

Dear Friends and Visitors

The greatest event of December was Christmas, including the weeks of Advent leading up to the celebration of the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord.

At Vigils on each day of the first weeks of Advent we sang the Invitatory refrain, Come, let us worship the Lord, the King who is to come! From the 17th to the 23rd of December, the refrain changed, adding to the with the intensity of the season: the Lord is close at hand; come, let us adore him.. On December 24, Christmas Eve day, we sang Today you will know the Lord is coming, and in the morning you will see his glory! Finally, at Vigils of Christmas, celebrated an hour before midnight Mass, we sang, with the church lighted and decorated with taste and care, Thus, Advent burst into Christmas

In our remote wooded location, even though the weather was mild (there was no snow as there was last Christmas), our guests at Midnight Mass were very few, eight or ten at the most. But this small number of worshipers fit exactly the tone of the Gospel from Luke, the annunciation to the shepherds. Fr Mark, in his homily, remarked how the gospel passage is meant to be a kind of mirror in which each small congregation of Christians can see themselves reflected. Especially here at Ava, our little community and our little component of guests, were like the humble shepherds who were the surprised and privileged beneficiaries of the greatest news ever proclaimed upon earth, ""Today, FOR YOU has been born a savior, who is Christ the Lord!""

Fr Mark went on to quote St Therese of the Child Jesus: It is not intellect or talents that Jesus has come upon earth to seek. He became the Flower of the fields solely to show us how he loves simplicity. Again, St Therese wrote

The one crime charged against Jesus by Herod was that He was mad...and I agree with him!...We shall never be able to commit the follies for Him that He has committed for us, nor do our actions deserve the name folly, for they are in fact most reasonable acts, far below what our love would like to accomplish. (Letter to Celine, August 19, 1894.)

After Midnight Mass, the monks greeted one another in the refectory over freshly baked cinnamon rolls (Br Bernard) and fresh eggnog (Fr Mark). Several, in addition, visited with the guests in the guest house before retiring for a few hours rest before Christmas Lauds and, later the Day Mass of Christmas. Br Fidel did a superb job as cantor at both Christmas Masses. ""He sings like an angel,"" the guests remark!

The community continues to care for Fr Richard. He still needs assistance getting around and eating. The caregiving has brought out into the open the true nature of the unity and good will that exists among the brothers. There is unquestioned and cheerful generosity on the part of all, and disarming cheerfulness and patience on the part of Fr Richard himself. St Benedict's aspiration comes to mind, let the brothers support with the greatest patience one another's weaknesses of body or behavior, and earnestly compete in obedience to one another. (RB 72:5,6)

Our fruitcake sales were particularly good. We are grateful to all of our customers. Your purchases not only help us financially; they also affirm our way of life. We made it a point this year to avoid any media coverage, such as TV spots or newspaper articles. In the past these have always resulted in more orders than we were able to handle. That meant disappointing customers, and extra work in the office returning orders. This year we were able to avoid that situation.

Thanks to all who sent us Christmas greetings and gifts. Your continued friendship and support mean a lot to us. As the New Year begins, we take this opportunity to wish for you the peace the world cannot give, the peace that is brought by the Prince of Peace and purchased for us at the price of his very unpeaceful human life.

Fr Mark, Abbot