

SUNDAY PLUS

Christmas is coming

Tabernacle of the Lord



by Luke de Pulford

A lesser known title for Mary is “Tabernacle of the Lord.” In Eastern iconography the image is widely venerated with the Christ Child in a womb-like circle at the heart of the Virgin’s body. More recent western interpretations have simply shown the consecrated Host in the same place. No passage better illustrates these images than today’s Gospel, telling of Mary’s visit to her cousin Elizabeth.

What I love about this particular iconographic tradition is that it can help to renew our love for our tabernacles. It’s so easy to forget the awesome mystery of these unassuming containers. They never complain if we don’t acknowledge them, or if our genuflections have more to do with habit than devotion – if we bother at all.

But these little boxes, like Mary, locate the presence of the Lord of heaven and earth. And here’s the really extraordinary thing: for a brief

period after Communion, we too become tabernacles of the Lord, holding within our own bodies his Real Presence: Jesus’ true body.

Reflecting on the visitation, many of the Church Fathers observed that Mary first welcomes Jesus and then shared what she had received. We see the joy that results. Mary bears the Lord to her cousin and John the Baptist “leapt for joy” in his mother’s womb.

Extending the tabernacle analogy, it is almost as if this was the first Benediction, with Elizabeth and John the Baptist receiving the blessing, and Mary as the monstrance. From the many lessons that can be drawn from this rich passage, perhaps one of the clearest is the need to share the Lord with others, whose Eucharistic presence is vulnerable, humble and risks derision, just as the infant Jesus in the stable.

Luke de Pulford, a Catholic journalist, is a founder of the Arise Foundation, www.arise.foundation, which fights against people trafficking and domestic slavery.

Image © Lawrence OP / Mosaic from the apse of Saint Sophia, the Greek Orthodox Cathedral in Washington DC.

Pray for them

by Gerlinde Symons

As Advent draws to a close, our time of waiting and preparation is almost over. Soon we will be rejoicing the birth of the infant Jesus, God made flesh, Emmanuel!

For many of us, it will be a time of celebration, a time to share a meal and exchange gifts with our families, friends, colleagues and neighbours. But for men and women in prison, it’s a very difficult time. They may be able to call their loved ones, or spend a couple of hours in the visits hall with their families, but that’s not the same as being at home. Many have feelings of guilt and regret for letting their families down, and they are reminded of this at Christmas time. Consequently, incidents of self-harm and thoughts of suicide tend to increase, so prison staff take extra care to identify vulnerable prisoners and offer them support.

Please remember our brothers and

sisters in Christ who will be spending this Christmas in prison. Pray for them and their loved ones, that they may be filled with God’s peace and love.

Gerlinde Symons is a lay Catholic chaplain in two UK prisons.

Loving Lord, do you appreciate how busy I am? Now that Christmas is literally only hours away, my “to do” list is becoming longer and longer. Help me to make time for you. Let me not lose sight of you during the celebrations for your birth. Amen.

Believe in Christmas

by Mary Bell

“If only we could have Christmas all the time”, say children, who don’t understand that the essence of happiness is its transitory nature. Anticipating the good things in life is all part of the pleasure. On Christmas Eve we impatiently wait for midnight to come – the candles shining in darkness, scents of green foliage, singing carols, the wonder, the crib, the love implicit in the giving and receiving of gifts. There is laughter and sharing and light. Thoughts of this at any age fill our hearts with longing.

Every newborn baby brings a sense of hope, a life to be fulfilled; this one more than any other. As

we look into the crib each year, delighting in the smallness of the infant Jesus, in child-like wonder we accept this moment as a blessing, a promise of future hope, and rejoice once again in that warmth which can only be called joy.

Mary Bell is a grandmother and a retired teacher who continues to use her skills in the University of the Third Age.

“If we really want to celebrate Christmas, let’s contemplate this image: the fragile simplicity of a newborn baby. That’s where God is

Pope Francis

Merry Christmas from all of us at Redemptorist Publications

Today: Micah 5:1-4 Hebrews 10:5-10 Luke 1:39-45	Monday: Mass in the Morning 2 Samuel 7:1-5. 8-12. 14. 16 Luke 1:67-79	Tuesday: Vigil Mass: Isaiah 62:1-5 Acts 13:16-17. 22-25 Matthew 1:1-25	Mass During the Night: Isaiah 9:1-7 Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-14	Dawn Mass: Isaiah 62:11-12 Titus 3:4-7 Luke 2:15-20	Mass During the Day: Isaiah 52:7-10 Hebrews 1:1-6 John 1:1-18	Wednesday: Acts 6:8-10; 7:54-59 Matthew 10:17-22	Thursday: 1 John 1:1-4 John 20:2-8	Friday: 1 John 1:5 – 2:2 Matthew 2:13-18	Saturday: 1 John 2:3-11 Luke 2:22-35 (E) St Thomas Becket (Feast) Colossians 1:24-29 Luke 22:24-30 or Matthew 10:28-33	Next Sunday: 1 Samuel 1:20-22. 24-28 1 John 3:1-2. 21-24 Luke 2:41-52
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