

TELEVISION

# Cable Viewers to Get Rare Medieval Christmas Eve

By Henry Herx

New York (NC) — One of TV's more welcome contributions to the spirit of the Christmas season is "The Play of St. Nicholas," the medieval religious drama being presented on the Satellite Program Network via subscribing cable systems, 8-9 p.m., Friday, Dec. 24; 3-4 p.m., Saturday, Dec. 25; and 8-9 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 26.

The program offers three short plays based on a 12th century manuscript from the Fleury monastery in France. They are part of the medieval tradition of using churches for staging

religious dramas on themes associated with the liturgy of the day or the season.

Originally performed at Fleury on the saint's feast day, Dec. 6, the Nicholas plays celebrate three miracles attributed to this patron of unwed women, the oppressed and the unjustly condemned. In the first of them, he provides dowries and suitors for three daughters; in the second, he forces thieves to return a merchant's stolen goods and, finally, he restores life to three students murdered by a greedy innkeeper and his wife.

In keeping with the

medieval tradition, the drama is presented in New

York's Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the

## Broadcasters' Decision Seen 'Serious Blow'

Washington (NC) — The National Association of Broadcasters' decision to drop its 30-year-old code restricting broadcast advertising is a "serious blow to the American public," said Richard Hirsch, U.S. Catholic Conference secretary for communication.

The NAB's scrapping of its voluntary code will have serious social consequences since broadcasters will be allowed to "send any commercial messages they wish into American homes in order to maximize income," Hirsch said.

He called it a blow to "the battle to maintain minimal standards of conduct and resist increasing commercialization in the

broadcast industry."

The Justice Department and the NAB recently signed an agreement which ended an antitrust suit brought by the Justice Department against NAB in 1979. Although the suit pertained to matters such as the duration and number of television commercials, some observers fear that all restrictions will be dropped, including those governing advertising content.

Hirsch said the USCC believes that products such as hard liquor and contraceptives should not be promoted on radio and television "over which parents have little or no control. But NAB's actions would appear to pave the way for such advertising."

world's largest Gothic church. Performed by the Ensemble for Early Music, under the direction of Frederick Renz, the production is an authentic re-creation of the 12th century music and staging.

Sung entirely in Latin verse, with melodies closely related to plain chant, the roles of both men and women are taken by male performers of the ensemble. The musical accompaniment is played on instruments of the era whose sounds might best be described as robust and lively rather than delicate and harmonious.

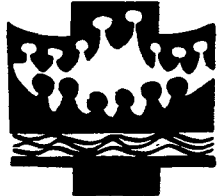
Based on the excerpts shown to the press as the program was in the final stages of editing, the ensemble's performance of the Nicholas plays would seem

to have appeal for a wider audience than that of medieval scholars and culture buffs. Introducing that larger audience to the program is Douglas Fairbanks Jr. who does quite well in his role as our helpful guide to the history and content of the plays.

These dramatic artifacts from the Age of Faith tell their story of miracles through simple and uncomplicated action — as they had to because the common people of the day knew little, if any, Latin. It takes little imagination to link the vigorous, dark-haired figure of the saint and his acts of generosity to his secularized image as the white-haired Santa Claus and his bag of gifts.

### Insights In Liturgy

By Father Thomas P. Mull



### An Adult Christmas

Have you ever had a dream that has puzzled you? You try to remember all the various details of the scene to permanently imprint it in your memory. That once done, you try to delineate just why the dream happened. "What was I thinking of before?" "What significance does the dream have in my life?" "Why do I feel impelled to seek out the message of this dream?" It is an attempt to give form and matter to that which seems real in sleep.

"It's Christmas time!" How often we stand before the manger scene, gaze upon the figures present there, absorb the serenity of the moment, capture the gentleness of a mother/father/newborn, and wonder why we can't experience this tranquility always. Is it a dream?

This feeling is a frequent occurrence as we commemorate each year the birth of Jesus our Messiah. We always want to explain this "dream-like" event to our satisfaction and for the satisfaction of others. Yet, it is impossible.

Do you realize that we celebrate Christmas because of Easter? Have you stopped to contemplate the fact that if this "newborn king" had not died on the cross, been raised from the dead, and ascended into glory, that the Christmas event would be empty? Do you look at the infant and realize that you can only experience the impact of this particular moment because of the faith you already have in the Paschal Mystery? We do believe and profess our faith, not in an infant, but in an adult Christ, risen from the dead?

Scripture scholars are quick to remind us that the Infancy Narratives of Matthew and Luke were written after the Resurrection. These narratives see the "Christian penetration of the mystery of Jesus illuminated in the fact that He was already Lord and Messiah during His lifetime, so that the

resurrection was the unveiling of a divine sonship that was already there." (An Adult Christ at Christmas, Raymond E. Brown, p. 7) Matthew and Luke see this christological announcement of the birth with the "star of the East" and the "words of an angel," proclamations which attempt to complete, in retrospect, the picture of the Resurrected Jesus.

As we gather in our faith communities to celebrate the presence of the "Word Enfleshed," it is important that we realize the dream and come to appreciate the real, deep meaning of our worship experience. For all the beauty and simplicity of the manger scene, we linger there but a moment — for we are called to follow an adult Christ. Transfusing His presence into our lives and the life of the world is the challenge for each Christian person. The mature Christian has come to appreciate and separate the dream from reality.

Bethlehem, the angels, a manger, lambs and shepherds, stars and kings are all the various facets of Christmas which we have imprinted in our minds. Our challenge, now, is to bring enfleshment, maturity and reality to these images. To believe in an infant who would be resurrected, to profess faith in a Savior who has fulfilled his mission: belief in an adult Christ is the only reality for the Christian person. This makes Christmas, then, a day not of commemoration but of celebration — celebrating the reality of Emmanuel: "God-with-us."

Again this year, the Christmas crib scene will awaken our deepest yearnings; almost "dream-like" we will gaze upon it with hope and vision. Let us spend this moment absorbed in peace, and let us spend our lifetime in celebration of Him — he is risen... we are saved... Jesus does live... Alleluia!

Prayerfully, the Liturgy Office extends a wish of His presence to all. May our Savior inspire you to a fuller expression of His life in your dream.

### MOVIES

**AN ADULT CHRISTMAS**  
 (An Adult Christ at Christmas, Raymond E. Brown, p. 7) Matthew and Luke see this christological announcement of the birth with the "star of the East" and the "words of an angel," proclamations which attempt to complete, in retrospect, the picture of the Resurrected Jesus.

**THE 48 HOURS**  
 (The 48 Hours, John Wood, p. 7) A man is held in a hospital for 48 hours.

**THE 400 BLOWS**  
 (The 400 Blows, Francois Truffaut, p. 7) A young boy's life in a Catholic school.

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