Besides the story of the "Other Wise Man" which we mentioned before, there is the charming story of the old woman who was cleaning her house as the Magi passed by. She asked them to wait for her until she had finished her work, but they were unable to delay, and she could not catch up with them. Of course, the real reason for her delay was that she wanted to wrap up a nice little gift for the Child. Ever since that time she is said to wander all over the world, seeking the Christ Child in order to give Him her gift. In Italy, as Befana (a corruption of Epiphany), she leaves many gifts at the homes of children in the hope that she may find the Child whom she seeks. Another interesting story is told in the "Feast Day Cook Book" (op. cit. p. 13): "When Mary heard the tramping feet of the camels, she picked her baby up and held him close, fearing that someone had come to take him from her. And so the Wise Men found them exactly as they had been foretold. When they went home again, the story continues, they resigned their high offices and estates and went forth to teach the gospel of the Prince of Peace; and years afterward Saint Thomas found them in India, baptized them and ordained them priests. Later they were martyred, and the Empress Helena is said to have found their bones and enshrined them in the Cathedral of Saint Sophia in Constantinople. During the crusades these relics were taken to Milan and later to Cologne where today they are to be found in the cathedral of that city in a chest of gold incrustured with jewels."

THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

(January 6)

An Epiphany party, topping all home celebrations of the season should be held during the Octave of the Feast. Perhaps the children would like to dress up in the costumes of the Wise Men for their caroling during the week. Little could be added to the charming description of such an occasion given by Florence Berger in "Cooking for Christ."

"Then comes the greater feast of the Epiphany when the 'Gentiles shall walk in Thy light and kings in the brightness of Thy Rising.' It was amazing to find how many of our friends and our children's friends had never heard of the Epiphany. Some were Catholics who had never realized that this day is really the Gentile's Christmas, our day of Christ's manifestation. They had heard of 'Twelfth Night,' but only as a night of feasting. Why there was feasting they had never thought to ask. Some were non-Catholics who had never heard of the three kings and their gifts. For this reason, we always plan to do a little entertaining and a little manifesting as well.

"One year it was a children's party. As the young guests arrived they were introduced with due pomp and ceremony to the three kings who stood in state on a velvet-covered table. The kings' hair and features were made with floss, and their regal clothing was cut from cast-off Christmas wrappings.

"Next we told the children of a great star which had appeared in the sky, and 'when the Wise Men saw the star, they said to one another: "This is the sign of the Great King; let us go and search for Him, and offer Him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh.'" Freddie was the gift bearer. The rest of the group was divided into three sections, each belonging to one of the kings. They pretended to be camel drivers or soldiers, or retinues.

"Then began the exciting journey. The children had made a paper road to Bethlehem beset with pitfalls and terrors. The kings advanced much as the pawns in Parcheesi, but such troubles they had! Camels were sloughed in the mud of the Jordan, robbers lay in wait near Jericho. Still the kings advanced with their rooting retinues until they found the crowned Christ child in the crib under the Christmas tree.

"For refreshment we served the traditional Twelfth Cake. Ann was our baker.

1 cup shortening	1/2 teaspoon salt
2-2/3 cups sugar	1-1/2 cups milk
5-1/2 cups flour	2 teaspoons vanilla
5 teaspoons baking powder	6 beaten egg whites

Cream shortening and sugar. Add milk alternately with sifted dry ingredients. Fold in beaten egg whites. Add vanilla. Bake in three 9-inch greased layer tins in a moderate oven (375 degrees) for about 30 minutes.

"Ann topped the cake with a beautiful crown of gum drops. Inside the cake, she hid three beans. The child who received a piece of cake with one of the beans became one of the kings for the rest of the party. Anyone who forgot to address him by his correct and kingly name had to give a forfeit. This was religious education which appealed to eye, ear, nose, touch, taste and tummy."²

With very little imagination, parents and teachers could interest the children in many variants of this party. Instead of the division of the group of children into soldiers, camel drivers, and attendants of the kings, there could be found on the table surrounding the Twelfth Cake a series of little shells. Under each shell could be hidden a symbol of St. Stephen, St. John the Baptist, St. John the Apostle, Isaiah, the Holy Innocents, St. Agnes, St. Lucy, St. Cecilia, or any other of the host of attendants in the suite of the Great King. After the cake had been eaten and the kings chosen, each of the other children chooses a shell, lifting it up to discover what character he should assume for the party, and be costumed or be given a symbol of the one whom he represents. When the kings arrive at the crib, each of the children tell whom they represent and what they would like to offer the Christ-Child. Later on in the evening the kings assign tasks to their "subjects" corresponding to their own gifts: gold symbolizing wisdom and love, frankincense symbolizing

prayer, and myrrh symbolizing self-denial. In this manner the forfeits themselves assume a spiritual meaning.

In some homes, an Epiphany play could be acted out or pantomimed. The "Epiphany" feast day book, published by Grailville, offers a suggested outline: "The play could begin with a Prologue in which the liturgical meaning of the feast of the Epiphany is explained either as a talk or reading. The first scene would be the visit of the Magi to Bethlehem. The narrator can read the passage from the gospel (Matthew, Chapter 2) while several of the members act it out in pantomime. The second scene, the baptism of Christ in the Jordan (John 1:24-34) and the third scene, the miracle at the wedding feast of Cana (John 2:1-12) could be pantomimed or symbolically interpreted. The fourth scene is the manifestation of Christ on the last day. One person can stand holding a large cross, while the ten virgins dressed in white kneel before it with burning candles in their hands. The narrator reads the gospel of the second coming of Christ (Matthew 24:15-35). This scene can end with all standing and singing the 'Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat.' Before each scene the people could sing the appropriate verse of the hymn, 'We Have Come With Our Gifts.' It may be well to end the play with a few final words on the spirit of Epiphany in relation to the lay apostolate. The speaker can, for example, stress that the Divinity and Kingship of Christ must again in our time be recognized in every sphere of life, and that it is our task as Christians of the twentieth century to manifest Christ to all nations."

Out in the yard, the children would enjoy making snow men in the form of the three Wise Men, and then sing carols in the evening in their honor. A little competition among the children of the various homes and classes would make it doubly interesting. Among the songs which could be chosen for the feast, perhaps the most appropriate would include the American carol, "We Three Kings From Orient Are," translations of the Latin carols, "A Child is Born in Bethlehem" and "He Whom Joyous Shepherds Praised," the old English carol to the tune of "Greensleeves," "What Child is This?" and the traditional "Twelve Days of Christmas." If parents are a little more ingenious, perhaps the children could be taught the Latin of the responsory of Terce for either Christmas or the Epiphany, and its meaning explained to them. At the party, however, a great deal of life could be added by two songs. One is the traditional Swedish dance carol, "Yuletide is Here Again," which should be danced, and the other is the intriguing "Green Grow the Rushes, Ho!" In this last song, we learn that "five is for the symbols at your door," and this leads us to the wonderful custom of the blessing of homes on the Epiphany and the placing of the symbols of the Magi Saints at the doors. We shall speak of this a little later.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Since the octave day of the Epiphany is chiefly concerned with the beginning of the public life of the Saviour by His baptism in the Jordan, this Sunday occupies the position of bridging the gap between the childhood of Christ and His public ministry. The Church today progresses in the development of the Christ-life by offering us the example of the youthful Christ at the age of twelve: the finding in the temple. The gospel especially tells us the reason for His manifestation: He is come to do the Will of His Father.

This important manifestation of the Saviour on the first Sunday after Epiphany has been supplanted in modern times by the Feast of the Holy Family, even though the same gospel has been retained. Modern piety has seen fit to offer a subject of meditation and a moral lesson by the idealization of the Holy Family, whereas the ancient Church preferred to see another manifestation of the redemptive actions of the Messiah. Both of these ways of presenting Christ to us are valid and good, even though the ancient manner would seem to be more in accord with the spirit of the Epiphany. For Our Lord manifests His "glory" at each important turn in His life: at the Incarnation, by means of the visit of the angel to Mary, and by her visit to her cousin Elizabeth; at His birth by the "Gloria" of the angelic hosts, the visit of the shepherds, and by the star which led the Magi; at His presentation, by the prophecy of Simeon; at the age of twelve, which we celebrate today, by the affirmation of His divinity in the temple at the very age when He attained majority; at the age of thirty, when He began His public ministry, by the manifestation of the entire Trinity at His baptism in the Jordan; by the miracle at Cana, when He performed His first public action. The reason for these manifestations is in order to recall to our minds the important steps in the Redemption, and to renew these

manifestations each year by an increase in grace. It is noteworthy, as well, that since Mary is the Mediatrix of all graces, in the majority of His manifestations she is close by, participator and co-offerer in His sacrifice.

Today should be a family feast "par excellence," since the day is devoted entirely to a consideration of the Holy Family as a model for Christian family life. The children must learn to see in their father the foster-father St. Joseph, and the Blessed Mother as the perfect model for their own mother. The lesson to be learned is both practical and theoretical, in that the children must learn how to obey and to love their parents in thought, word and action, just as Christ was obedient to Mary and Joseph. Helping mother in the kitchen and in the house work, and helping father in his odd jobs about the home thus take on a new significance by being performed in a Christ-like spirit.

The family assembles today for the recitation of the Joyous Mysteries of the Rosary in honor of the Holy Family. The Annunciation is brought to our minds several times during the year (March 25; the Immaculate Conception; the Holy Name of Mary; the "Missa Aurea" on the Ember Wednesday in Advent). The Visitation is celebrated twice: during the Friday in Advent Ember Week and on July second as a special feast. The Nativity is celebrated at Midnight Mass; the Presentation in the temple is celebrated on Candlemas Day, which concludes the Christmas Cycle, and the Finding in the Temple is celebrated today. The Rosary in common today would constitute a veritable summary of the Christmas Cycle. It could be followed by hymns in honor of Mary and Joseph.

As the children get a little older, and begin to approach twelve years of age, the Gospel today recalls to their minds the great sacrament of Confirmation. The work which Christ came to perform in the world was confirmed and manifested by the coming of the Holy Spirit on the occasion of His baptism, and even at the age of twelve years when He first came of age His wisdom was manifested to the doctors in the temple. We recall from our reading during Advent how the Messiah who was to come would be filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Isaias 11:1-2). The boys and girls of today, in imitation of Christ at the age of twelve, must be taught to assume the responsibilities of bearing Christ to others and to manifest the faith and the grace which they have received at Baptism and Confirmation.

