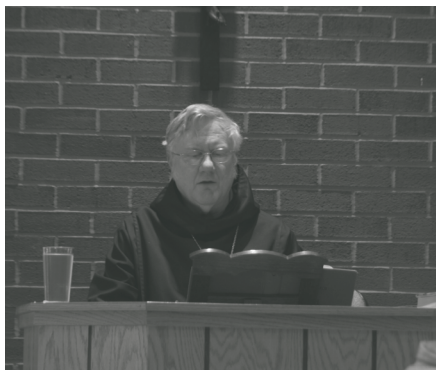




Abbey Letter  
no. 284  
Christmas 2020



Abbot Andrew



Prior Aelred

*The monks of St. Gregory's Abbey wish  
you a Merry Christmas and a joyful 2021.*

Fr. William



Br. Martin



Br. Abraham



Br. Armand

# NOTES

Br. Armand has been elected to life vows. The profession will be scheduled later when it is safe for family and friends to attend.

Abbot Andrew met with members of the Community of Celebration in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania September 28th – October 1st via teleconference. He is the spiritual director for the community and usually travels there every other year. This year, as with so many things, was different.

Saint Gregory's Abbey now has an e-mail list for those wishing to receive the ABBEY LETTER electronically (PDF). To enroll

in the e-mail list, send your full name and e-mail address to

[abbeyletter@saintgregorysthreerivers.org](mailto:abbeyletter@saintgregorysthreerivers.org)

Enrolling in our e-mail list does not remove you from our hard copy mailing list. If you do want to stop receiving the hard copy once you are on the e-mail list, simply send an e-mail to

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telling us you are now on the e-mail list and want to be removed from the hard copy list. (If you are in the confraternity, please mention that so that we make sure you receive the confraternity letter via e-mail).

## Q: What's On Our Website?

**A:** slideshows showing various aspects of the abbey grounds and monastic life, articles from back issues of the *Abbey Letter*, sermons preached by the monks, information about monastic life, the Summer Vocation Program and monastic vocations, and contact links for the abbot, novice master, guest department, and publications office. Prayer requests and donations can also be made online, as well as calendar and book purchases.

[saintgregorysthreerivers.org](http://saintgregorysthreerivers.org)



Please send me \_\_\_\_ copy or copies of the

## 2021 Calendar

Enclosed is \$10.00 for each calendar.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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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!

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## Caroling with Janis

At the very beginning of the Historical Documents section of the Prayer Book is the 451 AD Council of Chalcedon's description of the union of the divine and human in Jesus. It builds on, and clarifies the teaching of the previous ecumenical council, held at Ephesus twenty years earlier.

Both of these councils were called to settle theological debates over the question of who was this Jesus we claim as our Lord and Savior. Chalcedon's answer is repeated in the Athanasian Creed and the Second Article of Religion. Its presence in our church's book tells us that it is the answer of our side in those debates, which is also the side of most mainstream Christians. Well, most mainstream Christians in our part of the world. Our opponents in those councils had their own church traditions and families, which are still with us today.

One of the interesting things happening in the world of ecumenism these days is that after all these centuries, Christians on our side, and the Christians on the other side of these debates are acknowledging that we all do in fact agree on the gospel truth that Jesus is both truly human and truly God. Ever since the days of the councils, each side had been claiming that the other side failed to believe and teach that. This long-delayed recognition isn't leading to churches merging. And not everybody actually agrees that we agree. Still I consider it progress that, on these points, Christians are at peace, instead of fighting, and that church establishments are acknowledging the truth that historians have long held forth.

Thinking of these things has reminded me of one of the great theological conundrums of my own childhood. It was appropriately childish: What was the real, the true tune for "Away in a Manger"? There were two tunes used in the world of my childhood. The simpler one is often labeled as "Mueller." Probably because it's simpler, it was usually the one kids learned first. The slightly fancier tune was the one for "Flow Gently Sweet Afton." As I recall, girls tended to favor that one, probably because it was somehow more refined.

