



Monastery of the Ascension

# THE DESERT CHRONICLE

XXIX, No. 4 ADVENT 2020

## Advent 2020

**A**FTER A YEAR MARKED BY CATASTROPHIC FIRE, PANDEMIC, AND POLITICAL UGLINESS, THE PRAYER FROM THE ADVENT LITURGY, “DROP DOWN DEW FROM ABOVE, LET THE EARTH BUD FORTH A SAVIOR,” seems appropriate. Maybe not dew, but a thick blanket of snow, to cover over 2020 and brood something better.

To celebrate Advent this year, we have asked four friends to write reflections on the season. Let us pray for them and for each other, that we may be ready for the Savior’s Coming.

### An Advent Sensibility

by *Letitia Thornton*

Benedictine priest and liturgical scholar Patrick Regan called Advent “the dawn in time of the fullness of time, the entrance into history of the goal of history, the appearance in one man of the ultimate future of all.” And this appearance is no superficial cameo: in his incarnation, Christ rejects nothing of our humanity except sin. Our pain, our sorrow, our big and small joys, our particular bonds of love for each other that must be loosed at the end of life—even death itself—all these were accepted and manifested by him.

If it is “the goal of history that enters history” at Advent, then Advent is at once waiting and fulfillment. It is not just preparation but realization. It is itself a salvific time, because contained within Advent is Easter. That is, that which we hope for is already present. This is nothing less than a breathtaking reality of overwhelming hope. Words that tumble into mind and crowd upon each other—nativity, epiphany, *parousia*—these are mysteries best grasped by the heart rather than the head, and Advent is the doorway to all these, as it is the doorway to the unfolding mystery that is the entire liturgical year. A season that opens so much mystery is possibly best understood as a heart-season. It is suited more to symbol rather than precepts; sensibility, rather than sense.

See “ADVENT 2020”, *cont. on page 4*

## INSIDE

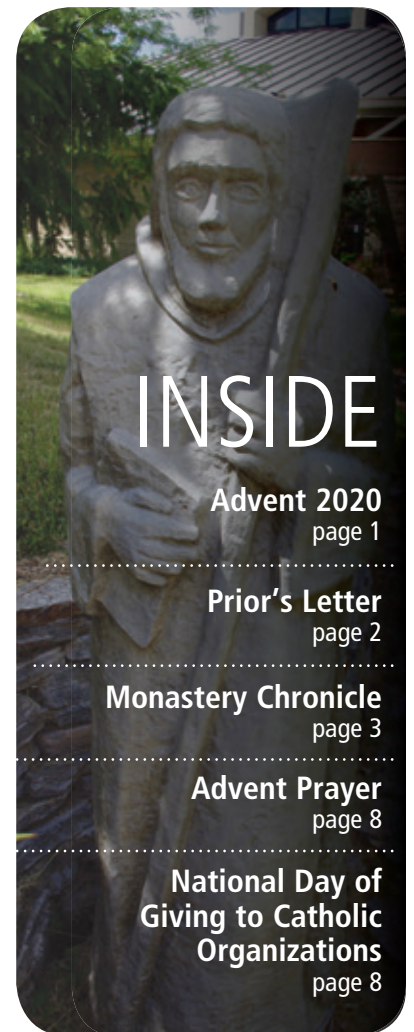
**Advent 2020**  
page 1

**Prior’s Letter**  
page 2

**Monastery Chronicle**  
page 3

**Advent Prayer**  
page 8

**National Day of  
Giving to Catholic  
Organizations**  
page 8





Dear Friends of the Monastery,

Blessings to all of you. You are in our prayers daily. In addition to your specific requests for prayer, the general intention continues to be for welfare and help for all affected by COVID-19. Thank heaven we have been spared thus far. We remain on “lock down” and will continue to do so at least until there is a vaccine for all.

Like many, staying in relative isolation results in changing familiar ways of doing things. The other day we received a letter from the Jerome County Elections Director. “Due to the Corona Virus Pandemic your normal voting precinct *The Monastery of the Ascension* is currently not open to the public. Therefore, the County has decided to permanently move Falls City Precinct to a new location *for all future elections* to the Jerome County Airport Terminal.”