COMMEMORATION OF THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

(January 13)

The second mystery which is celebrated in the triple manifestation of the feast is accentuated principally on January 13. In the Orient, to be sure, the manifestation of Christ is principally associated with baptism, in remembrance of the baptism of Christ in the Jordan. "This day the heavens were opened, and the sea was made sweet; because that Christ is baptized of John in the Jordan." According to an ancient tradition which is often cited by the Fathers of the Church, Christ hallowed all the waters of the earth through His baptism. From the lighted candle held at baptism, the Greeks gave the feast the name "Feast of Lights"; indeed we read in the second nocturn of the octave day that "Christ is enlightened, or rather He enlightens us with His own effulgence; Christ is baptized, let us also descend at the same time, so that with Him we may likewise ascend (Sermon of St. Gregory Nazianzen)." The Latin rite has adopted a blessing of water for the Feast of the Epiphany, and this prayer was officially introduced on December 6, 1890. The Bishop or celebrant, preceded by acolytes with processional cross and lighted candles, proceeds before the altar for the solemn blessing of the water which is to be used for the blessing of homes during the season of the Epiphany ("Roman Ritual").

Before we proceed with the blessing of the home, which is the important element in our participation in the liturgy of the day, there is another most interesting blessing which takes place after Holy Mass on the Epiphany. Chalk is blessed and distributed to the parishioners that they might write the names of the Three Wise Men over the lintels of their doors during the blessing of their homes:

"Bless, O Lord God, this creature chalk to render it helpful to men. Grant that they who use it in faith and with it inscribe upon the entrance of their homes the names of thy saints, Caspar, Melchior, and Baltassar may through their merits and intercession enjoy health of body and protection of soul. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."³

The custom of going from room to room in the home, blessing it, and inscribing the names of the Magi over the door probably originated in the words of the gospel, "and entering into the house, they found the child with Mary, His Mother, and falling down they adored Him." The blessing is often given from the doors of the parish church in the four directions of the parish in the event that the parish is too large to be visited during the octave. At each home, however, it would be a splendid practice for all of the members of the family and their guests to receive this blessing from their pastor, or at least to receive the blessed water and chalk and then to proceed to the private blessing of their individual homes. The prayers, including the antiphon to the "Magnificat," are most inspiring:

"From the East came the Magi to Bethlehem to adore the Lord; and opening their treasures, they offered costly gifts: gold to the great King, incense to the true God, and myrrh in symbol of His burial. Alleluia....

"Let us pray.

"O God, Who by the guidance of a star didst this day reveal thy Sole-Begotten Son to the Gentiles, grant that we who now know thee by faith may be brought to the contemplation of thy heavenly majesty. Through the same Jesus Christ....

Responsory: "Be enlightened and shine forth, O Jerusalem, for thy light is come, and upon thee is risen the glory of the Lord, Jesus Christ born of the Mary Virgin.

V. "Nations shall walk in thy light, and kings in the brilliance of thy origin.

R. "And the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.

"Let us pray.

"Bless, O Lord, almighty God this home that it be the shelter of health, chastity, self-conquest, humility, goodness, mildness, obedience to the commandments, and thanksgiving to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. May blessing remain for all time upon this dwelling and them that live herein. Through Christ our Lord. Amen."⁴

As the home is being blessed, by the sprinkling of the Epiphany water, and then incensed during the chanting of the Magnificat, the lintels of the doors are inscribed with the number of the "Year of the Lord" and the initials of the Magi: who were traditionally named Kaspar, Melchior and Balthassar, e.g., 19 K M B 55. (The first initial "K" is sometimes varied with "C" for Caspar in English, or "G" for Gasparis in Latin). These "symbols at the door" remind all who enter and leave that they should as the Magi be ready to leave everything, and to follow the star of the Nativity.

The "Roman Ritual" has been our guide for the celebration of the octave day of the Epiphany. Truly, the blessing of homes is really intended to take place on the feast itself as well as during the octave. The blessing of water should take place on the vigil of the feast. But since the allusion to the baptism of Christ is principally accentuated in the Roman liturgy on the octave day, we have placed the explanation of both the blessing of the water and of homes at this point. The feast is to be taken as a unity, but our discussion of the details must be taken successively.

Even though we have accentuated the ritualistic blessings on this day, we may easily conceive how the children may be instructed and brought to participation in these excellent sacramentals. The blessing of the home naturally requires quite an occasion for the children, and gaiety could be given to the feast by having the children mark the doors and sing Epiphany hymns, giving an extra spirit of liveliness by the singing of "Green Grow the Rushes, Ho!" By the time that parents and teachers have answered all the questions which these home ceremonies shall have occasioned, the spiritual and educational content of the day will have been plumbed.

ENDNOTES

1. "Das Jahr des Heiles," I Band, pp. 25-26.
2. Berger, op. cit., pp. 32-33.
3. "Roman Ritual," p. 39.
4. Ibid., pp. 39-43.

CHAPTER 9

FEBRUARY 2: FEAST OF THE PURIFICATION

CANDLEMAS DAY

CANDLEMAS is the last feast day of the Christmas cycle, and constitutes a transition between the seasons of Christmas and Easter. Even though the feast is named for the Purification of the Blessed Mother which occurred forty days after the birth of the Saviour, the day is consecrated principally to the Presentation of the Child in the Temple. The understanding of the importance of this presentation depends upon our realization of the meaning of the feast as the third high point in the cycle, along with Christmas and the Epiphany. The Latin rite tends to follow a stricter chronology in presenting the life of Christ in the liturgical year, and we have seen already that owing to the introduction of the feast of the Epiphany from the Greeks, the manifestation of the Saviour included not only the visit of the Magi, which may have occurred even two years after His birth, but also His baptism and His first miracle at the marriage feast of Cana. If we were to be less preoccupied by exact chronology and seek rather the meaning and symbolism of the feasts, we should find a splendid progression in the three major feasts of the Christmas cycle. This progression may be seen both in the symbol of light and in the participation of humanity in the manifestation of the Redeemer. Pius Parsch has explained the meaning of the feast of the Purification with remarkable lucidity:

"At Christmas time, the Light 'shines in the darkness' and there are only a few who 'receive it' (the Mother of God, the shepherds). At the Epiphany, the Light shines over Jerusalem (the Church), 'the glory of the Lord is risen over Jerusalem,' and the pagan world gathers together from the darkness towards the city of light. Today, on Candlemas Day, the Light is in our hands, we carry it in procession at the Mass; light today is an essential part of the liturgy. It is also to be noted, however, that today the Church advances as a Spouse before the Lord and 'lovingly receives Mercy (become Man) in her arms (Introit of the Mass).' It is precisely this progression which makes this feast so beautiful. At Christmas, the Church is still in the background, the Divine King who is born dominates the entire liturgy; at the Epiphany, the Church appears as the Spouse 'clothed in the vestment of salvation as a Bride adorned with jewels.' The liturgy celebrates her marriage. Today, the feast signalizes an important step: the Bride decorates her nuptial chamber, and goes forth to meet the Bridegroom. This is why we sing the nuptial chant (First Antiphon of the Procession at Candlemas).

'O Daughter of Sion, adorn thy bridal chamber
And welcome Christ the King;
Embrace Mary, for she who is the very gate of heaven
Bringeth to thee the glorious King of the new light.
Remaining ever Virgin, in her arms she bears her Son
Begotten before the day-star,
Whom Simeon receiving into his arms, declares unto all
peoples
To be the Lord of life and of death and the Saviour of
the world.'"1

This participation of humanity in the manifestation of the Saviour is the very essence of the feast. The Greeks call the feast the Hypapante, the Meeting, since all men meet the Saviour in the temple (the Church). "Behold the sovereign Lord comes into His holy temple; Sion, go before thy God, full of joy and gladness (Invitatory of Matins)." Psalm 47 dominates the entire Mass of the day: "We have received thy mercy in the midst of thy temple."

The symbolism of light is very closely associated with the meeting of humanity with the Redeemer, for light represents Christ and the divine life in us through grace. The feast, indeed, was originally instituted to replace the pagan "Lupercalia" in honor of the goddess Februa. In ancient Rome the month was dedicated to the gods of the underworld, and candles represented Ceres who was trying to find her daughter Proserpina, stolen from her by Pluto and carried by him to the lower world. Outrageous feasts were held

during the night by the light of flaming torches, and it is in reparation for the immorality of these feasts that the Church uses violet vestments for the blessing of the candles. The feast of the presentation of the Saviour and the Purification of the Virgin Mother is a splendid manner of teaching the Christian the virginal purity of the Christ-life received by grace. Candles are blessed today for the liturgical ceremonies of the Church, but it is most important to note that they are placed in the hands of the faithful, recalling the baptismal candle of Eastertide, and reminding us to be prepared with lighted lamps in order to go before the Bridegroom when He comes for the heavenly nuptials.

The blessing of the candles is one of the most beautiful ceremonies of the entire year: "A light for the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." We carry in procession today the lighted candles, symbol of the Christian life and reminder of how we must be Christophers, Christ-bearers. As members of the Bride we sing the nuptial antiphon as the procession returns to the altar, greeting the Lord and Saviour. The candles are kept lighted during the Gospel and during the Canon of the Mass, since at those times the Bridegroom is with us by His Word and by His Sacramental Presence. Christ is given to the church that she may bring all nations to Him and manifest His mercy and His glory to the end of time.

The Mass of the Feast today is devoted to the Presentation of the Child and to the Purification of the Virgin Mother. Mary had no need to fulfill the ancient prescription for the purification of the mother after childbirth, since she was full of grace and was conceived without original sin. In her humility, however, and as the type of mothers whose first desire is to return to the Church after their period is over, she comes to offer God the sacrifice of the poor: two turtle-doves. For the Infant Saviour, however, His Presentation is really the Offertory of His holy Sacrifice. God the Father did not liberate His only-begotten Son: it was He who is to liberate mankind from the dominion of sin and of Satan. Today, the divine Lamb is, so to speak, placed upon the paten and offered as a pure and spotless Victim to the Heavenly Father. It is at this point that we see how the feast of Candlemas is the link between the seasons of Christmas and Easter. During the Easter Cycle, Christ will consummate His sacrifice by His death and resurrection; today He is offered as the Victim to be slain, and who the Church as the Bride is invited to unite with His sacrifice in perfect communion of charity.

