

Mary, Mona Lisa, and Seeing Through the Icons By *Marina Berzins McCoy*

When I was 16 years old, I saw da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* for the first time. Sort of. I was on a high school exchange trip to France for two weeks, and even at 16 knew that visiting the Louvre and seeing this masterpiece was a "must." But once I arrived, I had a hard time really seeing into the painting. The work was already familiar to me, so iconic, that all I could see was the idea. It was "the *Mona Lisa*," but seeing the details was harder, much harder than with an unfamiliar painting, precisely because the look of the whole was already stamped into my mind. And the many tourists that crowded around the painting, taking photos, made it even more difficult to contemplate.

The Christmas Nativity scene can be like that. The story of the birth of Jesus can become so familiar, so iconic, that we can too easily lose the ability to really see the story and all of its details. The story of Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus, with shepherds, magi, and a bright star are widely represented in Christmas cards, pageants, and creche sets, and these are all wonderful ways to enter into the story. And yet each Christmas, I hope that I can somehow enter into the story with fresh eyes, so that I can find Jesus there and see *him*, and not only the image on the Christmas card.

St. Ignatius of Loyola gave us a way to *pray imaginatively* with Scripture so that we create a space for God to break into our icons, and maybe even break them up a little, so that images do not become idols, and we can see something new. For me, there are details in the Christmas stories—found in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew—that help me to get into the story when I pray imaginatively. I sometimes start by noticing parts of the story that are a little more "outside the box" than the parts that are already most familiar to me. For example, I might start by recalling little details such as:

- A manger is a trough from which animals eat, and while the family could have been in a barn, they also could have slept just under an awning or lean-to.
- Mary was advanced in pregnancy, and walking or riding an animal would likely have felt heavy and uncomfortable.
- The census meant crowding and fear of disease in Jesus' time; I might wonder what Mary and Joseph felt like, moving into a busy crowd.
- It's easy to ask for lodging in a room as a paying customer but harder to ask a stranger for a place to stay when there is nowhere else.
- The shepherds spent a lot of time in the fields and probably had dirt on their clothes and were a bit smelly.

Continued inside back page-



ST. MONICA PARISH

12011 Woodhead Road, Richmond, BC V6V 1G2

Tel. 604.278.0844 Fax. 604.279.0334

Website: stmonicaparish.ca Email: parish.smon@rcav.org

PASTOR: **Rev. Robert Wong, SJ**

PARISH OFFICE HOURS

Monday – Friday

9:30 am – 1 pm / 1:30 pm – 4:30 pm



December 27, 2020

Holy Family of Jesus, Mary & Joseph

Blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways.

On the Feast of the Holy Family, we celebrate God's Incarnation into a human family who loved, protected and taught him. They were holy because they were perfect in obedience and virtue; blessed because they feared the Lord and walked in his ways. We, too, may strive to attain his holiness, in our imitation of the Holy Family's example and through the grace of Christ.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

In today's first reading, God promises Abram an heir, even though Abram is very old. Before too long Sarah, his wife, bears him a son. In the second reading, the author of Hebrews tells the story of Abraham (Abram) as an example of true faith in God. In the Gospel, Joseph and Mary take Jesus *to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord*. The devout and righteous Simeon beheld the child Jesus, and prayed to the Lord that he as the Lord's servant might now be dismissed for he had seen the salvation that had been promised. Simeon also foretold the destiny of Jesus and the suffering Mary would undergo.

Today's Readings:

1st: Genesis 15.1-6; 17.3b-5, 15-16; 21.1-7

Psalm: 105

2nd: Hebrews 11.8, 11-12, 17-19

Gospel: Luke 2.22-40

Distribution of Holy Communion on New Year Day

Trusting you will have a chance to follow one of the online Masses on Jan. 1. **Holy Communion will be given out at 10:30am, inside our Church**, while observing social distancing and wearing a mask. Please follow the direction of the volunteers. No congregating in the church or foyer, please.