What prompted this reflection were the words *permanently* and *for all future elections*. Something is going to change permanently. It will never be the same again. Actually, this particular change may be an improvement. The local airport is probably easier to find and more accessible.

Two things came to mind. First, the change may be beneficial. And two, what was lost was something we can be grateful for. We enjoyed being the voting precinct. We got to see friends and neighbors, and we had the convenience of voting

right here. So we can be grateful for that.

So here we are on “lock down”. And some of the good things we cannot do, we may have to discontinue permanently. For sure there is a sense of loss about that. But we can also look back with gratitude.

Thanksgiving Day is a month away at this writing. Giving thanks can be a daily deed. In a time of conflict and division in our world, giving thanks is not a ready attitude, but an important one. To give thanks for what we have received and for what we have done with it for others.

There is a passage in Matthew 10, 8: “Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give.” It captures an important quality of one who wants to follow Christ. In the Gospels Jesus speaks often on the way we are to make use of our blessings. So as we give thanks on Thanksgiving Day, we might include thanks for the good things we have done but can do no longer.

This issue of the *Desert Chronicle* is early. It has articles on Advent, but Christmas and New Year greetings can fit in. We want you to have abundant blessings. May the presence of Christ find a place in all our hearts.

Peace and good things,  
Fr. Boniface Lautz, O.S.B.  
Prior







# Monastery Chronicle

*By Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB*

## SEPTEMBER

Fr. Ezekiel returned from Colorado on September 2. We were able to resume singing at Vespers with the support of an organist. Though our liturgy is not elaborate, being able to sing makes a big difference. Our efforts to slow the pace of our community prayer have had positive results. We are still getting used to it.

We gathered to have the Sacrament of Anointing for LuAnn prior to her surgery, which occurred on September 9. After a two week recovery she is back with us, for which she and we are grateful.

The Diocese requires that we participate in the safe environment renewal program. We were able to do it on line. As our doctors have recommended, most of us have been able to get flu shots.

Since we are not hosting programs here in the foreseeable future, our loyal friends who use our facilities have had to try other venues. The quilting group came to take their equipment, and were able to take some quilting materials that we had stored. That included some liturgical vestments that had gathered dust for many years.

As we plan for our future here, we've been trying to think of ways that our retreat center can be best put to use. We've asked some of our good friends to help us with ideas. We had a first session to come up with different possibilities.

Zoom is becoming a familiar term. Fr. Hugh has been able to make use of the process to hold meetings with our Oblates and to

represent us in local organizations and to take in the pilot of a JustFaith class called "Sacred Land: Food and Farming." Several others in the house make use of it as well. It seems to be the new normal.

Fall is here. All the crops are harvested: the beets were finished in an early dig and the silage corn was cut on Sept. 27. The tomatoes in our garden continue to produce. LuAnn and Adam made some great salsa and plan for some tomato paste. One of our Oblates is helping refinish outdoor furniture and. Br. Tobiah and John Wasko are winterizing the grounds and flowers beds.

## OCTOBER

We received some loads of top soil to fill vacant spots in the lawn. A friend has drained our lawn irrigation system, as he does every year.

We have had a final harvest of tomatoes. There was an abundant crop and we were able to share some of it. LuAnn and Adam made lots of salsa and tomato sauce that will enrich our menu this winter. We've been blessed by gardening friends, who have brought us wonderful honey dew melons, corn, peppers, apples and plums.

Our friend, Fr. Stephen MacPherson departed for Ireland on October 7. We had a small social gathering to bid him farewell. He has let us know of his safe arrival. He was required to make an initial self-quarantine for two weeks, but has now settled in his permanent residence in Knock. We wish him well.

John Wasko has been doing extensive work to repair and refinish vacated rooms. In the

process, with advice from Br. Sylvester, he found a way to clear and clean between the double panes on some of our exterior windows. Such a pleasant discovery! We thought we might have to get help from the window company, and of course the warranty period had expired.