Vespers and Compline of the Feast of the Purification are of incomparable beauty. If we examine vespers closely, we find that the antiphons and the chapter show how all of the ardent desires of Advent have been fulfilled: the commission of the Son by God the Father to save the world, the yearning of Isaias for the heavenly Dew, the sighs of the "O" Antiphons, the preparation of the ways by St. John the Baptist, and finally the birth of the Saviour and His recognition as God by Simeon:

"O wondrous exchange! the Creator of man, having assumed a living body, deigned to be born of a virgin, and having become man without man's aid, enriched us with His divinity.

"By Thy ineffable birth of a Virgin the Scriptures were fulfilled; like rain upon the grass Thou has descended to save mankind; Thee our God we praise.

"We recognize in the bush which Moses saw burning and yet not burnt, thy virginity gloriously preserved; O mother of God, intercede for us.

"The root of Jesse germinated, a star is risen out of Jacob, a Virgin gave birth to the Saviour; we praise

"Behold, Mary hath given birth to the Saviour whom John seeing, exclaimed: "Behold the Lamb of God; behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world.

Chapter: Malachy 3:1: "Behold I send My Angel, and He shall prepare the way before My face. And presently the Lord whom you seek and the Angel of the testament whom you desire shall come to His temple."

--From the first vespers of the feast

"Today the blessed Virgin Mary presented the Child Jesus in the temple: and Simeon, filled by the Holy Spirit, accepted Him in his arms, and blessed God for all eternity. (Ant. to the Magnificat of Second Vespers of the Feast)."

The figure of Simeon is very moving. All during his lifetime he had awaited the coming of the Saviour, for he had been promised that before the end of his days he should see the Messiah. Today, rejuvenated by the presence of the Child, he sings his even-song: "Now dost Thou dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, in peace according to Thy Word. . ." This song of Simeon has been adopted by the Church as a canticle at the close of the day: may we, too, be able to receive the Saviour into our arms at the end of our days. He is our salvation, our light throughout the way, our glory and our eternal reward. There is no greater assurance of eternal life, nor of a life well-spent in the service of God: it is the perfect night prayer for each day, especially at the close of our lifetime.

The completion of the drama of the Christmas Cycle is achieved in the remaining Sundays after the Epiphany (3-6). The Saviour, as conqueror and judge, protects His Bride, the Church, from all enemies, interior and exterior, and extends her realm to include even Gentiles and sinners. She is compared with the mustard seed and the yeast, ever growing until the end of time, penetrating more deeply and entirely into the souls of all men. It is she who prepares all humanity for the Second Coming of the King which is foretold in the gospel of the First Sunday in Advent: at the end of time the Kingdom of Christ, His Mystical Body, shall be complete and eternal in the everlasting union of heaven.

* * *

This rather lengthy introduction to our celebration of the feast of the Purification may seem to be slightly out of place, since our principal concern here is to offer suggestions whereby children may be instructed by means of the liturgy of the Church. Candlemas, however, at the present time would seem to be one of those great festivals whose real import is not well understood. It appears to many as a second-rate Christmas feast, often overshadowed by the time of Septuagesima. Few see its significance as the finale of the Christmas drama and the logical transition to the cycle of Easter. It is very important to restore this third climactic feast, and without the theoretical and theological knowledge necessary for thorough understanding it would be impossible for parents and teachers to attempt to convey its beauty to children.

The great advantage of the Candlemas, in comparison with two other great feasts of the season, is that it allows a direct participation by the children in the liturgy itself, rather than simple home celebrations based upon liturgical sources. Pastors of souls should indeed seize every opportunity to have parishioners and children take part actively with lighted candles in both the procession and the Mass on Candlemas Day. It may require a little ingenuity to protect carpets and pews from a slight coating of wax, but the result is worth all the effort: let the little ones come with lighted lamps in the suite of the Spouse who comes to meet her Lord and Saviour! Therese Mueller finds that "the rites of the blessing and the prayers of the procession are so beautiful that we should repeat them at home in the evening, when the family members who could not attend the morning service are present. Each one carries his own candle lighted--Baby's is put in a safe place and burns too--so we go singing and praying, led by the father of the family, through all our rooms, blessing them and our life and work in them for the coming year. 'Hear thy people, O Lord, we beseech thee, and grant us to obtain those things inwardly by the light of grace, which thou grantest us outwardly to venerate by this annual devotion (Prayer preceding the procession).' The candles can be used often; not only on sick days, in sorrow, or temptation, but on all feast days, anniversaries, name days, and before important personal decisions. The symbolism of light is one which the Church uses constantly in her liturgy. Why should we not, too, make frequent use of this beautiful symbol in our homes."2

Mothers should be especially interested in this feast of the Purification. One day the children will be grown-ups, and if today mothers rejoice with Mary at the successful deliverance of their children, they realize, too, that the children are gifts of God who must be reconsecrated to the glory of God. Their vocation in life and their early training are subjects of the deepest concern for apostolic families who desire to see the Christian life carried to the far corners of the earth. The Christ-bearing manners and customs of the family, in cooperation with divine grace, have a great deal to do with the bringing of the light of Christ to others. Where parents are Christophers, religious vocations often abound, and all of the children, God willing, by word,

deed and example carry their lighted candle of baptismal purity to bring themselves and others to the eternal Feast.

Grailville has published a very useful booklet for the celebration of Candlemas in the parish, at home, and in apostolic groups. One of the suggestions which is made for the celebration of the feast is a candle-making project. Mothers may consider this a rather messy prospect, with wax distributed all over the kitchen; however, most mothers do expect the children to muss things up nearly every day, and the suggestion of candle-making should be well-taken. There are many craft books in libraries which describe how to make hand-dipped tapers. Participation of the children in the making of an object which so often serves a sacramental usage will be found very helpful to parents in their effort to explain the symbolism of the candle. The Paschal candle is often explained by comparing the wax of the candle to the body of Christ, the wick to His soul, and the light to His divinity. In the process of making the candles, their usage could be discussed. This leaves a wide-open field for candles are used in nearly every liturgical function, and at the administration of nearly all of the sacraments. Even colored Advent, Christmas and Hallowe'en candles should be made in preparation for Candlemas, for this is the feast on which the Church extends her blessing upon all the candles which she uses, with the exception of the Paschal Candle on Holy Saturday. I believe that it should be found very interesting, indeed, to have the children use their imagination in anticipation of future feasts, with appropriate decorations for candles which may not be used, say, until next All Hallows' Eve! At the same time, there is perhaps no better way to teach children to respect light and fire than to have them actually make the candles. It presents an excellent opportunity to give a practical lesson concerning the usage of matches. If candles came to be used frequently in the home these sacramentals would be respected and loved, and the children would automatically take proper precautions concerning

A Candlemas party is an appropriate time to initiate the usage of the candles, especially after the experience of carrying the lighted tapers at the procession and at Mass in the morning. In some parts of Mexico, this party is given by the godparents of the children; in other places it is given by the guest who finds a little replica of the Christ Child in the Twelfth-Day Cake. The theme of the party should include the two major themes of the day: the passage from darkness into light, and the meeting of the Church with the divine King. On this day we could review some of the salient features of the entire season, and have Isaias enter the darkened classroom or parlor with a single light; after him, St. Lucy would arrive, until finally the Christ-Child arrives; the Epiphany would be represented by lighting all of the tapers about the house, until finally, as the group finishes the home procession singing Simeon's Song of Praise from this morning's liturgy, all would again take up their candle and proceed to the evening banquet in the dining room.

A good subject for conversation at the table this evening would be what it means to be a godparent, for if possible, the godparents of all the children should be invited to the Candlemas dinner of the family. During the meal and the party which follows, many appropriate songs could be chosen, especially those songs which have been so admirably chosen by the community at Grailville. The antiphon for the "Magnificat" at Candlemas Vespers, and the song for the presentation of children are not too difficult, and even though these are found to be slightly beyond the easy grasp of the children, they will most certainly enjoy the "Seven Joys of Mary" and the "Ave Maria Round." In the course of the evening, mother and father should be particularly honored and praised, since their married life is a symbol of the love which exists between Christ and the Church.

The high point of the evening, however, and the conclusion of the festivities, is most naturally the signing or reciting of Compline by the family as their evening prayer. Even though it may be necessary to shorten some of the prayers (and this may be simplified a little by the usage of the Roman Sunday Compline from the "Short Breviary" published by St. John's Abbey), the Cantic of Simeon should certainly be learned and sung for the occasion. In this manner, the family is introduced to the official prayer of the Church, as all family prayer gradually should come to be based upon the Divine Office. As the children grow older, it is hoped that they will be able to sing together certain hours of the office, especially lauds and vespers. Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical, "Mediator Dei," again requests the restoration of vespers in the parishes. If the children grew up with the Psalter, and with the home and classroom recitation and singing of parts of the Divine Office, the desire of His Holiness would be fulfilled, and the reward would be reaped a hundred fold.

ENDNOTES

1. Parsch, Op. cit., Feb. 2.
2. Mueller, Op. cit., pp. 19-20.

CHAPTER 10

OTHER FEASTS DURING THE YEAR WHICH BELONG TO THE CHRISTMAS CYCLE

BESIDES the feasts which fall properly within the limitations of the Christmas Cycle (First Sunday of Advent to Candlemas Day), there are several other feasts of the Christmas Cycle which are distributed throughout the year. The compenetration of the mysteries of salvation during the two great cycles of Christmas and Easter presents a marvelous and most instructive tapestry. We recall how each Mass is a renewal not only of the passion and resurrection of the Saviour, but also of His incarnation, epiphany, ascension and His triumphant second coming, or "parousia." In much the same manner, the Christmas cycle is extended and woven into the year of grace; this fact is most apparent in certain feasts which are celebrated at various times of the year, and often in mid-Lent or in mid-summer. The following feasts are noteworthy:

1. The Feast of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated on December 8th in order to take into account the nine months which separate this feast from the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin on September 8th, already long-established. The Immaculate Conception of Mary is indeed the only conception which is celebrated in the church year (with the exception of that of Christ at the annunciation). We have already seen how we may fit this great feast of the Mother of God into the Christmas cycle, since the octave falls within the limits of the Christmas cycle itself.

