

Christmas celebration continues through Epiphany

By Father Robert Scott Bourcy
Guest contributor

I am lying beneath the Christmas tree at my parents' home this day. As I look upon its beauty with cherished ornaments of past and present generations, I am in pain from sore ribs, a bad back and the effects of bronchitis.

I will not, however, let these things get me down and steal away the wonder of this sacred time of year. It's too precious and all too short.

Thoughts of Advent/Christmas/Epiphany being too short? These thoughts are not shared by all. How sad to see Christ-

mas trees curbside on Dec. 26, and houses that were brightly lit return to darkness the day after Christmas. In addition, figures of wise men are wrapped and put away before the Feast of Epiphany. What's the rush? Can't we pace our lives with the celebration of the Lord's.

For the past eight years, I have traveled — not great distances like the Magi — to New England to celebrate Epiphany. There I celebrate annually with friends who have not deserted Christmas/Epiphany. Wreaths still adorn doors and shutters, living trees can still be found in homes and Magi figures are still up with a place to bear their

gifts.

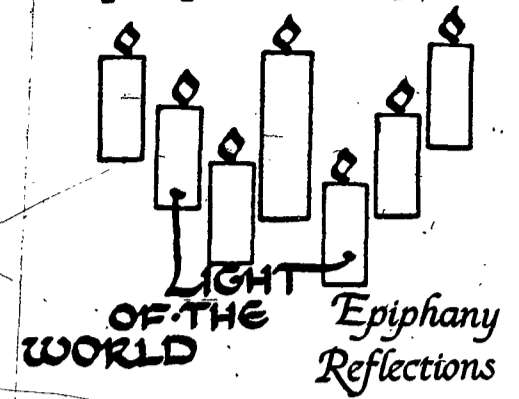
This Epiphany, the images and symbols found in our prayers and preface give us cause to still praise the Savior who is born! They spoke of Him who was revealed to nations, of guidance by light — strong and near to all people — and of love that can go beyond the limits of the world.

Don't we have faith in these words? Need we just look to the events of this past year and the power of prayer? How many times have men and women prayed for peace and the conversion of Russia? Wonderful gifts have been opened and continue to be opened between our nation and the Soviet Union.

Gifts of peace and hopefulness of new life exist for Eastern Europe. Of course, it is not finished; there is so much more to pray for so that justice and peace may be known by all. Lest we forget Panama, the homeless, the hungry and the poor. And yet his light still shines before all.

Perhaps by the time you read this column, you will still be tired from visiting family and friends, or maybe you are rested. Some of you will have trees and decorations dismantled, while some of us will have trees still up and our nativities displayed.

In whatever situation you find yourself,



we can share together the Christmas/Epiphany spirit in our hearts. Is not the miracle of this holiday to live it every day? True, some days it's hard with sore backs, cranky children, job worries, and so on, but let's not pack away its meaning. Fortunately, "wise men" saw the light well after the day of his birth. Let us, too, see that star and follow it.

"When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, when the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are back with the flocks, the work of Christmas begins: to feed the hungry, to release the prisoners, to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among brothers, to make music with the heart." (Author unknown).

Noriega

Continued from page 1

Citing an international treaty, the Vatican spokesman said such tactics were viewed as a "very serious matter" and said further steps would be taken if they continued.

Navarro-Valls' statement marked the first time the Vatican had referred to the United States as an occupying power in Panama, a definition that was challenged by the United States.

"We are down there with the consent of the government of Panama, the legitimately elected leaders of Panama. That means we're not an occupying power," said State Department deputy spokesman Richard Boucher.

As the negotiations continued, they appeared to focus on whether Panama's new

leaders would be willing to arrest Noriega and put him on trial there. Vatican sources said the nuncio was prepared to hand Noriega over to Panamanian justice as long as certain guarantees were maintained.

On this point, there was an apparent split among Panamanian leaders. The country's attorney general, Rogelio Cruz, said Jan. 1 that his office might try to indict the general on charges of murder and drug trafficking. The murder accusation concerned reports of executions following a failed coup in October.

But shortly afterward, Panamanian President Guillermo Endara said Panama's justice system was not prepared to try Noriega. He said he hoped "that the pope does not put us on the spot" by agreeing to a deal that would leave Noriega in the hands of Panama's authorities.

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