Fr. Kenneth's saint's day was October 11.

We had a second "brainstorming" meeting about the future of the monastery and have gotten some good ideas. Now we are trying to think about what we have heard from our friends and plan ahead.

The pandemic has affected us in various ways. One of our helpers was hospitalized for several days and is doing well at home. She was not in contact with any of us. Our chef was in possible contact with someone, but was immediately tested and found negative. We try to be careful here, and so far have been successful.

We had a pleasant visit from the Verbun Spei Community on October 23. They came to get acquainted. We hope we can meet again.

Our assistant part-time cook, Adam, will be leaving us at the end of the month. He has an opportunity for a full time job that looks promising. We will miss him and wish him many blessings.

Fr. Ezekiel birthday's is November 30. •





“ADVENT 2020”, *from page 1*

The Church, in sacramentals and saint-days, gives us much to enrich our imaginations during our Advent journey. Fragrant wreaths of evergreen, shining with candlelight; St. Nicholas’ gifts of gleaming gold; the heavily pregnant Lady of Guadalupe, astonishingly surrounded by tender roses—these symbols of hope work through our senses, not our logic, to properly orient us from the inside out as we recommit to the journey that began with our baptism.

How then does one approach Advent? Especially this year, perhaps, Christians need to consider a heart-based experience and understanding. This confusing and chaotic year, perhaps our faith-growth should be less dogma-driven, less certain, and instead led more by an embrace of symbol and metaphor. (After all, it has been said that metaphor is the language God uses to speak to humanity.) This season, perhaps we embrace an interior approach, one that, in trust and vulnerability, allows faith, hope, and love to sprout and root in darkness and silence, as a seed does, as a baby does, as the infant Jesus did, when he and all humanity awaited his birth. •

*Letitia Thornton is Director of the Office of Worship, Diocese of Boise*

## “Sure, Give Me A Second”

*by Jay Richard Akkerman*

“But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish, and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.” - *II Peter 3.8-15a (NRSV, Catholic Edition)*

I suspect most of us are familiar with the old joke about the man kneeling in prayer and asking, “God, is it true that a million years are only like a second for you?” “Yes, my child,” the Lord answered. So the man followed up this way: “And is it also true





Jay Akkerman

that a million dollars are like a penny for you?" Again, God replied, "Yes, beloved." So then the man asked, "Lord...can you spare a penny?" to which God replied, "Sure, give me a second."

We human beings are often naturally impatient, but

the Advent season is all about waiting. Anticipation italicizes this opening season of the Christian calendar as we join with countless generations before us in praying with ransomed Israel, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

Today, holiday impatience is stoked by modern marketers who test our limits with algorithms programmed to entice our spending at Christmastime. And children know firsthand the impatience leading up to Christmas, even as the winter darkness drags them ever-so-slowly to December 25th.

The Apostle Peter penned this farewell discourse to Gentile Christians who were scattered throughout Asia Minor, now modern-day Turkey. These first-century Christians were undergoing persecution, so Peter wrote to comfort and encourage them to maintain hope by remembering God's perspective, which morphs even the precision of time: "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day" (3.8).

Peter reminds all of us who read this letter to recognize that this "one to a thousand and thousand to one" paradox is a fact grounded in the patience of God, who doesn't want anyone to perish. Instead, God's beckoning grace offers us a great gift by patiently inviting all of us into relationship.

But in the same way that children discover that all of their holiday hype has a way of dissolving like their torn, cast-off gift wrapping, Peter indicates that the day of the Lord ultimately arrives -- quickly yet stealthily. In the end, Peter challenges all of his readers to live Godly lives, recognizing that God provides all that is necessary for our spiritual growth.

What kind of people does God want us to be? Peter says we're called to lives of holiness and godliness (3.11). Sounds like a one-in-a-thousand shot to many of us, I recognize. But literally, Peter says we're called to be set apart, awaiting God's patient

movement every second of our lives.

This Advent season, could I offer you a penny for your thoughts? What are you waiting for? Even now, God is working patiently on making all things new, where we can be at home with righteousness (3.13), and with the Spirit's power, we can regard the patience of our Lord as having saving power as we strive to live at peace with God, with others, and ultimately even ourselves.