2. The Feast of St. Joseph on March 19th is celebrated in honor of the "birth into heaven," the date of death, of the foster-father of the Saviour. The feast was established very late, comparatively speaking, by Clement XI in 1714. At present there are two major feasts in honor of St. Joseph. The nineteenth of March is dedicated to him personally and to the part which he played in the redemption; the feast and octave of St. Joseph which begins with the Wednesday of the third week after Easter is concerned principally with the honor which he merits as protector and patron of the universal church. The Feast Day of Saint Joseph on March 19th, therefore, belongs properly to the Easter cycle. This Octave, indeed, was placed during the week of the Good Shepherd of Eastertide as an appropriate time to celebrate the pastoral solicitude of Joseph as universal patron of the church which was instituted by the Good Shepherd Himself.

The Feast of St. Joseph, therefore, even though it falls within the penitential season of Lent, should be celebrated by the children as a Christmas feast. In Italy, and especially in Sicily, families and towns celebrate San Giuseppe with great joy. The mayor often serves a buffet dinner to the town on that day, and all are invited to take part. Special dishes of "Minestrone," "Spaghetti," and "Ravioli" are served, and the favorite desert is the "Sfinge di San Giuseppe" (Sphinx Cream puffs) The children would enjoy this superb dessert and the family could be rearranged at table to represent in costume and by assuming proper characters, the Holy Family.¹ There are innumerable Christmas Songs about St. Joseph, but perhaps the most beautiful of all is the "Te Joseph celebrent," the vesper hymn of the feast, taken directly from the "Liber Usualis."

3. The Feast of the Annunciation is the first message of the approach of the coming Advent and Christmas. It was established on March 25th, exactly nine months in advance of the forthcoming Christmas. The Annunciation is intimately bound up with the Christmas cycle by the great "Missa Aurea" of Ember Wednesday in Advent.

4. The Nativity of St. John the Baptist is the second message of the approach of the coming Advent and Christmas, and is often called the "Summer Christmas." This feast, which occurs on June 24th, recalls the birth of the Precursor, six months before the oncoming Christmas.

5. The Visitation is celebrated on July 2nd. After the Annunciation made to Mary (March 25), and after the conception of St. John the Baptist (Vigil of the Nativity of St. John, June 23rd, where the Angel gives Zachary the promise of the birth of the Precursor), Mary visits Elizabeth. This feast of the Visitation is in close association with Ember Friday in Advent.

6. The Feasts of St. Anne (July 26th) and of St. Joachim (August 16) are dedicated in honor of the grandmother and grandfather of the Saviour, and the immediate parents of Mary, the Mother of God. These days are intimate feasts, especially appreciated in Brittany and in French Canada, and should be celebrated at home where the grandparents should be held in particular esteem. If it is at all possible, a summer pilgrimage in honor of these saints would be most fitting. If the family is able to visit St.-Anne-de-Beaupre near the city of Quebec, or some other sanctuary, the summer vacation of the family could assume a more elevated and spiritual purpose.

7. The Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (September 8th) is another advent or message of the coming of Christ. This feast came from the Orient, and was established in the eighth century, and thus determined the date of the later feast of the Immaculate Conception to be nine months preceding the 8th of September, or December 8th. The Nativity of Mary and St. John the Baptist are the only ones which are celebrated among the saints, for Mary was pure at birth and at conception, and John was purified by Christ either before or at his birth.

8. The Feast of the Holy Name of Mary (September 12th) is celebrated after her Nativity in much the same manner that the Holy Name of Jesus is celebrated shortly after Christmas.

* * *

Among these various feasts which pertain to the Christmas Cycle, let us signalize four in particular which should be especially understood and celebrated by the children in preparation for Christmas: The Annunciation, the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin and the Feast of the Holy Name of Mary.

THE ANNUNCIATION

(March 25)

The feast of St. Gabriel, the Angel of the Incarnation, is celebrated on March 24th, the day preceding the feast of the Annunciation. It was this great Archangel who was the messenger of the good tidings of the redemption, and his name began to appear in the catalogs of the saints during the middle Ages in connection with the Annunciation.

St. Gabriel reminds us that Lenten austerity is to be broken by a feast of the Christmas cycle which commemorates the most sublime moment in the history of time, the moment of conception of the Second Person of the Trinity in the womb of Mary. The feast of the Annunciation is the first harbinger of the coming Advent and Christmas: only nine months remain until the birth of the Redeemer. The mystery of the Annunciation is, indeed, already celebrated in the ancient "Missa Aurea" of Ember Wednesday in Advent, where emphasis is placed upon the Saviour more especially than Mary. Because of chronological accuracy and the importance of the mystery, however, another feast was instituted which honors more particularly the "Fiat" of the Virgin Mary, and which is appropriately placed at exactly nine months before the Birth of Christ.

In order to celebrate this feast in a fitting manner, we should re-examine all of the material given in our treatment of the "Missa Aurea." "Lady Day" reminds us of the ringing of the Angelus, and the joy of children clustered about their heavenly mother. A festive tone may be given by the preparation of Swedish waffles as a special treat for the little family party. A tableau could be enacted which would represent the Angel Gabriel offering Divine Motherhood to the Blessed Virgin. The oldest boy could become an archangel for the day, and mother could very significantly take the part of the Mother of God. The feast of the Annunciation is indeed the truly Christian "Mother's Day," and spring flowers, gifts and candies for mother would not be amiss on Lady's Day. The songs most appropriate to the day are "Ave Maris Stella" and the "Seven Joys of Mary."

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

(June 24)

The feast of St. John the Baptist is one of the oldest in the entire year, outranking in class the feasts of most of the Apostles. Traditionally, this feast has been greatly celebrated in folklore as mid-summer, or "Summer Christmas." As a matter of fact among all of the Advent feasts which are celebrated outside of Christmastide, this is the most feted both because of the solemnity given the feast by Mother Church and because of the quasi-universality of its celebration among so many Christian nations. It is certainly time for parents and teachers to restore the celebration of this feast among the children.

It is indeed rare that we find in Sacred Scripture a detailed account of the life of a saint. Concerning the Baptist, however, all of the important details of his life and work are recounted; his conception, birth and circumcision (Luke 1); the beginning of his mission, his preaching and his testimony of homage rendered to the Lamb of God (Luke, 3; Matthew, 3; John 1 and 3:22-26); his arrest, captivity and martyrdom (Mark 6:14-29): all of the Evangelists concur by offering a complete account of St. John. It would be most fruitful to study all of these texts with the children in an effort to teach them a truly authentic life of a saint. The meaning of his life is most clearly expressed by St. Augustine in the second nocturn of the feast (Sermon 20 on the Saints):

"After that really holy birthday of the Lord, we do not read of the birthday of any man being celebrated, except that of blessed John the Baptist. In the case of other saints and elect of God, we know that that day is honored on which, when their works were accomplished and the world conquered and completely subdued, they were taken from this present life and born into the everlasting life of eternity. In others we honor the completed merits of their last day; in this present case, the first day, and the very beginning of this man is holy; doubtless for this reason, that the Lord wished his coming to be attested, lest if he came suddenly and unexpectedly, men might not recognize him. But John was a figure of the Old Testament, and typified the Law in himself; and therefore John foretold the Saviour, just as the Law preceded Grace.

"When not yet born, he prophesied from the hiding place of his mother's womb, and already bore witness to the truth though destitute of light himself. This event must be understood in the sense that, hidden under the veil and flesh of the letter, by the spirit he preached the Redeemer to the world, and proclaimed our Lord to us as from the womb of the Law. Therefore because the Jews went astray from the womb, that is, from the Law which was pregnant with Christ, they went astray from the womb, speaking lies; and so John came for a witness, to give testimony to the light.

"John lying in prison, directs his disciples to Christ. This event represents the Law sending to the Gospel. The same Law is typified by John, enclosed as it were in the prison of ignorance, lying in the dark in a hidden place, and held captive in the letter by Jewish blindness. Of him the blessed Evangelist proclaims: He was a burning and a shining light, that is, he was enkindled by the fire of the Holy Spirit, that to a world held in the night of ignorance he might show forth the light of salvation, and amid the thickest darkness of sin might by his ray point out the most resplendent sun of justice, saying of himself: I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness." (Benziger Bros., "Roman Breviary in English," Summer; N.Y. 1951).

The feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist is truly a bit of Advent during the season of Pentecost. It shows remarkably well how the mysteries of our salvation intermingle during the liturgical year, just as the new buds beneath the leaves announce in mid-summer the advent of the following springtime. The liturgy gives tremendous importance to the Baptist: he is the herald of penance and the preparation of the ways for the coming of the Saviour. Pius Parsch shows his importance in the liturgy of the Church very clearly:

"Christ is the sun, John is the dawn. The liturgy, which represents the coming of Christ in a very dramatic fashion, wishes also that the Precursor march before Him. A few examples show this: a) When, in winter, the sun begins to mount the horizon, the Church celebrates the birth of Christ; when the sun begins to decline, she celebrates the birth of St. John (December 25-June 24). The liturgy realizes the word of the Baptist: (He must become great and I must diminish!). b) During Advent, we await the rising of the divine Sun at Christmas; John stands before us like the dawn. c) At Lauds, before the rising of the sun of day

which is the symbol of the Eucharistic Sun, the Church sings the praise of the Precursor at the "Benedictus." And finally, 4) When the death of the Christian causes the eternal Sun to rise, the Church again sings the Benedictus over his tomb, once more greeting the Precursor of Christ."2 It must be remembered, too, that St. John outranks all human saints except the Mother of God. We observe this each time in reciting the "Confiteor." The Scriptural account of the special circumstances in which he received his name indicates his importance in the divine plan.

One of the oldest customs associated with the Nativity of St. John is the lighting of a festive bonfire on the vigil. In the British Isles at least, these bonfires had their origin in Druidic customs in honor of the god of the sacred grove at the summer solstice, but in reality relatively few pagan customs have remained. The bonfire, indeed, is a very prevalent custom in France, Germany, and Hungary as well as in many other lands. In the darkness of the night, either before a school dedicated to the saint, in the city square or upon a hill the fire was lighted in honor of the Baptist who gave testimony to the true Light which enlightens all men. In France, after Vespers, the bonfire is lighted, and the evening is given over to dancing and singing. The priest offers the official blessing over the fire: "O Lord God, Father Almighty, unfailing Ray and Source of all light, sanctify this new fire, and grant that after the darkness of this life we may come unsullied to thee Who art Light eternal Through Christ our Lord."3 In Germany, the young leap through the "Johannesfeuer"; in Hungary, betrothed couples leap through the fire together, while the others dance about the couple and sing:

"May God send a slow shower
To wash these two together
Like two golden twigs."