####

Kudos – A special *THANK YOU* to your prayerful support and kindness. We are grateful for your sacrificial offerings for our parish and greetings and gifts. May God, our Saviour, Jesus Christ whose birth brings joy and hope to our world, keeps you safe and healthy in this holy season and throughout the New Year.

####

Archbishop's Annual Mass for Life

Join us for the Annual Mass for Life celebrated by Archbishop J. Michael Miller, CSB. The Mass will be live streamed from Holy Rosary Cathedral on Monday, Dec. 28 at 12:10 pm. Join us at holynosarycathedral.org/live-stream

####

Support our parish this Christmas

Our parish relies on your ongoing support during this challenging time. Your gifts are critical in keeping our parish active and thriving into the new year. Online giving is easy to set-up, safe, secure, and saves time. Give now at support.rcav.org/christmas

####

Sunday Missal 2020 - 2021

The new liturgical year is here. You are encouraged to own a copy of the Missal for your perusal at home. \$5 a copy is a great investment for your faith life all year round. You can get your copy at the Office or in the church foyer. Thank you for keeping up your spiritual life with the Word of God.

####

2021 Donation Envelopes - No doubt the pandemic has brought many challenges and anxiety to everyone of us, including our parish financial commitments. Thank you for making any sacrifices to support St. Monica Parish. The new envelopes package is available for you in the church foyer. If you do not find your package, please let us know and you'll be given one for your perusal. May the Lord bless your generosity always.

A Stewardship Moment

When Jesus is presented in the Temple, our Blessed Mother formally offers him to God's service without reservation. It is a service that Simeon prophetically foretells: a service to God that will turn the old laws and cultural norms upside down. As we await the dawn of a new year, are we destined to hold on to old habits and customs tightly or like Jesus, are we willing to serve the Lord and proclaim the Gospel in new and creative ways?

-continued from back page

- The magi may have been both inspired and tired after their long journeys.
- We don't know what the weather was like the day Jesus was born, so Mary and Joseph may have seen rain, snow, or in their region, perhaps even flowers.

The details can open up parts of the story that I may have forgotten but, even more importantly, they help the scene to start from some place real. I have, for example, walked around eight and a half months pregnant, wondering when I'd have the chance to sit down or find a bathroom. Or, lately, I try to avoid big crowds due to concern of disease. These experiences make the story more human for me. And then, God somehow manages to come into my prayer and do the rest. God creates the something new so that I can see with fresh eyes.

I went back and looked at a photo of the *Mona Lisa* recently and found that what I see there now is a young woman with a winding path behind her, aglow as though she has a secret to share. If I forget for a little while that she is *the Mona Lisa*, I have a chance of seeing Lisa Gherardini, who was probably the subject of the portrait. She also reminds me a little bit of Mary, another young woman with a winding path and a secret that must have made her ponder—and maybe also glow with—a mystery, of which I can only hope to get a small glimpse.

(Marina Berzins McCoy is a professor at Boston College, where she teaches philosophy.)

Project Advance 2020

Many parishioners have made your donation online via the RCAV.org website. THANK YOU for your support and generous response of our parish commitment to this year's appeal of the Archdiocese. Our share is \$13,000. Our total goal is \$40,000 plus expenses for the refurbished new floorings in the Parish Centre and classrooms. PA2020 continues until December 31. May the Lord bless you always!

The shepherds went in haste,
and found Mary and Joseph and
the Infant lying in a manger.
Luke 2.16

Mass Intentions Dec 27, 2020 - Jan 2, 2021

Mon, Dec 28	-	Andre de Souza (+)
Tue, Dec 29	-	Francis & Paul Vaz (+)
Wed, Dec 30	-	Eliza Fernandes (INT)
Thu, Dec 31	-	Christine & Albert Man (INT)
Fri, Jan 01	-	Solemnity of Mary
Sat, Jan 02	-	Salud Bautista (+)