So beloved, rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel. •

- Dr. Jay Richard Akkerman is dean of the College of Graduate & Professional Studies at Northwest Nazarene University, where he also chairs the NNU Graduate School of Theology. He has been an oblate since 2010 and makes his home in Nampa with his wife Kim and their three young adult daughters.



## Advent

by Janne Goldbeck

It is lighting the Advent candles week by week that most clearly focuses for me the meaning of this time of waiting and preparation. And perhaps the first, the candle of hope, is the most powerful. What an audacious act—lighting a candle of hope in a world where people wait hopelessly in refugee camps,

See "ADVENT", cont on page 7





where people of color wait in frustration for justice, where we wonder about the future of the planet in a time of global warming. One small flame lit to remind us that we hope again, now, for new life to burst forth in us like a sprout from a dry, brittle seed. We hope for the presence of God with us, for God's purposes to be fulfilled in us and in all creation. And part of the audacity of this candle is that hope means possibility. Because if we hope for something, we believe it to be possible, not just an empty and impossible wish. So I love lighting that first candle and remembering our hope for all the new possibilities of God's presence in our lives and in our world.

Once I have lit the candle of hope, I can go on to light the candle of peace, for only in the light of hope in God can I believe in peace when violence, fear and pain are so strong all around. The second candle reminds me that peace comes as a gift from God's hand, as God frees us from our oppressors, external and internal, and that peace is the certain future of the world, when God makes all things new. Hope sustains me as I pray for exiles to find a peaceful home again, for children's laughter instead of tears, for God's vision of our future, for quiet in my own restless heart.

In the light of the candles of hope and peace, I light the third candle of joy. In the desert places of our lives, joy bubbles up like an underground spring from God's love for all creation. The light of the world has dawned; God's full day is coming. The Lord has named us children of God and sends us to nurture sparks of joy in the ashes of indifference and apathy.

And every year, on the fourth week of Advent, I wonder if I, who can be so unloving, dare light the candle of love. But just the act of lighting the flame reminds me that we learn love from God. God shows us how love gives with abandon and celebration, how love holds nothing back, not even the gift of God's very self. God loves us with a love that burns away our fear and self-absorption, so we stand ready to bear that love into the world.

Four small flames burning as we wait for the lighting of the Christ candle on Christmas Eve, the candle that tells us that here is the center of all our hope, peace, joy, and love: God with us, Emmanuel. •

*Janne Goldbeck is a Commissioned Lay Pastor in the Presbyterian church and certified as a spiritual director. She lives in Pocatello with her husband and cat.*



*Kristina and Jason Batalden*

## At the Potter's Wheel

*by Kristina B. Batalden & Deacon Jason A. Batalden*

Have you ever read the book *Skippping Christmas* by John Grisham? It is a story about an empty nest couple that decides to not participate in the expected maniacal spending behaviors of the season and instead go on a much-needed trip together to a sunny locale.

Admittedly, it is appealing. After 20+ years with children in the home and consistently finding ourselves stretched to the limit financially and emotionally, during the month of December, it seems idyllic to find respite in the sun, to listen to soft waves, and to hold hands. Appealing or no, ultimately that little niggling Catholic guilt reminds us all about the real meaning for our celebrations, how could we possibly let them go? A beach in Hawaii is NOT advent, right?

As parents we think of this time of year as a children's time. Our homes are decorated in a festive manner that appeals to our children. We have advent calendars with candy in them and we hang our stockings on the mantle. We set up our nativity sets and remind the wee ones to leave the cattle and kings alone. We sing songs with the children while hanging ornaments on the tree, each kid has his or her favorite. We watch holiday movies and listen to holiday music and bake holiday cookies to share with neighbors. The list goes on, endlessly on. Each activity is special and important and our children revel in the traditions. But when they are gone... who sings the songs? Who eats the cookies? Who hangs the ornaments? Why are the stockings even up? For empty nesters, this holiday time is a new uncharted territory without a roadmap or compass.

