



Priestly Fraternity of St Peter Newsletter

District of Oceania – Christmas 2023

From the District Superior...



*O Adonái et Dux domus Israëli,
qui Móysi in igne flammæ rubi
apparústi, et ei in Sina legem
dedísti: veni ad rediméndum nos in
bráchio exténto.*

*O Adonai, and Ruler of the house
of Israel, who didst appear unto
Moses in the burning bush, and
gavest him the law in Sinai; come, to
redeem us with an outstretched arm!*

This year, as every year, we eagerly await the coming of Christmas. Even those in our culture who do not have the faith, celebrate Christmas and look forward to it with much anticipation. The days are getting longer, the temperature is getting warmer, many will be on holidays and will go away to get away from the hustle and bustle of life. But in the midst of this excitement and bustle, we must never lose sight of what Christmas actually is and what it is we celebrate. We celebrate the wondrous incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the arrival of God become man to redeem us.

The Church in her liturgy presents to us each year the 'O' Antiphons, aptly named as they all begin with 'O'. They are sung in the Divine Office at the hours of Vespers in the evening of the seven days preceding Christmas Eve. When the first letter of the first word after the O of each antiphon is taken, it spells backwards *ero cras*, or 'I will be there tomorrow.' For on the next night, the evening of the Vigil of Christmas, that first Christmas night, we remember that Our Lord came and He came to redeem us.

The second of the O Antiphons is *O Adonai*. *Adonai* is Hebrew for Lord and is used in the Old Testament as a substitute for God's name which He revealed to Moses in the

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Our Seminarians receive the tonsure

On Saturday, October 21st 2023, at both of our international seminaries in Bavaria and Nebraska, 28 young men in their second year of seminary studies received clerical tonsure and the cassock. Among them were three men from the District of Oceania: Binil Chacko, Alexander Kurkcú and Andre Kurkcú (pictured below from left to right).



But what is tonsure? What does it entail? What does it mean? The ceremony of tonsure is very ancient – predating even, for example, the liturgical season of Advent. By its reception, a man is set apart in a particular way, embarking upon the journey that, God willing, will find its end (and beginning!) in his ordination to the priesthood. Beyond tonsure is the reception of the minor orders (porter, lector, exorcist and acolyte) before the major orders of subdiaconate, diaconate and priesthood. Considering tonsure and the minor orders, there is a

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From the District Superior

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burning bush in chapter three of the book of Exodus. God is indeed the ruler of all, and so was the ruler of the House of Israel in the Old Testament. He revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush, delivered Israel from Egypt and then on Sinai gave Moses the law that his people must follow. God redeemed or bought back Israel from the Egyptians and led them to the Promised Land.

After that Israel was intended to be directly ruled by God. But instead, they asked for a human king and so God reluctantly agreed, eventually giving them King David from whom a Messiah, a Redeemer, would come forth. God allowed Israel to be ruled by an earthly king as, through this king's successors, God Himself would be made man. God, not satisfied with redeeming Israel and giving them a kingdom in the Holy Land, became man Himself in the

person of Jesus Christ to redeem all of humanity, not from slavery in Egypt, but from slavery to the devil and sin. Our Lord stretched out His arms on the Cross to do this. He offered Himself up on the Cross, offering a perfect sacrifice to God to atone for our sins. He came to redeem us. He was born on that first Christmas night so that He, the Lord and Ruler of the house of Israel, could redeem us with an outstretched arm. Such is the immense love of God.

And so, as Christmas approaches, and we look forward to a break over summer, let us never lose sight of Christ. Let us never lose sight of He who became a babe in Bethlehem to redeem us. Let us make Him Our Lord and ruler and take care not to replace Him with earthly substitutes. He, and He alone is our Redeemer, the Saviour of mankind.

I wish you and your loved ones a peaceful, hope-filled and joyous Christmas.

May the blessings of the Christ child be yours this Christmas and beyond!

