

Abbey Letter
no. 260
Christmas 2014





Abbot Andrew



Prior Aelred



Fr. Jude



Fr. William

*We wish you a Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year, and thank you for
your prayers and gifts.*



Br. Martin



Br. Abraham

Beloved Children

Most people start celebrating Christmas right after Thanksgiving Day if not earlier, and move on to Valentine's Day right after the New Year. At St. Gregory's (and in many churches for that matter) we start celebrating Christmas the night before, which is when we decorate the tree. Then we celebrate Christmas up to Epiphany, but we don't think of Christmas as being over until the Baptism of our Lord which comes on the Sunday after Epiphany. We commemorate Jesus' baptism by including a blessing of holy water during the Eucharist. The inauguration of Jesus' adult ministry with his baptism is a new birth paralleling Jesus' physical birth from Mary.

There is an embarrassment about Jesus coming to be baptized that seems to have been shared by John, Matthew, and the early Church. Why should Jesus of all people come to receive a baptism of repentance? Jesus' reply that it is proper to "fulfill all righteousness" has never come across to me as a lucid explanation, although fulfilling righteousness sounds like a good thing. When Jesus is baptized, the heavens open and Jesus hears the words that set the tone for his life and ministry: "This is my son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (Mt. 3:17). In Luke, these words are heard by Jesus only; in Matthew everybody on the spot hears them. In any case, Jesus will be committed to getting those words out to everybody.

These words declare the unconditional love of Jesus' heavenly Father. They echo similar proclamations of God in Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42. In those cases, the words were meant for the King of Israel and the prophet respectively, but in both cases they were also meant for the whole people. The king was intended to spread the blessing to everyone ("May all nations be blessed in him" Ps. 72:17) and the prophet was also called to prophesy to all nations. These words of affirmation assured Jesus of the Father's love for him that he had experienced from all eternity as the Word that was in the beginning. This love had then been extended to the creation of the world. The Father's unconditional love was to support Jesus through a preaching ministry faced with opposition and rejection that would culminate on the cross. Such opposition was already presaged in Psalm 2 that begins with the nations both raging among each other and uniting against the Lord's anointed. These same words of reassurance were spoken to Jesus at his Transfiguration to strengthen him to face his ordeal in Jerusalem.

Based on this unconditional love, Jesus began his ministry with a cry to repent, a declaration of the Jubilee, and the Sermon on the Mount. The "year of the Lord's favor" that Jesus preached in the synagogue was to be a year of amnesty and forgiveness as decreed in Leviticus and re-affirmed by Isaiah. The Sermon on the Mount conveyed God's unconditional love to all listeners which

we should then extend not only to those who treat us well but just as much to those who mistreat us. The call to repentance might seem to undermine God's unconditional love in that a call to repentance suggests there is something wrong with us that we need to correct. First, God does not wait for us to be perfect or even anywhere near good before giving us unconditional love. Second, the word for repentance in the New Testament, *metanoia*, does not primarily mean turning away from sin and other shortcomings; it means turning our minds in a totally new direction.

Basing our lives on God's unconditional love is a radical turning around of life for most of us. We often find ourselves, if we pay attention to what we are doing with our lives, among those who gathered against the Lord's anointed. We live by accusation and blame of other people and energize our lives through seeking revenge for the wrongs done to us or that we think have been done to us. Unconditional love may be all well and good for a good person like Jesus, but we can all think of many things other humans do that call into question the advisability of offering unconditional love to them. What was God thinking when God gave Jesus ideas like that? God was thinking about people like us when God gave Jesus such outlandish ideas. Many people think that receiving unconditional love is an easy way of getting off the hook but anyone who thinks that hasn't even applied for it. Being forgiven gives us both the ability and the endurance to face the truth of the extent to which we fuel our lives with accusation of others and it challenges us to help others do the same. This sort of turning is what baptism is all about as it initiates us into God's kingdom.

For Jesus, a baptism of repentance, of *metanoia*, would almost certainly not have been as radical for him as it is for us. Jesus was loved by his mother who surely was inclined to treasure a son conceived when the angel spoke to her. Likewise, Jesus was surely loved by his adopted father Joseph. But Jesus was also born to a people who held longstanding grudges against other nations. Moreover, they were suffering under the yoke of Roman rule. Feelings of frustration and revenge would have surrounded Jesus as he was growing up and reflecting on how he should renew his people. When he came to John, John was preaching violent judgment against broods of vipers and warning that the axe was laid to the tree. What did Jesus think of that? We don't know if Jesus was having second thoughts about such attitudes or not when he approached John. What we do know is that when the water fell on him and the heavens opened, his life was turned unequivocally to the unconditional love of his heavenly father, a love he would carry with him all the way to the cross and into the resurrection where he still lives to offer God's unconditional love for all eternity to make all of us beloved children in whom God is well pleased.

— Abbot Andrew

NOTES



Br. Jude Hill SSF and Abbot Andrew

Br. Jude Hill SSF stopped in for a tour and visit July 30th. Br. Jude is a Jungian analyst and the superior of the American Province of the Society of St. Francis and was spending part of his sabbatical time at Apple Farm, a nearby Jungian center.