But maybe now is the perfect time for a re-focus. A time that can be filled with quiet, peace, and wonder.



When the kids leave the home there is a temptation to believe that our work as parents is done. Indeed, our roles change, but oftentimes with that change there also comes feelings of remorse or regret. The reflection on the past brings clarity and perspective and sometimes that clarity does not always portray our past choices and actions in a favorable light.

The First Reading on the First Sunday of Advent ends with the Prophet Isaiah stating, “Yet, O Lord, you are father; we are the clay and you are the potter: we are all the work of your hands.”

The encouragement found in this passage of scripture is a reminder that we are all in the process of being made. We are clay in the hands of the potter, we are his work. And, unlike the temptation to believe the lie that our children’s departure equates our own irrelevance, God’s work is not finished. We are still the clay being molded, shaped, and refined, and we are still in his hands. To begin advent submitting to God the Potter who molds, shapes, and refines us, illuminates the very inexorable need for us to mold, shape, and refine our advent.

An empty nest is quiet. Rightfully so, but now that quiet can be the space within which God can begin his work. Let this advent be your path to new traditions rooted in original meanings. Wherever you find peace, solitude, and quiet... a perfect recipe for preparation and anticipation... go there and sit at the potter’s wheel. •

*Jason is an ordained Deacon in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Boise and works at Idaho State University. Kristina, his wife, in addition to being a Certified Lay Minister, is a public school teacher with over 20 years of experience. Kristina and Jason possess a unique perspective on marriage and faith and willingly share that perspective in hopes of encouraging others.*



## Terra Sancta Wreath

Bronze Advent wreath with Celtic cross and knotwork., inscribed with an ancient Irish prayer: “I lay myself / before thee / as I light / this flame.” An additional candle is lit each of the four weeks of Advent, symbolizing growing anticipation of the birth of Christ, the light of the world. The circular form represents the unity and eternity of God.

[www.terrasanctaguild.com/bronze-celtic-advent-wreath.html](http://www.terrasanctaguild.com/bronze-celtic-advent-wreath.html)



## Reliquary Supply Advent Wreath

A modern re-imagining of a classic form, this Advent wreath is composed of the wood from various evergreens. Like its traditional counterpart, the circular shape symbolizes God’s eternal nature.

The four pieces coincide with the four Sundays of Advent and represent hope, faith, joy, and peace. The rose-colored cedar parallels the associated liturgical color of Gaudete Sunday.

A modular format requires assembly, echoing the tradition of weaving together boughs. The ascending height of each piece signifies the passing of time spent in anticipation of the Savior’s birth.

—heide@reliquarysupply.com





## THE DESERT CHRONICLE

The Benedictine Monks of Idaho, Inc.  
Monastery of the Ascension  
541 East 100 South  
Jerome, ID 83338-5655

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE  
P A I D  
BOISE, IDAHO  
PERMIT No. 849

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

## *An Advent Prayer*

*Near indeed is his salvation for those  
who fear him,  
glory will dwell in his land.  
Love and truth will meet,  
justice and peace will kiss.  
Truth will spring from the earth,  
justice will look down from heaven.  
-Psalm 85*

DECEMBER  
01

## *National Day of Giving*

December 1st is a national day of giving to Catholic Organizations. We have an entry under the **Diocese of Boise** in the participants menu at [igivecatholic.org](http://igivecatholic.org). We are hesitant to ask for help when so many others are in need, but with our retreat center closed because of COVID-19, we are running a considerable deficit. You can donate at [igivecatholic.org](http://igivecatholic.org) after November 15th. Of course you can always donate to us directly. Have a blessed Christmas.

Donate After November 15th to:  
**[igivecatholic.org](http://igivecatholic.org)**



The *Desert Chronicle* is available in digital form on the monastery website: [www.idahomonks.org](http://www.idahomonks.org). If you would like to receive the *Desert Chronicle* in digital form and cancel your paper subscription, please email Fr. Hugh: [hughf@idahomonks.org](mailto:hughf@idahomonks.org) and send him your email address.