Fr. Michael McCaffrey

Seminarians receive tonsure

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whole culture that goes with them: they set a person apart for liturgical offices and activities, preparing a man step by step, through lower forms of ministry, to receive

himself to the Bishop, who cuts his hair in five places – in the form of a cross – while saying the words: *Dominus pars, haereditatis meae, et calicis mei. Tu es qui restitues haereditatem meam mihi – The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my chalice. You are He who will restore my inheritance to me [Psalm 15:5].*

And every day from this point on, the new cleric prays these words as he puts on the cassock (the collar and fascia each have their own prayer too); such things are formative, touching the heart and soul and mind of the seminarian in formation, forming him after the heart of Christ, and inviting him daily into an ever-deeper reliance on Christ who has called him to be His.

Do keep all our seminarians in your daily prayers, as they draw closer to the altar by the beautiful, ancient, and ever-new rites of the traditional faith.



the higher forms of the major orders, by which he is decisively inserted into the exercise of the priesthood of Jesus Christ in the Church.

And the rite of tonsure is very beautiful. The seminarians, still laymen, enter the sanctuary in suit and tie, but carrying their cassocks over the left arm. These are then blessed, and the young men depart to the sacristy to dress for the first time in cassock (with collar and fascia), before returning as, quite literally, outwardly changed men. This is, of course, a reflection of the interior disposition and change to which the rite itself alludes. And next, the seminarian presents



Illuminated Faith:

A Medieval Depiction of the Nativity

Catholic Christmas cards usually display a classical painting of the Nativity on the front cover. Looking more into this, we will see that most of these paintings are from the Early-Renaissance, Renaissance, and Baroque periods of European art. But does art from the Middle Ages have anything to offer? Despite its technical simplicity, religious art from the Middle Ages, especially in illuminated manuscripts, is nothing less than a hidden treasure! In the *Age of Faith* (a happy term applied to the Middle Ages), we are not surprised to find art filled with faith and devotion, particularly because monks were at the forefront of manuscript illumination. What it lacks in technical perfection it makes up for in spiritual perfection, so much so, that I personally prefer the *Nativity* below to any *Nativity* of the Renaissance.