In France, boys and girls named after the saint are expected to throw a wreath into the fire. Spirits and demons and all of the powers of darkness, of course, keep a very respectful distance from its light and heat.

Imagine how enthusiastic boys and girls would be about the preparations and the lighting and celebration which surround the blessing of the new fire of St. John on the vigil! Many families, or even the entire parish, could assemble together for this mid-summer festival, causing it to be the real "lawn party" of summertime. Many, many customs surround this celebration. Throughout the centuries excellent carols and folk-songs were sung, much as on Christmas eve. Latvian carolers go from house to house singing carols, and the singers are openly lured into the homes by offerings and parties offering them food and drink. The home is highly honored if the singers accept their hospitality. For many years this custom prevailed in England, even as late as 1826 in Yorkshire. The newcomers into a parish would set small tables holding bread, cheese and beer outside their doors, and all passersby were invited to partake of their hospitality and to visit their homes. This is truly one of the most excellent manifestations of Christian hospitality, and a most normal and friendly manner of knowing other members of the parish. Whereas children are not usually constrained by formalities and soon get to know one another, it would give them a splendid example to see their parents offering hospitality and cordiality to neighbor and stranger, and to receive all into their home. The cocktail or beer party, so frequently used today for "social contacts," and "open-house" is but a poor imitation of this homey traditional hospitality offered on the vigil of St. John.

There is a very special song which is used as a carol on the feast and throughout the octave. The vesper hymn is ascribed to Paul the Deacon (730-799), and is one of the finest examples of Sapphic and Adonic meter in poetry. One of the greatest musicians of the Middle Ages, Guy d'Arezzo (995-1050), used the first syllables of the first strophe of the hymn in order to help his students to remember the intonations of the degrees of the musical gamut. As a consequence, the "Do, re, mi..." which the children learn at school stems directly from this vesper chant in honor of St. John:

Ut queant laxis	"O for thy spirit, holy John, to
Re-sonare fibris	chasten
Mi-ra gestorum	Lips sin-polluted, fettered tongues
Fa-muli tuorum	to loosen;
Sol-ve polluti	So by Thy children might thy
La-bii reatum	deeds of wonder
Sancte Ioannes.	Meetly be chanted."

(Trans. M. Britt., "The Hymns of the Breviary and Missal," Benziger, N.Y., 1948)

The name of "Si" for the seventh note was not used until much later, at the end of the fifteenth century. It seems to be formed by the initials of the last two words: Sancte Ioannes. Guy d'Arezzo preferred to retain the name of "B" for this seventh note. The name of "ut" was replaced by Italians during the 17th century, since they discovered that "do" was much easier to pronounce than "ut"; the musician Doni is said to have substituted the "Do" taken from the first syllable of his own name.--Each time, therefore, that we hear this beautiful hymn, and each time that the children sing the musical scale, they should be reminded of the ancient love and enthusiasm which nearly every western nation offered to St. John the Baptist

Beside the lighting of the bonfire, and the singing, dancing and hospitality which surrounds it, the association of St. John with the baptism of water and penance is duly celebrated, especially in Mexico and in Spain. This association is especially "a propos," for even the great cathedral of the Pope as Bishop of Rome is the ancient baptismal church of St. John (the Baptist) Lateran. In the Iberian peninsula, many walk through the dew or bathe in the sea, and every lover offers his *senorita*, a heart-shaped cake. It is in Mexico, however, that St. John is especially celebrated as the saint of the waters. The Mexicans are interested in St. John alone, and the customs in their country are entirely Christian in origin. Wells and fountains are all bright with flowers and ribbons, and everybody in the country, rich and poor alike, bathe in lakes, rivers and sea at midnight on the vigil. In cities, and at fashionable resorts, swimming contests and diving exhibits become the center of festivity. The families make a picnic at their favorite bathing spots or swimming holes, and "tacos," "tortillas" and "empanadas" abound together with "tamales," cakes and sweets.⁴

THE NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN

(September 8)

THE HOLY NAME OF MARY

(September 12)

Children always love to celebrate birthdays, and if people desire to celebrate birthdays, baptismal feasts and name days, certainly we should not fail to celebrate the birthday and the nameday of our "Heavenly Mother." During the entire church year (liturgical cycle), only three birthdays and two name-days are celebrated. We celebrate the nativity of Christ, of our Blessed Mother, and of St. John the Baptist; and the name days of Christ and His Mother. Christ and the saints are not too demanding upon us concerning birthday celebrations! As a consequence, we should be particularly happy to celebrate the birthday of the Blessed Mother. A special cake with candles should decorate the table, and our human mother who represents Mary in our family should receive special honor. The first offering of the day should be to assist at Holy Mass, offered in honor of our Heavenly Mother for the benefit of our earthly mother. Gifts and songs should add festivity to the family party. The most appropriate reading for these feasts is the Homily of St. Bernard taken from the second nocturn of Matins of the feast of the Holy Name of Mary. Both children and adults should memorize this masterpiece of love for Mary.

"And the Virgin's name was Mary.' Let us say a few things about this name which, when interpreted, is called 'star of the sea,' and is admirably suitable to the Virgin Mother. She is, in fact, very appropriately compared to a star without any loss to itself shoots forth its ray, so the Virgin, too, without injury to her virginity gave birth to her Son. And as the ray from the star does not diminish its brilliance, neither did the Son lessen the integrity of His Mother.

"She is, then, that noble star sprung forth from Jacob, whose ray brightens the whole world, whose splendors both shine in heaven and penetrate into hell; spreading, likewise, over the earth and warming both minds and bodies, it fosters virtue, and purifies from vice. She, I say, is a glorious and most wonderful star, of necessity raised above this great and broad sea, glittering with her merit, and giving light by her example.

"O you, who realize that in the rushing tide of this world you are bobbing about amid storms and tempests rather than walking on land, turn not your eyes away from the light of this star if you do not wish to be lost in

the storm. If the winds of temptations blow up, if you are running over mountains of tribulations, look up to this star; call on Mary! If you are being tossed about on the waves of pride, of ambition, of detraction, of envy, look up to this star; call on Mary! If wrath or avarice or the snare of the flesh shall strike against the ship of the mind, look up to Mary! If, when overwhelmed by the immensity of your crimes, when ashamed by the ugliness of your conscience, when frightened by horror for the Judgment, you begin to sink into the depths of sorrow, into the abyss of despair, think of Mary!

"In dangers, in trials, in matters of doubt, think of Mary; call on Mary! let her not depart from your mouth; let her not leave your heart, and, that you may gain the help of her prayer, do not forsake the example of her life. In following her, you will not stray; praying to her, you will not despair; when thinking of her, you will not be in error. If she holds you, you will not fall; in her protection, you will have no fear; with her as your leader, you will not faint in the way; through her kindness, you will arrive at port; and then you will realize yourself how deservedly it was declared: 'And the Virgin's name was Mary.'"5

ENDNOTES

1. "Feast Day Cook Book," p. 42.
2. Parsch, *op. cit.*, June 24.
3. "Roman Ritual," Vol. III.
4. "Feast Day Cook Book," pp. 81-82.
5. "Liturgical Readings," pp. 454-455.

APPENDIX I

LITURGICAL SYNTHESIS

(This note is intended for parents and educators who wish to know some of the basic theological background of child pedagogy through the liturgy. We have used the Christmas Cycle to illustrate this in practical application.)

Fundamental Distinction:

1. The Liturgy is the official, corporate worship of the Church, expressed in her official books, headed by the hierarchy as mediator between God and the people. More accurately and globally expressed, it is, as Father Louis Bouyer defines it: "That system of prayer and rites traditionally canonized by the church as her own prayer and worship." Thus the Liturgical life of the Church is expressed through the Mass, the Sacraments, the Ritual, the Divine Office, the Martyrology, and Pontifical Ceremonies.

2. There are other services, prayers, customs, and traditions which are more or less associated with the liturgy. These may be understood fully only in the light of history. The Medieval, Baroque and Romantic periods have made most serious inroads upon the Liturgy but many contributions as well.

a) Some of these spring forth from the liturgy as a by-product, and are founded upon the actions or doctrines taught by the prayer-life of the Church, e.g., the private recitation of the Divine Office, the blessing of the Christmas tree and the Advent wreath, the home singing of liturgical hymns, the recitation at home or even in public of extracts from liturgical prayers.

b) Others have preserved the true liturgical treasures of the past and now should be used, as "Mediator Dei" tells us, to lead back to the liturgy. Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament would lead to the Saving Host of the perfect Act of Thanksgiving, the Mass, as the Rosary would lead to the Psalter and to the meditation of the mysteries of the liturgical year. The procession to the crib might incite the public to enthusiasm for other processions such as those of Corpus Christi Candlemas Day, or the blessing of the Fields.

c) Others would seem to be evidently secular and more removed from the mystical life of Christ in the year of grace, as the Yule log, the wassail bowl, the holly and the ivy. "Jingle Bells" and "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas" are popular examples of secularized Christmas ballads.

It would follow that the problem of child education through the liturgy should center about the true spiritual foundation of the liturgical season proportionately diminishing in importance the usage of those prayers, services, customs and traditions in as much as they recede from association with the Christian Mystery as the fullness of Christ in the life of His Church.

PART ONE

I. The Mass and the Liturgical Year: The first thing to teach the child concerning religion as illustrated in the liturgy of the Christmas Cycle is the importance of Holy Mass. He must be made to realize that the Mass actually effectuates and realizes here and now the Incarnation, Epiphany, Passion, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ: that the Mass is not merely the reenacting of historical action, but the ever-present

realization of that action of Christ in us this very day: "now not I, but Christ Who lives in me." That which Christ did in His historic life, He does each day in His Mystical Body; the life of Grace which He gives us is the germ which fructifies in the Light of Glory, in the Parousia of the particular or final judgment.

