



## Christmas Eve at the Monastery

Advent 2007

Dear Friends of Clear Creek,

Once again — one wonders by what miracle — the world has survived yet another year, and the season takes us swiftly now towards the feast of the Nativity. Even the most hardened of human hearts feels a tinge of warmth at the thought of Christmas, and children surpass the more mature members of society in capturing the spirit of joyful expectation that is abroad.

In our monasteries, many beautiful customs are kept on Christmas Eve. One is our family meeting after the first Vespers, which takes place in the room we refer to as the “Scriptorium.” This is where our Christmas tree will have been set up and the many Christmas cards and gifts put on display for the monks to peruse during the relative leisure that comes on Christmas day. We meet a little after the evening Angelus has been rung. All should be wearing their best habits. The Brothers are allowed to converse while awaiting Father Abbot and Father Prior to arrive.

When all are assembled, Father Prior (or Father Subprior in a small monastery such as Clear Creek), speaking on behalf of the community, reads a discourse he has prepared with great care. It usually retraces the more important events of the year gone by and is sometimes punctuated by a gentle humor proper to the occasion. The discourse often ends with a filial apology for any faults committed by the monks during the year that may have saddened their Superior, who is their spiritual father and represents Christ among them according to Saint Benedict.

In turn, the Abbot, addressing himself to Father Prior and the community, thanks his sons for their fidelity and generous efforts. He also has words of comfort for various members of the monks’ families, who may be undergoing a particular crisis or hardship, assuring them of his prayers. This is the moment when the father of the community waxes eloquent — becomes a prophet of sorts — distilling the essence of what Christ’s birth on earth continues to mean for the monastic family, the Church in general and the world.

Then take place the Christmas greetings. Each monk, according to his rank in the community, approaches the Abbot, wishing him a blessed and merry Christmas, while receiving the monastic accolade (similar to the liturgical “kiss of peace”). He then takes his place in the line that forms in order to receive the same accolade from the Brothers coming after him. This joyful exchange goes on until the bell for supper rings.

After this light Christmas supper — which always has a particular atmosphere about it, rather difficult to describe — the Novices must hurry off before the dishes are over, in order to prepare to give their Christmas Play. This piece of theater is executed with the poorest of props and costumes,

Foundation for the Annunciation Monastery of Clear Creek

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and will have only Father Abbot, the Novice Masters of the Choir and the Brothers along with their assistants (called “Zelators”) for audience. On occasion, a Novice who has “graduated” from the Novitiate and joined the community during the year, will be invited to watch the spectacle as well.

The time remaining after supper and the Novices’ Play, before Matins begin, is spent in holy reading, in practicing solos that will have to be recited during the liturgy, or last minute preparations in the sacristy. A hot drink is served in the refectory just before the Office begins, as the night has often become cold and the monks will be up for many more hours before retiring . . . The rest is the secret of the monks. No written account could ever truly capture the grace proper to such a night.

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This year we will have even more things to be thankful for than usual. We continue to rejoice particularly in the great gift that has been given to the entire Church through the Holy Father’s *Motu Proprio*, which restores the habitual use of the older form of the Roman rite, now to be known as the Extraordinary form. Closer to home there is the rapid growth of our community, which has grown to thirty in number, with many more postulants hoping to join us in 2008.

Nothing could better bring home to us God’s goodness, however, nothing could better express in a concrete manner the loving dispositions of Divine Providence, than the fact that we will be receiving at Christmas the keys of our new monastery — in fact our first monastery, as our present quarters were never meant to be anything but a temporary shelter. It will be with no small emotion that we leave our little “stable monastery,” our *cowboy Bethlehem* along the banks of Clear Creek, to move up to the beautiful place on the hill that has been prepared with so much competence and love, in great part thanks to your own prayers and generosity. We wish you an abundant participation in our own joy as we contemplate these things and prepare to greet the Birth of the Savior of the World in His Mother’s arms.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "br. Philip Anderson, Prior". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

br. Philip Anderson, Prior