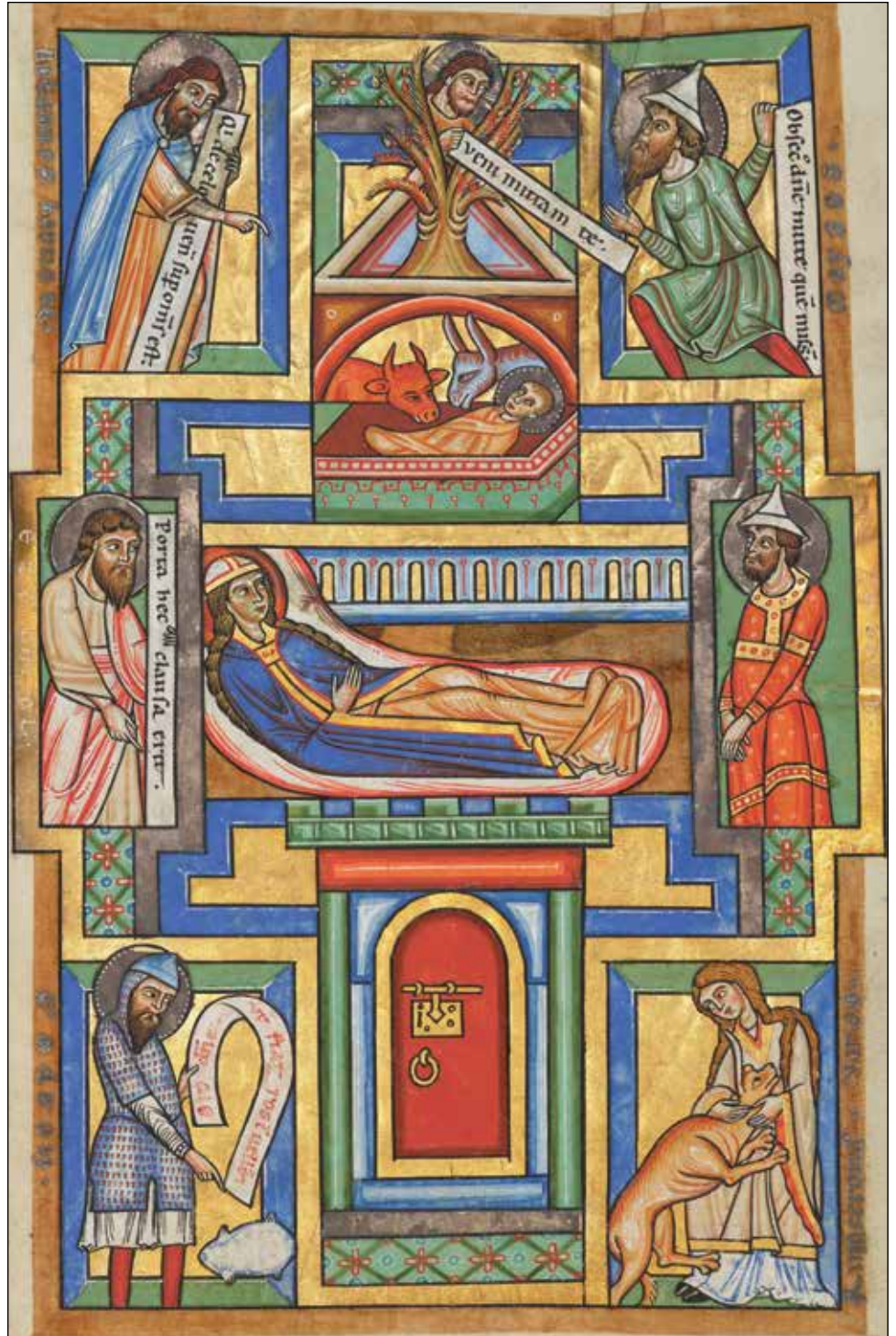
The featured image is from the Stammheim Missal, an extremely well-decorated and well-preserved missal produced at the Monastery of St Michael in Hildeshiem, Germany, around 1170. There are so many things to say about this Missal, but with so little space we will simply point out that this is a liturgical book, that is, a book used on the altar at Holy Mass. This image of the Nativity prefaces the Mass propers for the Christmas Mass. This simple fact reminds us how essential the holy liturgy has been in producing great works of art. For God's service, only the best suffices.

We first notice the attractive geometry of this Nativity. There is no realistic sense of place as in Renaissance paintings, and yet this wonderful illumination lacks nothing. Our Lady is in the middle and portrayed as in many other paintings: in the position of one reclining to give birth. At first sight she seems to be in the second story of a house, because of the door beneath her. But this does not make sense when we notice that Jesus is above her and surrounded by animals. St Joseph is at her feet in a window-like display. So, the illuminator of this work is not shooting for a realistic sense of place. Here the literal gives way to the spiritual.

What, then, is the purpose of the door? The answer is found in the man pointing at the door from the middle left of the image. This is the prophet Ezekiel. The scroll he holds quotes from his prophecy: *This gate will be closed* (Ez 44:2). The Church Fathers interpret this as referring to the Blessed Virgin. She gave birth to the Saviour while keeping her holy

virginity intact, just as the east gate of Eden remains locked except to God alone.

Moving down to the bottom left of the image, we see a warrior pointing to a mysterious white shape. His scroll



says: *I pray, Lord, that there may be dew in the fleece.* The warrior is Gideon, one of the judges of Israel, and the reference is to Judges 6:36 ff. He asks God for a sign that God will save Israel by his hand. Specifically, he prays that when he places a woollen fleece on the floor, it may collect dew while the ground around it remains dry. Church Fathers such as St Ambrose and St

Ephrem, wonderfully see this incident as a type of Mary's virginity. Just as dew gently, secretly, and mysteriously entered the fleece while the ground around it remained dry, so also God entered and exited the womb of the Blessed Virgin gently, secretly, mysteriously, and without any injury to her virginity. Psalm 71:6 seems to reference this: *He shall come down like rain upon the fleece; and as showers falling gently upon the earth.*