During the Christmas cycle, the Church desires that we live the life of Christ as an ever-present thing, under the modality of the season and the feast. Unlike the angels, we do not see things by infused species, but successively and divisively by rational acts. And consequently, since the life of the God-Man is so vast and full of grace, the Spouse has considered it expedient, and pedagogically sound, to review the life of Christ and the Church in successive psychologico-chronological succession, with the astronomical year as the over-all unit. This review is more than a review: it must represent the incorporation of our human personalities into that of Christ in order that through Him, and in Him, and with Him we may give glory to the Father. This is accomplished in the unity of the Holy Spirit as Indweller and Guide of the Spouse. But the Holy Spirit builds upon our nature, and perfects it by grace. The Holy Spirit thus incorporates us into Christ as human beings, successively and temporally, so to speak, by an ever-deepening yearly conversion of the Spouse into the Christ-Life--a conversion which is ever-real, ever present, and ever actual, even unto the fullness of time.

Upon this theological basis, children must be brought to realize fully their daily, gradual and immediate incorporation into Christ. The Masses and feasts of the Christmas cycle must be illustrated in such manner that they appeal to every human fiber of the child: to all of his senses, to his emotions, his will and his intellect. They must likewise make every appeal to all of his relationships with God, the Church, the State, the family, the self, and the universe. The Church is universal, love is universal. We cannot expect the problem to be less vast or less entire.

II. The Sacramental Life: The sacraments center about and receive their life from the Mass as the planets receive order and warmth from the sun. They are channels chosen by the Son as the normal and ordinary means of the reception of the Life of Grace, and of its increase. In the Christmas Cycle, for example, we find many occasions to deepen comprehension of the significance of the sacraments.

A. Baptism:

The Epiphany, and in particular the octave day of the Epiphany, offers us the Baptism of Christ: re-birth by water and the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Savior stands at the focal point in the history of mankind: it is the fulfillment of the Circumcision of the Old Covenant, and of the baptism of penance by the Precursor. It is the initiation of Christ's public life symbolized for us by the future efficacious cleansing by water and the Holy Spirit in the footsteps of the Master. This mystery of the feast of the Epiphany is a link between the Cycle of the Incarnation and the Cycle of the Redemption. Christ from the Father, assumed our human nature, and returned to the Father as our Savior into Whom we are incorporated in such wise that we may be one with Him as He and the Heavenly Father are One.

B. Confirmation:

Here again, the Baptism of Christ at the Epiphany, together with the descent of the Holy Spirit and the approbation of the Father, are definitely symbolic of the adult and public acts of confirmation in the life of grace. In the readings of Isaiah during Advent (Ch. 11) we learn that the Emmanuel possessed the plenitude of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. On the feast of the Holy Family, and on the first Sunday during the octave of the Epiphany, we learn that the young Christ-Child increased in grace

and wisdom before God and man.

C. The Eucharist:

The whole Christmas cycle may be said to be a sigh and a shout of triumph because of the Emmanuel. God is with us in order that we may at last be united in total love, in the fullness of our being, with the Godhead. The whole cycle celebrates the marriage feast of God with Man, of Christ with the Church. The Eucharist is the germ and promise of total and eternal union with God. Isaiah represents the sigh of humanity for this union; Mary represents the fullest union with God possible to human nature. Christ Himself actually became man, and now in heaven retains our human nature before the Throne of the Most High.

D. Penance:

It is St. John the Baptist who represents the sacrament of Penance throughout Advent and especially on the Third Sunday in Advent, and at the Epiphany. He is the voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the ways of the Lord," carrying out the injunction of Isaiah to fill in the ruts of our omissions, and to level the mounds of our transgressions, that the King of Glory may enter into our souls.

E. Matrimony:

Matrimony is the very theme of the Christmas cycle. For all Advent is a preparation of the Spouse for the Coming of her King, and all Christmastide is the celebration of her nuptials. The Epiphany, celebrating the marriage feast of Cana, and the feast of lights, the Candlemas, are the culmination of the drama. They are symbols of perfect and eternal union in grace and glory.

F. Holy Orders:

Holy Orders are most expressly celebrated in the Christmas cycle, for the Saturday of Ember Week in Advent was formerly the principal day of the year upon which this sacrament was conferred. It is the day on which we celebrate the shepherds and leaders of the Spouse.

G. Extreme Unction:

This sacrament is recalled distinctly by the myrrh offered by the Magi on the Epiphany. Its strength and healing force at the moment of death is foreshadowed by the martyrdom of Stephen, the murder of the Holy Innocents, the Cross overshadowing the Sunday in the Octave of Christmas, the blood of the Circumcision, and the prophecy of Simeon at the Presentation.

III. The Ritual¹ contains many appropriate blessings: of infants, of children, of mothers before and after childbirth, of nuptials, of the wine representing the love of St. John the Apostle, of gold, incense and myrrh, of chalk, of homes, of water on the Epiphany, of the procession of the Candlemas. Popular devotion desires to add a special blessing for the crib and the Christmas tree.

IV. The Divine Office and the Martyrology: The Divine Office during the Christmas cycle is full of florid warmth: the mountains distill the dew, the heavens rain forth the Just One, the hills leap for joy and clap their hands; the city is lighted and decorated for the Bridegroom; and all the saints and martyrs form the bridal suite of the great King.

PART TWO

All of the traditional teaching of the Church concerning the Incarnation indicates the wealth of material which the very liturgy itself offers to our minds and heart, imagination and senses. This teaching may be translated into terms easily loved and comprehended by children. We shall endeavor to relate all else to the fundamental and solid ground of the liturgy itself, and try to integrate many of the prayers and customs, old and new, into the life of the Church in such wise that it may be used by parents and teachers to appeal to little children.

Our material could be divided in many different manners. However, two specific methods combined together cover most of the pedagogical problems of the presentation of the Christmas liturgy to children. According to:

I. Psychological Chronology:

Beginning with the first Sunday in Advent, the Church combines history and tradition in the following succession of feasts and ferial days: the first Sunday in Advent, the Feast of St. Nicholas; the second Sunday in Advent; the Immaculate Conception, and the civil celebration of the Patroness of our country; St. Lucy; the third Sunday in Advent; the Ember Days of Advent, including the Annunciation and the Visitation; the fourth Sunday in Advent and the O-Antiphons; the Vigil of Christmas; the Nativity; the suite of the great King: Sts. Stephen, John the Evangelist, and the Holy Innocents; the Circumcision and the Holy Name; the Twelfth Night; the Epiphany, with its triple feast; the Holy Family and the childhood of Christ and His finding in the temple; the Presentation of the Child in the Temple at Candlemas; the celebration of the winter virgins: of Cecilia, of Lucy of Agnes and Agatha and the entry of the virgins into the nuptial chamber at the feast of the Purification.

II. Functional Human Needs:

A. Food: by the wealth of Christmas recipes which pour in at the holiday season, and which are the delight of children.

B. Clothing: the profound signification of the assumption of the rags of our human nature by the very Word of God, and the symbolic meaning and usage of raiment as the expression of our being and personality.

C. Shelter: the poverty, chastity and obedience of the Christ-Child. He had not "whereon to lay His head," was born in a cave at Bethlehem, exiled into Egypt, and worked at Nazareth as a carpenter.

D. The Senses:

1. Sight: The whole gamut of materials made possible by visual education should be made serviceable: the crib, the Christmas tree, the ornaments, the Advent wreath, the Advent candle, the crown of St. Lucy, the costume of St. Nicholas; all that is available of pictures of Bethlehem, of Jerusalem, of Egypt, of the costumes of the people, the beauty of the

oriental nights, the camels, the caravans. etc.

2. Hearing: Selected Christmas stories which have bearing upon the Scriptures and the liturgical feasts of the Christmas season; plays about St. Nicholas, the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, the Presentation, the Finding in the Temple, the Visitation of the Magi, the Baptism of Christ, and the miracle at Cana; songs offering the greatest range A whole book could be written about these latter. They should be chosen because of their theological soundness and their relation to the liturgy, their universality, their simplicity and intrinsic beauty. In addition to the ardent Gregorian chant of the season nearly every nation has contributed to Christmas music, and it is readily available as folk-song and as classic.

3. Taste: What an appeal Christmas offers to the appetites of children! If we extend the notion of taste to works of art, we could also unite taste with sight and teach the children the wealth of works of Christian art which express the cycle of Christmas, from the old masters to the most modern.

4. Smell: The incense of the Epiphany as a symbol of our prayers, virtues and good works ascending before the throne of God; the homey smells of Christmas cooking....

5. Touch: All of the manual arts by which the children could be taught to make their own crib, decorate their own tree, and make toys for others. They could play games with all of the objects which represent the character and objects used to illustrate the whole Cycle.

E. The Imagination and the Emotions: Contemplation, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, is most like play, since it is for itself. However, it must be remembered that the imagination of the child should be based upon reality, and that whatever freedom of rein it may be allowed, its origin and end should be centered about the living reality of the life of Christ as the Church presents it in her Christmas cycle.

F. The Will: Human free will should be strengthened by an increase of penance and charity by giving up things for the poor, by poverty of spirit; by imitating the obedience of Christ, especially in virtue of His super-abundant love for the Father and His Will, and of His supreme humility in taking on our weak human nature.

G. The Intellect: Even though what we know comes first through the senses it results in the enlightenment of the intellect of the child, in order that from exterior representations, colors and lights, plays and games come a fuller participation in the

Christian Mystery. The Advent and Christmas Psalms should be memorized, and many carols of real doctrinal worth be sung. Bible History and Scripture should become a special joy for children.

H. The Relationship of the Child to God, Neighbor and the Universe: The fundamental purpose of the Church in teaching all men is to offer them the new law of love: the love and worship of God above all things. He is the first consideration at all times and in every circumstance; the neighbor is loved because of the super-abundance of our love of God and because of His image in creation. The fundamental concept to be brought to the child by pedagogy in order to bring him to maturity in its fullest sense human and divine, is to bring him to the plenitude of being and reality. Nothing artificial in any shallow or cheap sense of the term is admissible: it must be real and as perfect as our human abilities, aided by grace, may permit. The things of the universe, natural and manmade, are for the usage of man, but they are the creation of God. There is no better time nor place than in childhood to realize the hierarchy of being and of its transcendental attributes.

