



THE FIRST NOEL AND THE FIRST SMILE

Christmas 2012

Dear Friend of Clear Creek Abbey,

Much has been said about the coming of the Son of God into this world on the first Christmas, during the night of Bethlehem. This was the first act of the Gospel, the first Evangelization, the first Noel. Over the years and centuries spiritual writers—not to mention the evangelists themselves—have made mention of just about every aspect of this unique scene: the place, the time, the actors, the circumstances of it all. *In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. . . .*

One somewhat neglected facet of the Christmas story has to do with the face of this newborn, who arrives in a poor stable of Judea. As the theologians and philosophers tell us, the human face reveals something of the human soul; it lifts a corner of the mystery of a man's personality, something of his person. In this sense the face is the icon of the inner man. But in the case of Jesus—even as a newborn babe—we are dealing with a Divine Person. Jesus' Face is a true if not complete revelation of His Divine Person. How, since the Creation of the world—or more precisely from the Fall of Adam and Eve—the human race had longed to contemplate this God whose friendship and familiarity had been lost in the primal garden! *Thy face, Lord, do I seek. Hide not thy face from me* (Psalm 26).

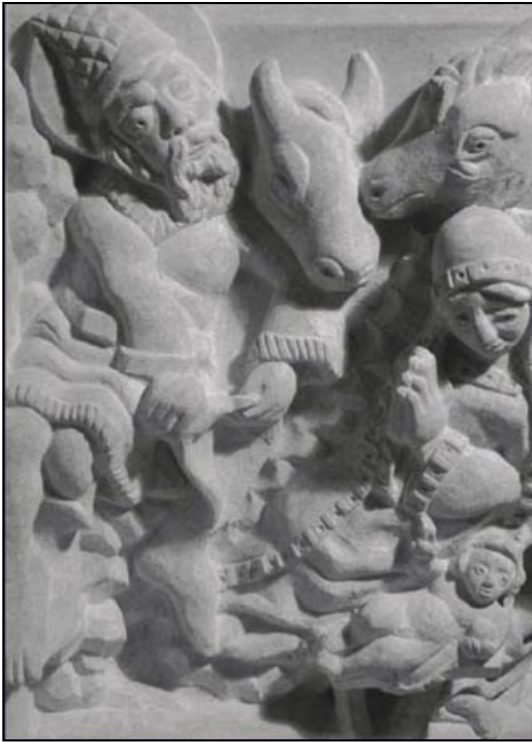


On the night of Bethlehem, at long last, the very Face of God was shown to mankind, being revealed to some humble members of the people of Israel. Although this revelation remains veiled under the luminous shadow of Faith, even if the little Face was not the glorified face of the Transfiguration or the Face of the face-to-face of eternal life, nevertheless it was truly the face of the Divine Person come to earth to save the human race, the face of the God-Man Jesus Christ.

Dostoevsky once wrote something to the effect that the tears of one baby are of greater worth than the entire order of the universe. The same might be said of one baby's smile, especially if that

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From Abbey Portal: Sculpture by Andrew Smith

little one happens to be the true King of the universe! It may be that babies do not often smile on the day they are born . . . but the point is that there was this first smile of the Son of God and that this smile represented in itself a sublime revelation and a new springtime for the human race.

Many Christians these days—especially Catholics—will be in a somber mood, following the recent elections, as they contemplate with some anxiety the future of our nation and the status of Catholics in a political environment that seems to menace our religious freedom. A point of no return seems to have been passed, and a spiritual and moral decline that had already begun now appears inevitable. How foolish we would be, however, to let unfavorable circumstances on the political and economic front erase from our hearts and minds the remembrance of what counts most, the memory of the smile of God! Nothing can stop the expansion of a Kingdom that depends, not on polls and pundits for its success, but on a love that has no beginning or end, on a

love that knows no frontiers or barriers. Let us move forward during this Year of Faith proclaimed by the Holy Father, toward a New Evangelization of our poor world, enlightened as we go by the radiance of the tiny Face of Bethlehem, before which the dark things at work in the world flee like so many shadows afraid of their own nothingness.

With Hope and spiritual good cheer in the light of the mystery of Christmas that is upon us, on behalf of all the monks of Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey, I offer once again our wishes for a Blessed and Merry Christmas to all our good friends that have done so much to make our monastery a living reality in the heartland of America. May the Infant and His Mother smile upon you and yours.

+ br. Philip Anderson, abbot

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