On the bottom right of the image is an unusual and non-Biblical depiction. In the Middle Ages, it was said that the illusive animal known as the unicorn could be captured by a virgin. The idea goes that the unicorn is attracted to maidens, and when it sees one, it lays its head on her lap. Hence, the easy capture. Some writers and the author of this Nativity painting compared this to the Incarnation, in which God, attracted by the virtues of the holy Virgin, came to dwell within her womb.

Moving up to the top of this image, the focus is now on Christ lying in the manger. At the top left, St John the Baptist holds a scroll which roughly quotes his words in Jn 3:31: *He that comes from above, is above all.* In the middle and the right there is a scene from Exodus: God appears to Moses in the burning bush. God says to Him, as the scroll summarizes: *But come, and I will send thee to Pharaoh, that thou mayst bring forth my people, the children of Israel out of Egypt* (Ex 3:10). Moses replies: *I beseech thee, Lord send whom thou wilt send* (Ex 4:13). The purpose of portraying this scene is to show that Christ is *the Prophet par excellence*, who fulfills in a perfect and everlasting manner the job given to Moses.

But the illustrator, in depicting the burning bush, very likely intends to promote two more Christmas-themed messages. Firstly, St Gregory the Great interpreted the burning bush as prefiguring the Incarnation, that great event in which God became perfect man while remaining perfect God. This is prefigured in the fire (Jesus' Divine nature) which inflamed the bush (Jesus' human nature) without destroying it. And thus, Jesus is perfect God and perfect man. Secondly, some Church Fathers compared the burning bush to Mary's virginity. Just as the bush was on fire without being consumed, so also did Mary become the Mother of God without any blemish to her virginity. Even the holy liturgy mentions this at Vespers of January 1st: *In the bush which Moses saw unconsumed, we recognize the preservation of thy glorious virginity: Holy Mother of God, intercede for us.*

There is an abundance of spiritual fruit to be gleaned from this 12th century illumination of the Nativity. At first it deceives us because of its simplicity, but upon deeper inspection we see the profound faith that it illustrates. And this is only one example of many from the Stammheim Missal. How much we should appreciate the art which came out of the Middle Ages, that *Age of Faith!*

Fr Richard Wallace FSSP



Catholic Music Festival

On Saturday November 18, the FSSP Parramatta apostolate hosted the first Catholic Music Festival, which was held at Champion College in western Sydney. We had 20 performances for the Junior Category and 14 for the Open Category, and between the two concerts there was a BBQ picnic in the grounds of the College.

About 2400 years ago, the Greek philosopher Plato identified the seven core subjects of the liberal arts. They were so called because they were worthy of a free man and because they 'liberate' the soul. They were the foundation stones of education since they teach a skill, virtue, and self discipline. Music was one of those core liberating arts.

Plato believed that music travels through the body, touching each organ, then finally coming to a rest in the soul. Quite literally, he believed, music has the ability to bypass reason and penetrate to the very centre of a person, shaping the person's character and emotions.

Whether that theory is scientifically accurate can be debated, but what is certain is that music has been an integral part of every human culture, and it seems that human nature somehow needs music. We can also observe that a nation's culture shapes its music, but also its music shapes the culture. It is not insignificant, therefore, what kind of music we listen to at a personal and societal level.

From a Catholic perspective, we should also be aware that music can be an instrument for evangelisation. Not only is sacred music in the liturgy important for that end, but there is also a need for popular cultural music that is imbued with a spirit of Catholicism.

The Music Festival was attended by 180 people, and we hope to organise it again next year.

Fr Roger Gilbride FSSP

**17 - 19th April Men's Retreat (Bowral, NSW)
led by Fr Adrian Wee FSSP**

***The Contemplation of Christ in the Spiritual
Exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola***

January Women's Retreat - FULLY BOOKED