Br. Mark Orcutt OSB from St. Benedict's Monastery in Oxford, Michigan was with us July 30th – 31st. Br. Mark is one of the oblate directors at St. Benedict's. His monastery is next door to St. Augustine's House, a Lutheran Benedictine Monastery.

Fr. Michael Garcia OP and Fr. Thomas McDermott OP were with us for a short visit July 31st. They are both from the Dominican Friary of St. Vincent Ferrer in



*Fr. Michael Garcia OP
& Fr. Thomas McDermott OP*



Br. Mark Orcutt OSB

River Forest, Illinois.

The Rt. Rev. Edward Little, bishop of the Diocese of Northern Indiana, was with us September 21st – 25th.

Fr. William attended the ordination of Jennifer Fulton to the priesthood September 20th at St. Paul's Church in Mishawaka, Indiana, and the ordination of Susan Tiffany to the priesthood at St. Michael and All Angels Church September 26th in South Bend, Indiana.

Abbot Andrew is scheduled to lead a clergy retreat for the Diocese of Calgary February 2nd – 5th. This retreat is a make-up for one that the abbot missed due to inclement weather last year.



Bishop Little

Daily Schedule at St. Gregory's Abbey

Weekdays

4:00 a.m. MATINS
6:00 a.m. LAUDS
8:15 a.m. TERCE
EUCCHARIST
11:30 a.m. SEXT
2:00 p.m. NONE
5:00 p.m. VESPERS
followed by meditation
7:45 p.m. COMPLINE
(on Tuesdays and Thursdays, COMPLINE
is prayed privately)

Sundays and Major Holidays

5:30 a.m. MATINS & LAUDS
8:30 a.m. TERCE
EUCCHARIST
noon SEXT & NONE
5:00 p.m. VESPERS
followed by meditation
7:45 p.m. COMPLINE



St. Gregory's Abbey July Vocation Program

Spend two weeks (or more) in July with the monks of St. Gregory's Abbey, a Benedictine monastery of the Episcopal Church at Three Rivers, Michigan.

Worship & Pray Work & Learn

For males 18 to 50 who can stay for at least two weeks. The only cost is \$25 for registration.

For more information, use the envelope bound in this issue of the Abbey Letter or write:

July Program Director
St. Gregory's Abbey
56500 Abbey Road
Three Rivers, MI 49093

novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org
Applications will be accepted after January 1, 2015.
saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Please send me ___ copy or copies of the

2015 Calendar

Enclosed is \$10.00 for each calendar.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Any payment in excess of the calendar price will be gratefully accepted as a gift to the abbey.
St. Gregory's Abbey, 56500 Abbey Road, Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595

thirteen months, 15 photos, with the Abbey's liturgical calendar

Allow 8 weeks for delivery.

**Or download a PDF of the calendar from our website –
\$2.00 per download!** On the “Publications” tab, go to “Order Publications
(Print)”. Download the PDF and then click the PayPal button to make your payment.

saintgregorysthreerivers.org

Music compositions from St. Gregory's Abbey

Missa Brevis *choral symphony* by Br. Abraham – Latin text from the ordinary of the mass

Rumi *choral symphony* by Br. Abraham – English translation of the poems of Rumi

A Symphony of Psalms *choral symphony* by Br. Abraham – Latin text of four psalms

The Kiss *baritone voice and string quartet* by Br. Abraham – texts from office readings for Mary
Magdalene and the Virgin Mary

Tuesday Afternoon *chorus and wind octet* by Br. Abraham – psalms from Tuesday vespers

Symphony in c minor *orchestral symphony* by Br. Abraham in romantic minimalist style

Symphony in g minor *orchestral symphony* by Br. Abraham in expansive classical style

Visible Dream *piano and baritone voice* by Br. Abraham – poems of Cyrus Cassells

Week In Review *piano and baritone voice* by Br. Abraham – poems of Robert Fruehwirth

The Hours *tenor, baritone, and bass voices* by Br. Abraham – texts from psalms for lauds and
vespers

Life of Benedict *orchestral setting of Gregory the Great's Life of Benedict* by John Webber
scores and synthesized performances available at webbermusic.com

For everything but *Life of Benedict*, search for 'Newsom, A'; for *Life of Benedict*, search for
'Webber, J'. Donations of \$1.00 per look and listen are requested and can be made at the
website or sent to St. Gregory's Abbey designated for "music compositions." Hard copies of scores
and orchestral parts are for sale at list price from webbermusic.com

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FORWARDING SERVICE REQUESTED



Saint Gregory's Abbey is the home of a community of men living under the Rule of Saint Benedict within the Episcopal Church. The center of the monastery's life is the Abbey Church, where God is worshiped in the daily round of Eucharist, Divine Office, and private prayer. Also offered to God are the monks' daily manual work, study and correspondence, ministry to guests, and occasional outside engagements.

The continuing existence of Saint Gregory's is made possible by the support of those who believe that the contemplative vocation within the Church finds valid expression there.

The monks ask your prayers and will be grateful for your offerings.

<http://saintgregorysthreerivers.org/donate.html> to donate online

Donations may be mailed to:
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Three Rivers, MI 49093-9595