I was unpersuaded by the theologically hollow argument from refinement. But, like the bishops at the ecumenical councils, I was sure that there was one true version of the matter. And I fretted about which was *really* the right musical setting. In my adult years I've come to a position more like that of the latter day ecumenists. The fact is that we really are just singing the same song to different tunes. And that's a tolerable thing. The idea isn't new. There's a solid tradition of hymnbooks with the pages cut in two. The music is printed at the top, and the words below. That way you can more easily sing the words for one hymn to the music printed for another one.

The internet tells me that there are nearly two hundred tunes that have been matched to our Christmas carol. I'm sure that doesn't include my personal favorite. For years now, when I've sung "Away in a Manger" by myself, it's usually been to the tune of Janis Joplin's "O Lord, Won't You Buy Me a Mercedes Benz?" That particular combination works just fine. But not all tunes fit those words. One of the earliest suggested tunes for the carol was the music for "Home Sweet Home." This doesn't work nearly so well. You can sing "Away in a Manger" to that melody, but you have to leave out the music for the chorus. That particular song is half chorus, so it's not really a great fit.





Similarly not all the theological descriptions of Jesus that Christians have come up with fit the gospel story. Some early teachers really did say Jesus wasn't truly God, some said he wasn't truly human. Some said that he didn't fulfil the Old Testament, but exposed it as a fraud, with a phoney pseudo-God. These ways of singing the story of Jesus don't really fit the words we read in the Bible. They are departures from the basic truths we've been given. These teachings are not just ancient opinions from early church history, either. They're still around, sometimes in slightly different forms, today. Part of the job of teachers of the faith is to show how some beliefs match up with the basic truths of the gospel, and how some depart from them.

But even for those solidly orthodox and Biblical in their faith, there's still a place where the ecumenists' idea of back to the basics form a useful element of review in their spiritual lives. When we do our daily examination of conscience, we usually find ourselves noting particular acts, the details of our lives. That's a right thing. Our lives are made up of particular, concrete thoughts, words deeds and omissions.

Still, there are times we should look beyond the details to their foundations. Such times could be when we're preparing for sacramental confession, or on retreat, or in a particular time of re- dedication of our lives to the Lord. This may even be a regularly scheduled part of our spiritual discipline. A good middle step for connecting individual acts with their roots is to look for patterns of behavior. Once we see the patterns, we look at how they do or don't fit with our basic commitments to life in Christ, how the words and the music do and don't fit together. And we set about fixing the parts that aren't right. That is repentance, and repentance and a determination to do better are a most excellent birthday gift to bring to our Lord at Christmas time. God help us all!

—Fr. William

## 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**

## Daily Schedule at St. Gregory's Abbey

### Weekdays

4:00 a.m. MATINS

6:00 a.m. LAUDS

8:15 a.m. TERCE & EUCHARIST

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 & EUCHARIST

noon SEXT & NONE

5:00 p.m. VESPERS  
*followed by meditation*

7:45 p.m. COMPLINE



## CONTACTING THE ABBEY

### Mailing address –

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

### Telephone –

269-244-5893

9:30am - 11:15am or 2:30pm - 4:15pm Eastern Time Monday through Saturday  
(please do not telephone at other times or on Sundays or holidays)

### E-mail –

Guest reservations and information –  
[guestmaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org](mailto:guestmaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org)

### Mailing list –

[office@saintgregorysthreerivers.org](mailto:office@saintgregorysthreerivers.org)

### Abbot Andrew –

[abbot@saintgregorysthreerivers.org](mailto:abbot@saintgregorysthreerivers.org)

Information about becoming a monk or participating in the July Program –

[novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org](mailto:novicemaster@saintgregorysthreerivers.org)

Books and calendars may be ordered, prayers requested, and donations made at our website –

[www.saintgregorysthreerivers.org](http://www.saintgregorysthreerivers.org)



# ST. GREGORY'S ABBEY

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