Let us now consider concrete means and methods by which we may employ much of what the Church offers to us during the Christmas cycle to the education of children. "For people are instructed in the truths of faith and brought to appreciate the inner joys of religion far more effectually by the annual celebration of our sacred mysteries than by any official pronouncement of the teaching of the Church. Such pronouncements usually reach only a few and the more learned among the faithful: feasts reach them all. The Church's teaching affects the mind primarily: her feasts affect both mind and heart, and have a salutary effect upon the whole of man's nature." (Pius XI, "Quas Primas")

ENDNOTES:

1. See also the new official Latin-English Ritual, "Collectio Rituum," Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, (Bruce: Milwaukee, 1954).

APPENDIX II

A CHRISTMAS JESSE TREE

The October (1953) cover of "Worship," modeled on the mediaeval Jesse tree, prompts us to tell you about our Jesse Advent and Christmas tree¹. Some years ago we initiated it in a New Jersey high school, and are now using it in Pennsylvania in several schools. Novices in England this year will be making one, and a woman's group in Minnesota is planning an Advent program based on it.

Ours is a Christmas tree designed to put Christ back into Christmas. The ornaments, made by the children, represent the ancestors of Christ. Imagination is fired by reading of these characters in the messianic story, and some of the symbols and figures used have indeed been ingenious. Last year some of them were home-baked cookies decorated with colored sugar. Others were paper or cloth with a taffy base, and yet others used little shiny Christmas bells for patriarchal heads. On the original tree we had used only symbols, many of them taken without leave or license from "Orate Fratres," (now "Worship") and done up in colored shiny paper that was then pasted on aluminum kitchen foil. A box of 'good junk' in the classroom, scraps of shiny paper, rich cloth, fur, metallic stripping, etc., provides material and suggests further ideas for construction.

The base of our tree is wrapped in corrugated paper cut to represent a tapering root, and Jesse's symbol is placed thereon. With abandon, we then cut back to Adam and Eve. An apple with two bites out and a serpent coiled about it tells their doleful story. A few green leaves attached to red Christmas balls provide other apples to place among the branches, to remind us of the grip that sin had upon the world through the long ages of waiting for the Redeemer.

Pushed down over the topmost spiny branch of the tree is a plastic disc supporting twelve aluminum-foil stars. Just before school lets out before Christmas, we place in a test tube that we have scotch-taped above on this branch the most beautiful rose we can procure from the florist, swaddled in the maiden-hair fern. Lettered in gold on the blackboard near the tree is this:

"Our Christmas tree represents, as does the liturgy of the season, the longing of sinful mankind for its Redeemer. The cry of the Old Testament for the Saviour--"Drop down dew, ye Heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just one"--is repeated in the New Dispensation in which we share. "Let the earth open and bud forth a Saviour!" cried the ancestors of Christ who are represented by symbols on our Jesse tree. Our cry is the same: that the Christmas Rose, who is Jesus Christ, will bud in our hearts, from the branch that is Mary. She who wears a crown of twelve stars lights the way to her divine Son. Let us redouble our prayers in these last Advent days that Christ be truly reborn in us. "Come Lord Jesus, and tarry not." ... Making our Jesse tree has been lots of fun. We sing while constructing it, and sing around it after it is completed. Under it we place our crib, beneath the branch from which hangs Ruth's symbol. We tell our many visitors the stories about the figures, and when Christmas comes at last we all feel somewhat as those men and women did whose representations adorn our Jesse tree...."

(The study sheets which Sister Rose uses for her classes include splendid suggestions. The students are encouraged to make a thorough study of the genealogy of Christ in Scripture, encyclopedia, text-books, the ordinary and common of the Mass, and in symbol. Since the text is so readily available in "Worship," we suggest that the details should be looked into, and the imagination exerted forcibly in an effort to visualize and concretize the longing of the Old Testament for the Coming of the Saviour....)

THE CHRISTMAS SKY

Long before the Christian era the 25th of December was considered to be a great feast-day, and even today the Christians are not the only people who observe it. Certain peoples rejoice at this time of the year because the sun, having attained its full course southward, now inclines northward, bringing the earth the hope of a greater abundance of light and heat.

At the solstice of December 22nd the sun passes from Sagittarius to Capricorn, and at midnight of the 24th of December, in all latitudes, the Sign of the Virgin is precisely at its most easterly point. This is why astronomers often say that the sun is the son of the virgin.

We Christians who do not hesitate to make comparisons and to treat all things from the point of view of religion do not fear to compare the Sun with Christ. For it was He who drew the universe out of darkness, and it is He who is also the Son of the Virgin.

The sun thus entered the Sign of Capricorn in order to give it new virility. Without doubt it is far from producing the balmy warmth of springtime, for the return of the sun towards the north has just begun and it shall fully arrive only within several months. The movement of the stars is slow insofar as we are concerned. Men have tended to accelerate everything in their human productions, but the work of God which is of infinite duration never changes its speed. Spring, as well as the other seasons, will never arrive at an earlier date. The stars do not change their course in space for any material reasons. This is why they act as immutable points of reference and continual sources of comparisons and teaching for those who study them.

Even the well-known Santa Claus is an astronomical figure. He is the perfect reproduction of the figure of Centaur, which is an eastern constellation situated beneath the constellation of the Virgin. Both Centaur and Santa Claus wear the remarkable large beard.

Many people pretend that if the people of the ancient world were to return to our modern world they would be astounded. That is possible, but perhaps some of these ancient people would be surprised at our ignorance of all the phenomena of nature.

ENDNOTES

1. Cited from the December, 1953, issue of "Worship." This article by Sister M. Margaret Rose, S.S.J., is a very interesting application of the mediaeval "Jesse Tree" to usage in the High School.

APPENDIX III

THE LITURGICAL USAGE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE DURING THE CHRISTMAS CYCLE

I. In the Missal

A. Usage of the Gospels in the Christmas Cycle and Feasts:

The historical, scriptural account of the life of Christ up to the time of His public ministry (beginning with the temptation in the desert, First Sunday of Lent), is included in the following passages from the Gospels:

Matthew:	1:1-25	The Genealogy of Jesus: 1-16; the Virgin Birth: 16-25.
	2:1-23	The Magi; Flight into Egypt; Holy Innocents; Return to Nazareth.
	3:1-17	St. John the Baptist and the Baptism of Jesus
Mark:	1:1-11	St. John the Baptist and the Baptism of Jesus.
Luke:	1:5-80	The conception of John the Baptist and of Christ. The Visitation and Canticle of the Blessed Virgin. The Birth of the Baptist and the Canticle of Zachary.
	2:1-52	The Birth of Christ. His Presentation in the Temple. The prophecy of Simeon. The Finding in the Temple.
	3:1-22	St. John the Baptist and the Baptism of Jesus.
	3:23-38	The Genealogy of Jesus.
John:	1:1-14	The Word of God.
	1:15-34	John the Baptist and the Baptism of Jesus.
	2:1-11	The Marriage Feast at Cana.

1. The gospels during the Christmas Cycle and on the various feasts which are integrally associated with the cycle are distributed into discontinuous readings which have been built up pedagogically according to the season and feasts in the following manner:

2nd Sunday of Advent:	Matt. 2:2-10	The mission of John the Baptist.
3rd Sunday of Advent:	John 1:19-28	John the Precursor
Ember Wednesday in Advent: (Missa Aurea):	Luke 1:26-38	The Annunciation.
Ember Friday in Advent:	Luke 1:39-47	The Visitation.
4th Sunday of Advent:	Luke 3:1-6	John the Precursor.
The Vigil of Christmas:	Matt. 1:18-21	The doubt of Joseph concerning Mary.
Christmas:		
Midnight Mass:	Luke 2:1-14	Nativity of Jesus; Announcement by angels to shepherds.
Mass at Dawn:	Luke 2:15-20	Visit of the Shepherds.

Mass of Day:	John	1:1-14	The Word of God.
Feast of Holy Innocents:	Matt.	2:13-18	Flight into Egypt; Martyrdom of Holy Innocents.
Sunday in Octave of Christmas	Luke	2:33-40	Mary's heart pierced by sword; prophetess, Anna; Return to Nazareth.
Circumcision (and Holy Name of Jesus: Sunday in Octave of Circumc.):	Luke	2:21	Circumcision on 8th Day in the Temple.
Vigil of Epiphany:	Matt.	2:19-23	Return from Egypt to Nazareth.
The Epiphany:	Matt.	2:1-12	The Visit of the Magi.
Sunday in Octave of the Epiphany:	Luke	2:42-52	Finding in the Temple.
(Holy Family: Sun. in Oct. of Epiphany):	Luke	2:42-52	Same Gospel: Finding in Temple.
January 13:	John	1:29-34	John the Baptist and Baptism of Jesus.
2nd Sunday after Epiphany	John	2:1-11	The Marriage Feast at Cana.
Purification (Feb. 2)	Luke	2:22-32	Presentation in Temple: Simeon.

2. Feasts integrally belonging to the Christmas Cycle:

Vigil of Immac. Conception	Matt.	1:1-16	Genealogy of Jesus.
Immaculate Concep. (Dec. 8) Aurea).	Luke	1:26-28	Annunciation (Missa Aurea).
St. Joseph: (March 19)	Matt.	1:18-21	Doubt of Joseph (cf. Vigil of Christmas).
Annunciation: (March 25)	Luke	1:26-38	Annunciation (Missa Aurea).
Vigil of St. John the Baptist: (June 23):	Luke	1:5-17	Conception and Naming of the Baptist.
Nativity of St. John the Baptist: (June 24):	Luke	1:57-68	Birth of St. John the Baptist.
The Visitation: (July 2):	Luke	1:39-47	Visitation (Ember Friday in Advent).
St. Anne: (July 26):	Matt.	13:44-52	Kingdom of Heaven a Hidden Treasure
St. Joachim:			

(August 16):	Matt. 1:1-16	Genealogy of Jesus. (cf. Vigil of Immaculate Concep.)
Nativity of Blessed Virgin: (September 8)	Matt. 1:1-16	Genealogy of Jesus. (cf. St. Joachim; Vigil of Immaculate Conception).
Holy Name of Mary: (September 12):	Luke 1:26-38	Annunciation (cf. Missa Aurea; Feast of Annunciation, March 25).

