

Features

Diocese's 'neediest' seek Yuletide aid

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76 Donna has epilepsy. Her house needs major structural repairs because the walls are caving in and the floor is rotting. Her house also needs drainage to prevent further rotting of foundation.

77 Mrs. C. is an elderly widow who lives alone in an abandoned hunting cabin in a remote rural area. The cabin needs insulation, storm windows, heat, indoor plumbing and drainage around the house to prevent rain water from flooding the kitchen.

78 The P. family of seven includes a newborn baby. Their house needs a hot-water tank, new roof and electrical rewiring due to an electrical fire.

79 The T. family of four lives in a house currently heated with kerosene. In addition to a better heating system, the T.s need a new well as their water is unsafe. The family includes an infant and a disabled father.

80 Joan is a single mother of three, including one developmentally disabled child.

Her house has been cited for various code violations; needs rewiring, a new chimney and new roof.

81 Sara is a single mother with a small child. Their water is contaminated and they require a new well.

82 Tom, a paraplegic, needs a ramp and handicapped-accessible bathroom in his home.

83 The M. family of six lives in a renovated chicken coop in a very remote rural community. They need heat, structural support for the upstairs, and weatherization.

84 Mrs. J., an elderly woman whose husband is dying of cancer, cannot get home health care because their home has no running water. They need a well.

85 Harold is an elderly man who lives alone. He depends on social security for income. His house burned down, and Harold's insurance was not adequate to replace it. He needs help to hook up a used mobile home to his septic system and well.

86 Mrs. L., an elderly woman, lives with her seven-year-old developmentally disabled granddaughter. Social security provides their income. They need assistance to repair their home due to fire. Currently, they are living in the kitchen without indoor bath or appliances. They have no electricity or heat.

87 Helen has recently obtained a legal separation from her abusive husband. She and the children stayed in the home which the family had purchased a few years ago. It is now her responsibility to make the mortgage payments. She works a low-income job. Two of the children have asthma and require regular medical care. Helen feels the harder she tries to provide for her family, the more obstacles are put in her way.

88 Jack was injured at work and was unable to return to his job. After several months, he found a new job, but he is still behind in payments on many bills. He sought help because he has no money for heating oil, and his wife was due home from the hospital with their fourth child.

89 Frank and Carol and their three children live in a rural area where Frank

works on a neighbor's farm. The farmer is not always able to pay him on time and sometimes not the full pay. Food stamps are the only help for which the family is eligible. Their life is a constant struggle to provide food and clothing, and holidays are especially difficult.

90 Last Christmas, life was beginning to look brighter for Joan and her three small children. She had a job and she expected to be able to support them. But after several months of poor health, she was diagnosed as having multiple sclerosis. Loss of work and medical bills have taken her small savings. They will need help at Christmas time.

91 Earl and Yvonne and their five children live in a trailer. He drives a school bus and must find odd jobs in the summer to have any income. Yvonne has a disability that prevents her from working outside the home. They receive some help from social services, but are living on such a close budget that recent unusual expenses keep them in debt.

92 The L.B. family just returned to rural Steuben County from out of state. The Continued on Page 15

Christmas commemorates Jesus' incarnation and humans' redemption



Advent Reflections

By Sister Estelle Martin, RSM Did you ever notice how quickly the Gospel readings move from the birth of Jesus through a few brief narratives of childhood to an accounting of his baptism as an adult by John the Baptist? From a biographical perspective, Jesus seems to "grow up" very fast. Yet even the readings and prayers that form the fabric of the Advent-Christmas celebration focus on proclaiming the message of an adult Jesus. In the Christmas Vigil Mass, we hear: "God has brought forth from (David's) descendants, Jesus, a savior for Israel. John heralded the coming of Jesus by proclaiming a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel ..." (Acts 13).

Sometimes we become so enamored with the visual image of an infant in a manger that we fail to grasp the deeper significance of Christmas: incarnation and redemption. The mystery of the Incarnation transcends the stable scene and opens for us the reality of our salvation and of Christ's continued presence with us. Emmanuel, God-with-us, is as true today as it was 2,000 years ago in Palestine.

A clue to an authentic celebration of the birth of Jesus can be found in our birthday celebrations of family and friends. The cake and ice cream and parties are not reenactments

of the moment of birth, but rather joyous celebrations of a person's whole life. Reflection on the child in the manger creates the threshold which allows us to look beyond into the challenging vision of life itself, a life rooted in the person of Jesus Christ. The first preface of Christmas prays:

"In the wonder of the Incarnation your eternal Word has brought to the eyes of faith a new and radiant vision of your glory. In him (Jesus) we see our God made visible and so are caught up in the love of the God we cannot see."

Clearly this prayer moves us to awe and wonder in our worship of an incarnate God.

Raymond Brown, the noted author and theologian, views addressing the adult Savior at Christmas to be appropriate because he perceived the whole Gospel message within the context of the Christmas narratives. Immediately following Christ's resurrection, the earliest preaching of Paul and the apostles identified God's revelation of Jesus as the divine/human savior in the events of his passion, death and resurrection. Shortly thereafter, the ministry of Jesus, beginning with his baptism by John, was recounted in the light of his death and resurrection. This placed the manifestation of the divine sonship of Jesus at the public rite of his baptism. About three decades later, Matthew and Luke established that Jesus was both human and divine throughout his earthly life by their accounts of his conception and birth. The incorporation of these Scriptural readings into a Christmas feast was added to the liturgical calendar in the fourth century. To this day, we continue to proclaim this message of good news: our God incarnate who has redeemed us. The psalm for the Christmas midnight Eucharist echoes our response in faith:

"Announce his salvation, day after day, Tell his glory among the nations Among all the people his wondrous deeds;" (Psalm 96).

Thus, the Christmas liturgies give expression to our call to enter into the mystery of God's love, peace and self-giving. The Christmas story becomes more than a pleasant memory. It challenges us to make the event alive in our own time. It invites us to encounter the adult Christ who is risen and is present in our midst, calling us to become Christ, people of God, in him.

St. John penetrates the message of Christmas in the familiar prologue to his Gospel. We listen with renewed understanding to the power

of the words we hear each Christmas day:

"In the beginning was the Word; the Word was in God's presence, and the Word was God ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we have seen his glory: The glory of an only Son coming from the Father, filled with enduring love ... Of his fullness we have all had a share -- love following upon love." (John 1).



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Jesus was the first missionary. Jesus came to bring Good News to the poor -- to all. Because you are baptized, you, too, are a missionary. You, too, are called to share His Good News with the world.

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