

## THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS AND THE LADDER OF HUMILITY

Christmas 2010

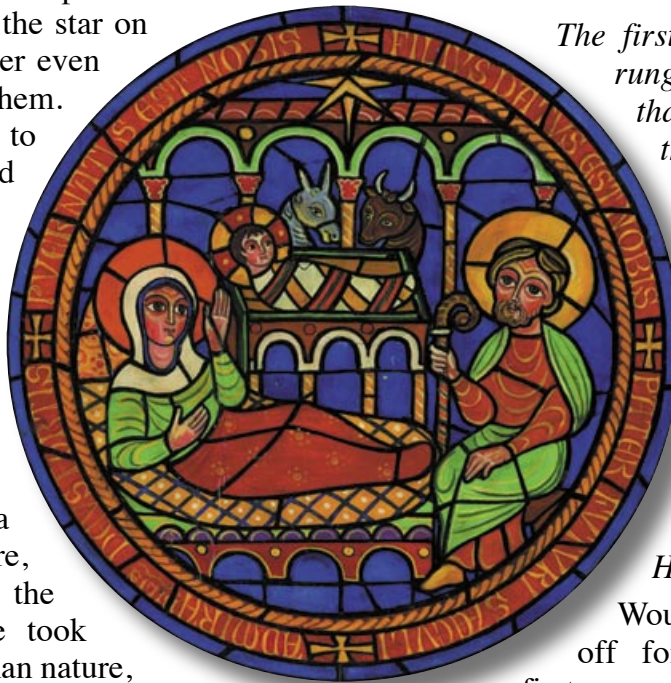
Dear Friend of Clear Creek Abbey,

**h**ere is a little path you can follow through the days ahead, through the twelve days of the great feast of the humility of God, that is to say — the feast of Christmas. It is an upward path actually, a spiritual step-ladder. Its top reaches higher than the star on the Christmas tree, higher even than the Star of Bethlehem. It is St. Benedict's gift to the Order of Monks and to the world, the ladder of humility. It has twelve rungs, one for each day. It is for you too.

Jesus, Our Little Lord, followed it in reverse. He came down this ladder from Heaven, humbling Himself to a degree undreamt of before, from the beginning of the world. Being God, He took upon Himself a true human nature, becoming Incarnate in the Babe of Bethlehem. It is all too much for us fully to fathom. Even His Immaculate and virginal Mother could only ponder the mystery in her heart, without ever exhausting the meaning.

We, on the contrary, must go up the ladder. St. Benedict in his Rule for monks (Chapter Seven) describes the climb in very realistic terms. Life's

great challenges are met head on. We are too big; we have to get smaller and not take up so much space in the world. We must accept who we really are and not live in a virtual universe, a mere world of shadows.



*The first degree of humility (or rung of this ladder), then, is that a man always keep the fear of God before his eyes, avoiding all forgetfulness . . . Let him consider that he is always beheld from heaven by God, and that his actions are everywhere seen by the eye of the Divine Majesty, and are every hour reported to Him by His angels . . .*

Wouldn't the world be better off for having climbed this first rung of the ladder? Wouldn't it be more like Bethlehem, where Angels watch and proclaim the Glory of God?

On the second day of Christmas, we are asked to make a beautiful gift to God in ridding ourselves of our selfishness.

*The second degree of humility (writes St. Benedict) is that a man love not his own will, nor delight*

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*in gratifying his own desires; but carry out in his deeds that saying of the Lord:  
“I came not to do mine own will, but the will of Him who sent me . . .”*

The third rung of this unusual Christmas climb evokes the great drama of human history to which the Birth of Christ was the divine prelude. This same baby Jesus was to become the true Partridge on the Pear-Tree of the Cross, rendering absolute obedience to His Father. He invites us to share in this exalted sentiment:

*The third degree of humility is that a man for the love of God submit himself to his superior in all obedience; imitating the Lord, of whom the apostle saith: “He was made obedient even unto death.”*

Unfortunately, it would be too lengthy a process to tell all the other rungs of the ladder of humility in this Christmas letter. However, if you do not have a copy of the *Rule* of St. Benedict, in which are found the texts that I have been sharing with you (Chapter Seven), I would be happy to send you a small copy of this very important book as a rather late Christmas gift. All you have to do is to let me know by a brief letter (you have to do a little work, you see), and I will send you one. I cannot resist, however, quoting at least part of the last step of the ladder, the highest rung that gives the whole climb its meaning.

*Having, therefore, ascended all these degrees of humility, the monk (or yourself) will presently arrive at that love of God which, being perfect, casts out fear: whereby he shall begin to keep, without labor, and as it were naturally and by custom, all those precepts which he had up until then observed with fear. He will do this, no longer through dread of Hell, but for the love of Christ . . .*

That incomparable love begins at Christmas, as an upwards journey to the place from which the Infant of the Manger came down along the great ladder, so as to lead us back up. My Christmas wish and prayer is that you undertake this climb if you have not already started, or that you continue on this royal highway if you have already set your foot to the task. All our authentic human endeavors can become part of the process. May the Infant, from the ladder of His Mother’s lap, bless the Twelve Days of our Christmas climb.

+ br. Philip Anderson, abbot

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P.S. As I mentioned in my last letter, we are proceeding with the Abbey Church. I would invite you to visit our website ([clearcreekmonks.org](http://clearcreekmonks.org)) and click on “Construction Site.” We have posted a number of photos there of the church walls going up!