3. In Resume: by comparison of the Gospel reading of the Christmas Cycle with the above-noted gospel narratives concerning the early life of Christ before His public ministry, we find that

Matthew: Chapters 1 and 2 are completely cited; none of Chapter 3;

Mark: Is not included;

Luke: Chapters 1 and 2 are completely cited; and Ch. 3: 1-6;

John: Chapters 1 and 2 are completely cited.

In general, Matthew 1 and Luke 1 are read in Advent; Matthew 2-3, Luke 2-3, and John 1-2 are read at Christmastide. Therefore, by the suite of the various feasts of the Christmas Cycle in the "Roman Missal," the complete scriptural account of the life of Christ up to the time of His public ministry is given in this cycle.

B. Chronology and Liturgical Usage of Scripture:

It should be especially noted that the Liturgy frequently prefersto follow strict chronology, but not always. For example: the Immaculate Conception is placed nine months preceding the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin; the Annunciation, nine months before Christmas; and the Purification, forty days after Christmas. On the other hand, however, in the Christmas Cycle, the order of events is frequently altered historically in deference to the logical order of feasts. For example, according to the chapters of St. Luke, the succession of feasts would be as follows were they ordered historically and chronologically:

1. Vigil of Nativity of St. Baptist: (June 23):	1: 5-17	The conception of the John Baptist.
2. Missa Aurea: Wednesday in Advent Ember Week:	1:26-38	The Annunciation: March 25.
3. Friday in Advent Ember Week:	1:37-47	The Visitation: July 2.
4. Nativity of St. John the Baptist: (June 24):	1:57-68	Nativity and Naming of the Baptist.
5. Christmas: Midnight Mass:	2:1-14	Nativity of Christ: Announcement to Shepherds.
6. Christmas: Mass at Dawn:	2:15-20	Shepherds at the Crib.
7. Circumcision: (January 1):	2:21	Circumcision of Christ.
8. Purification: (February 2):	2:22-32	Presentation in Temple.
9. Sunday in Octave of Christmas:	2:33-40	Mary's heart pierced by sword; Prophetess, Anna; Return to Nazareth.

- 10. First Sunday after Epiphany: 2:42-52 Finding in the Temple.
- 11. 4th Sunday of Advent: 3:1-6 John the Precursor.

C. The Correlation of the Christmas Cycle with the Joyous Mysteries of Rosary:

- 1. The Annunciation: Immaculate Conception; Missa Aurea; Feast on March 25; Feast of Holy Name of Mary.
- 2. The Visitation: Friday in Ember Week of Advent; Feast on July 2.
- 3. The Nativity of Christ: December 25: Midnight Mass.
- 4. The Presentation in the Temple: Feast of the Purification, February 2.
- 5. The Finding in the Temple: First Sunday after Epiphany: Feast of the Holy Family.

II. In the Roman Breviary:

The scriptural readings for Advent are taken from the prophecies of Isaias; those for Christmas tide are taken from all of the Epistles of St. Paul. The reason for this is evident: Isaias is the great prophet of the Messiah; St. Paul is the great Apostle of the Gentiles: it is he who manifests (Epiphany) the Messiah to the world at large.

A. The Distribution of the Readings is as follows: (First Nocturn of Matins):

- 1st Week in Advent.....Isaias 1-10 incl.
- 2nd Week in Advent.....Isaias 11-26.
- 3rd Week in Advent.....Isaias 26-34.
- 4th Week in Advent.....Isaias 35-66.
- Sunday in Octave of Christmas and the following days.....Romans 1-4.
- Sunday between Circumcision and Epiphany and following days..Romans 5-8.
- 1st Week after Epiphany.....I Corinthians.
- 2nd Week after Epiphany.....II Corinthians.
- 3rd Week after Epiphany.....Galatians (Sunday, Monday, Tues.).
Ephesians (Wed., Thur. Fri. Sat.).
- 4th Week after Epiphany.....Philippians (Sunday, Monday)
Colossians (Tuesday, Wednesday)
I Thessalonians (Thursday, Friday)
II Thessalonians (Saturday)
- 5th Week after Epiphany.....I Timothy (Sunday, Monday)
II Timothy (Tuesday, Wednesday)

Titus (Thursday, Friday)
Philemon (Saturday)

6th Week after Epiphany.....Hebrews

B. Special Seasonal Psalms:

1st Week in Advent.....Ps. 24.

2nd Week in Advent.....Ps. 79.

3rd Week in Advent.....Ps. 84.

4th Week in Advent.....Ps. 18.

Vigil of Christmas.....Ps. 23.

Christmas.....Pss. 2, 44, 47, 88, 95, 97.

St. Stephen.....Ps. 62.

Holy Innocents.....Ps. 2.

Epiphany.....Ps. 71.

3rd Sunday after Epiphany.....Ps. 96 (and for whole time
after Epiphany).

4th Sunday after Epiphany.....Ps. 117.

Feasts of Blessed Virgin Mary....Pss. 109, 112, 121, 126, 146,
8, 18, 23, 44, 4S, 86, 95,
96, 97.

GLOSSARY

I. Divine Office (Breviary):

Many terms which are used in the text may not be familiar to the layman who is not accustomed to reading the Divine Office. For this reason it may be helpful to define certain terms which may be less familiar. (Should the reader desire to increase his knowledge of the Office, he may consult the following works: Pius Parsch, "The Breviary Explained"; G. Hoornaert, S.J., "The Breviary and the Laity"; and the appendix to "A Short Breviary," edited by William G. Heidt, O.S.B., of St. John's Abbey).

The Divine Office is the official collection of prayers used by monastic communities of the Roman rite for daily chanting or reading. The "Psalter," or Book of Psalms, is its back-bone of prayer. Readings from Scripture, the fathers of the Church, and homilies or sermons on the gospels constitute its meditative element. Hymns and Canticles add charm and variety.

The Breviary is really an abridgement of the lengthy Divine Office. When the secular clergy and missionaries were unable to recite or chant the Office in common, this briefer form of daily worship became customary. The private recitation of the Breviary requires about an hour or more, divided into the various times of the day and night.

1. The Hours, or constituent parts of the Office and Breviary divide the time of day as follows:

- a. Matins, or the night office, which is made up of psalms and readings called Lessons.
- b. Lauds, the ancient morning prayer of the Church.
- c. The Little Hours:
 1. Prime: the morning prayer before beginning the work of the day. This hour is of monastic origin.
 2. Terte: the third "hour" of the Roman day, which is usually recited at 9 o'clock in the morning, before High Mass.
 3. Sext: the prayer at mid-day.
 4. None: afternoon prayer at the ninth hour of the Roman day, or about 3 P.M.
- d. Vespers: the solemn evening prayer of the ancient Church. First Vespers are celebrated on the eve of a feast; Second Vespers are celebrated on the evening of the feast itself.
- e. Compline: the final night prayer which completes or concludes the Office of the day.

2. Other terms used in the Divine Office or Breviary:

- a. Antiphon: a short verse or theme preceding and following a psalm or canticle.
- b. Canticle: a hymn of praise or thanksgiving. The three most important canticles used in the Office are the "Benedictus," or Canticle of Zachary, at lauds; the "Magnificat," or Canticle of the Blessed Virgin, used at vespers; and the Canticle of Simeon, used in Roman Compline.

- c. Chapter: short reading from Scripture read after the last psalm at most of the hours.
- d. Invitatory: the verse introducing psalm 94 at the beginning of matins. It is inserted between each verse of the psalm.
- e. Nocturn: the major division of the hour of matins This latter hour may consist of only one nocturn, with nine psalms, and three lessons, or of three nocturns with three psalms and lessons each. A responsory is read or sung after each lesson.
- f. Opus Dei: this term, meaning the "Work of God," is applied especially by St. Benedict to designate the whole of the Divine Office or duty of prayer to God.
- g. Response: a short invocation, usually taken from a psalm, and preceded by a versicle.
- h. Responsory: a short prayer said antiphonally (alternately), used after lessons and chapters.
- i. Versicle: a short invocation, usually taken from a psalm, and followed by a response.

II. Other Technical terms used in the text:

1. English terms:

- a. Basilica: a major church, usually ancient, or a church which because of its preeminence receives this name as a title of honor.
- b. Feast: a day celebrated in honor of God or the saints.
- c. Ferial Day: an ordinary week-day.
- d. Motet: a vocal composition on a sacred text, usually polyphonic or in parts. Motets are usually sung after the offertory at Mass, or during Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.
- e. Sanctoral Cycle: the succession of feasts of the saints beginning with the vigil or eve of St. Andrew in November and concluding the following November 26th on the feast of St. Sylvester, Abbot.
- f. Station (Stational Church): an important Roman church or basilica at which important feasts are celebrated by the Pope. These stations are held at various churches located in the city of Rome, especially on important feasts and during the whole of Lent.
- g. Temporal Cycle: the division of the seasons of the year in honor of the incarnation and redemption:
 1. The Christmas Cycle (the Incarnation): which extends from the First Sunday in Advent until the Feast of the Purification (February second);
 2. The Easter Cycle (the Redemption): which begins with Septuagesima Sunday and extends through the last Sunday after Pentecost. The latter part of this cycle, beginning with Pentecost, is concerned

with the work of redemption effectuated by the Holy Spirit in the Church.

2. Greek and Latin terms:

- a. *Majestas Domini* (the Majesty of the Lord): a representation of Christ in glory often seen in Byzantine churches, and frequently in Roman churches.
- b. *Parousia*: the second coming of Christ in glory to judge the world at the end of time.
- c. *IHS* or *IHC*: the first three Greek letters of the name of Jesus.
- d. *ICTHUS*: a rather complicated symbol used very frequently in the ancient church. The Greek words are as follows: *Iesous Christos Theou Uios Soter* (Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Savior). By taking the first Greek letters of each of these words, the word, "Icthtus," or Greek word for Fish was formed. This is the reason for the common usage of the Fish as a symbol of the Savior.
- e. *PHOS-ZOE* (Light-Life): these two Greek words form an acrostic in the form of a cross, with the letter "O" or Greek omega as the center. "Phos," or Light represents the light of Faith received in the fore-Mass; "Zoe," or Life represents the Mass of the Faithful in which they receive the Bread of Life.
- f. *XP* (Chi-Rho): this symbol, usually formed into a cross, is taken from the first two Greek letters of the name of Christ. In English we use three letters, *Chr*, but in Greek X is *ch* (pronounced chi) and P is the letter R or Rho.

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