

A Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord



DEAR FRIENDS OF MOUNT SAVIOUR:

The heart of the Christian message, the revelation of the triune God whose inner life we share through Christ, is spoken to us as it were in the one Word of the Son. This is beautifully expressed by the prophet Isaias in words familiar to us in the Christmas liturgy, "A child is born to us, a son is given us; upon his shoulder dominion rests." In Jesus Christ, the mysteries of the Incarnation and of the Trinity are communicated to us in a way apprehensible by man. But just what do we apprehend, you and I, at the heart of the Christian message today in 1971?

Let us take advantage of the days of Advent to "ponder all these things in our heart" as scripture says Mary used to do. She seems to have been a lively and energetic woman with enough presence of mind to ask the right questions about the conflicting signs she was being given. We don't usually think of her as endowed with such a quick mind and a demanding nature. In fact, we rarely consider our closeness to Mary and the saints in terms of our common aspirations and common humanity.

Scripture relates her encounters with Christ and often ends by saying she didn't understand. How did she live with it and keep going? Her problems with the first century Christ and ours with the twentieth century Body of Christ are not all that different. I remember a black woman who was asked what she wanted for herself and her family. She replied, "Write down what you want and sign my name." The mystery of the Incarnation is like a man who made a list of the deepest desires of his heart and found an identical list signed by God.

To join with anyone and to identify your destiny with his is a fantastic risk. Yet God did it — he did it with joy and enthusiasm and he loved it. And he is still with us and he still loves it. There is a word in Job: "Even if he kills me, yet I will trust him." This word is on the lips of a man, but as inspired by God. It could have been said by Christ as a man subject to death. It could also be said as God's word to us. Nothing can take away his faith in us even if we kill him. Even our malice in its passionate intensity cannot destroy his saving faith in us. God did not give a mere sign or word about his faith in man. He embodied that faith. This is fantastic.

The Irish seer, William Butler Yeats, speaks for all of us in *The Second Coming*: "The best lack all conviction while the worst are full of passionate intensity. Things fall apart; the center cannot hold." The good lack all conviction; the center cannot hold. I would sign my name to that. But I would want to add: Thank God, because that which is not holding never was the center anyway!

The center is given to us, the center is born to us. It is the Son, center and focus of the Father's life whose self and spirit are imparted to us. He is as it were the center of the Father's trust and the one on whom his spirit rests with confidence.

Frau Paula Buschbaum-Winzen, the elder sister of Reverend Father Damasus, came to the United States in September to visit her brother's grave and see the fruit of his life's working and teaching. She first attended the meeting of the oblates in New York, and then was driven through the Catskills to Mount Saviour. She came with our oblate, Helen Mann, who was her interpreter during visits with the community and with friends of the monastery in Elmira and the neighborhood. We found Frau Paula charming, and able to describe from another viewpoint the sudden conversion of a young university student into a monk, to the utter surprise of his family. That was fifty years ago. There was much to remind us of Father Damasus — especially a liveliness and gentle curiosity in the eyes, and an eagerness to see and do everything we suggested. Frau Paula also visited Regina Laudis, the monastery of Benedictine nuns where Father Damasus served as first Chaplain, before returning to Germany.

Fire broke out in the arts and crafts shop, early morning of October 23. Brother Pachomius, returning to his cell after vigils, saw the flames and turned in the alarm, and the fire crew (Brothers William and Mark, Bill Schuyler, and Father James who came over from the milking) went into operation, assisted by nearly everyone from the monastery and guest-house. Very soon the Golden Glow Firemen arrived, and added their hoses to ours, and with their ladders, axes and lights entered the building. The firemen worked well, the fire was brought under control quickly, and by dawn we were able to sing Lauds. The cleaning up began that morning and revealed that the potter's wheel and probably the metal book-binding equipment (see fourth notice, below) were salvageable. Everything else was lost — an electric kiln, all the tools and unglazed pots, works of sculpture, papers, leathers and glues, all the handbooks, drawings and notes that accumulate in craft-shops, and the entire contents of the wood-working shop. The kiln, where the fire began, remains, but its outer cover is gone, and the shop building was declared by the insurance men a total loss. But we must be grateful that no one was injured, that the adjoining machine shop was spared, and that in the damp windless morning no harm came to the barn or the woods close by.



We were fortunate during the late spring and summer to have weekly illustrated lectures in artistic and cultural history from Bill Hood, candidate for a doctorate in art history at the NYU Institute of Fine Arts. Stanley Hopper, professor of religion and literature at Syracuse University, will come to us for a few days in November. His subject will be the nature of meaning. Father Thomas Berry, of Fordham University, who has guided our studies from afar the last two years, will come for a week in December. The subject we will work on then is a broad one, religious life and modern man.

Through a series of loans and gifts, most significantly that of the necessary mechanical equipment by our Carmelite brothers in Waverly, we had set up a bookbinding in the arts and crafts shop. Brother Aelred, who studied this subject

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Who can put into words this mystery? The center for the Son was the proclamation of what the Father was actually doing in him. The role given the Messiah by the prophets was to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers. When this relationship is established, man would be centered as God is centered. This is the true center which does hold. Rooted in this center, goodness, passion and conviction all can flourish.

This is the message of Christmas: man has been reoriented around a new center, born and given to him. Jesus Christ is the faith of the Father given to us not merely as precept or encouragement, but as center of his own life shared with us. He dwells among us. He is in the midst of us, as the center — wherever we really are, not where we wish we were. This was the way he was with Mary and Joseph in the darkness of the night, in a place they didn't choose to be, involved in a responsibility both awesome and unknown. He is in the midst of us, integrating us, the living center so that our conviction can be ignited from his passionate faith in us. With faith enough to become one of us he has signed his name in human flesh that we may sign there too, as lively and bold as he.

May the living child whom Mary bore share with you his Father's love, his joy and Spirit.

fr Martin