

Dear Friends and Visitors

At the beginning of a new year, the year 2002, we wish our friends and other visitors a year of Peace and Grace.

The unspeakably tragic and horrible closing of 2001 has confounded, it seems, the hopeful prayers with which we greeted that first year of the new millennium during our all-night vigil one year ago, December 31, 2000.

Yet out of the blackness and hell has shown in surprising splendor the resilience of men and women all over the world, of all faiths and ethnic backgrounds, who refuse to be cowered by irrational evil, intimidated by ignorance, nor seduced into revenge.

For us Christians, we believe that even now a Unique Human Being in His very Humanity holds history not only in his loving regard but also in his wise power moves us in our turn boldly and confidently to work for "peace with justice and for justice with forgiveness."

A few days before the Solemnity of our Lord's Birth, Fr Dominic harvested a tall, full cedar from our woods. Fr Donald and Fr Paul Jones spent an afternoon erecting it in our refectory. They threw strings of colored lights around it, put the figures of a venerable nativity scene at its base, and on its tip, in place of a star, a hand-carved crucifix from Guatemala. This splendid tree has been a center of warmth and joy through the Christmas Season.

There was a surprisingly large group of guests and visitors for the Christmas Night Mass. The monks had first assembled a little after 10:00 p.m. to sing the office of Vigils. In the intermezzo between Vigils and Mass, Fr Paul played Christmas carols on the organ in the darkened Church as visitors assembled.

In his homily at the Night Mass, Fr Mark recalled an experience earlier in the week with a Fed-Ex delivery woman. He went on to say that

God is like a Fed-Ex delivery woman, whose only work is to drop off gifts, nothing more. Christmas is this delivery woman dropping off a gift at the address of the world, the doorstep of history; a gift at the curbside of countries, in the mailbox of cities, the living rooms of households, into the hands of solitary men and women who dare to open the door to her.

The gift is a sign, a key, a solution to riddles, and the explanation of history. The Logos made flesh is the insight dropped by the Fed-Ex woman at Christmas into the cosmos that entirely

changes the rules and rewrites the principles that anyone had followed and lived by up to then.

With our picking it up, opening it, taking it out and cuddling it, old memories, current problems, and cherished expectations take on a new look.

With her Christmas gift left under our tree, the Fed-Ex delivery woman provides us with a game to play, a game that at last corresponds to all the pieces on the board.

With Christmas, and even earlier during the Season of Advent, we introduced some new music into our liturgy. It consists of simple melodies composed here at Assumption Abbey for texts supplied by the Roman Missal for the Entrance at Mass, and by the Liturgy of the Hours for the Invitatory at Vigils. These have been received well by monks and guests alike.

Early in November we had a request from a parish in Mountain Home, Arkansas, for a priest to hear confessions during the annual Youth 2000 weekend to be held at the end of that month. Considering that southern Missouri is still mission territory, and also that Assumption Abbey and the Cistercian charism need wider exposure among the Catholic youth, it was easy for us to decide to accede to the request. Fr Alberic Maisog, Novice Director, was pleased to render this service on the last weekend of November.

Butch and Mary Louise McPherson and Butch's mother Juanita visited for a few days early in December. Butch and Mary Louise are old friends of the Abbey from Mississippi. Nearly every year, they bring a huge amount of shrimp and take over our kitchen to prepare all manner of wonderful Cajun dishes.

December 8, 2001, Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Abbatial Election

Dom Brendan Freeman, Abbot of New Melleray Abbey in Iowa and Father Immediate of Assumption Abbey, arrived December 6 to prepare for and preside over the abbatial election to be held on the 8th, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.

Witnesses for the election had already been chosen. These were Br Tobias Shanahan, a monk of New Melleray in long-term residence here at Ava, and Br Fidel Manuel, a monk of our daughter house in the Philippines. Fr Paul Jones was asked to serve as the Notary.

The evening before the election the conventual chapter (that is, all solemnly professed monks with stability at Ava) met with Dom Brendan to decide on the term of office of the new abbot, and to choose the scrutators. The chapter elected for a six-year abbatial term. As scrutators

they chose Fr Donald and Fr Anthony.

The election took place in the Chapter Room on Saturday, December 8, immediately after the 9:00 a.m. Mass. It was the fifth abbatial election at Assumption Abbey. Fr Mark Scott, monk of New Clairvaux at the time of his election and superior ad nutum of Ava since August, 2000, was elected abbot on the first ballot. Fr Paul, the Notary of the election, brought the news to Fr Mark who was in the kitchen making pizza for the community meal at noon. Leaving his dough on the table, Fr Mark returned with Fr Paul to the Chapter Room and in the presence of the Father Immediate and of the Conventual Chapter accepted the election.

The installation of the new abbot took place that evening before Vespers. In the Chapter Room each of the professed monks approached Fr Mark to make his promise of obedience. Then all processed to the church and the Father Immediate installed the new abbot in the abbot's choir stall. Touchingly, the abbatial staff—the crozier—was once again in place at the abbot's stall after an absence of over two years, the duration of the sede vacante at Ava finally brought to an end.

News of the election spread quickly throughout the Order and among our friends. The monks are grateful for and moved by the outpouring of good wishes and expressions of joy that have come from every quarter. The Abbatial Blessing will take place on Saturday, February 2. Because of our limited space, we have to limit the number of people we can invite, an exigency we know our friends will understand.

As in the past several years, our supply of fruitcakes was sold out by the end of November. Even so, orders kept coming in. While disappointed at not being able to have their cakes for Christmas, the vast majority of our ""late"" customers told us to send them their cakes as soon as they were available. That will be mid-February: traditionally, we do not bake during January. Our customers mean a lot to us, and we are satisfied to know that we show our gratitude by providing an exceptional product—even people who ""can't stand fruitcake"" make an exception for Assumption Abbey Fruitcake!

Fr Paul Halaburt, monk of New Melleray Abbey and Infirmarian there, came with Fr Brendan in early December. He stayed on for a little rest. We have really appreciated his cheerful disposition and his dedication to the monastic life. He will return home later in January.

Once again, your brothers of Assumption Abbey wish you abundant blessings during this palindromic year of 2002.

Fr Mark, Abbot