



The Catholic Citizen

CATHOLIC CITIZENS OF ILLINOIS

Winter 2025

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O Little Town

by Madonna Muscarello

It is a tradition in my home, and likely in yours as well, that the Nativity scene is the first of the decorations to be placed as the Christmas season approaches.

The weathered cardboard box is retrieved from the attic, the tablecloth from decades past is put in place, the stable and beloved figures—wedding gifts from my parents—are arranged. The Magi with their grand camels are always positioned as coming from the East. The *Gloria* an-

gel hovers at the peak of the stable which stands beneath the glittery star hung with fish wire from a tiny pin lodged in the dry-wall above. The manger itself remains empty with expectancy until Christmas morn. The ritual is traditional; the components are conventional. All the elements come, in one way or another, from the Scriptural accounts. Even the ox and ass, not explicitly mentioned in the Nativity accounts, are the embodiment of the Old Testament prophecies of Isaiah who wrote that “The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its owner’s manger” Is. 1:3

Ours is a simple Nativity scene. And a true one. Not every decorative depiction

of that silent night, however, is that simple. In many Italian villages particularly, the traditional *praesepio* (from the Latin for an enclosure, a place of shelter) is a far more

complex and crowded affair. Arrayed in a riot of color and movement around the infant Jesus, Blessed Mother and St. Joseph are cheese mongers, wine merchants, acrobats, nonagenarians knitting or drowsing, prisoners, town minstrels and the town drunk, children rolling



The image above is of the massive Neapolitan Praesepio on permanent display at St. John Cantius Church in Chicago.

hoops, soldiers, monks and housewives, ladies of the night, swooning victims of the plague *in extremis* and priests administering Last Rites. Princesses are attended by their servants and Moors stand cheek by jowl with bagpipers. Many of those drawn to the newborn king bring offerings from their respective occupations—sausages and cheese, flagons of wine, baskets of eggs, loaves of bread. Their produce may lack the value of gold, frankincense and myrrh, but each is a sincere and sacrificial sign of devotion. Others bring nothing but curiosity. None will leave unchanged. Flora and

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fauna, fish and fowl, all manner of four-footed creatures (the extensive Fontanini catalog of Nativity figures includes even an elephant!) jostle and bray and snap in the commotion. These figures are often constructed of wire and papier-mâché or of clay. They are a source of great civic pride and rivalry between one village and the next. One can almost feel—and smell—the rank humanity on display. There is to be found in these elaborate tableaux the sinner and the saint, the beautiful and the base, the triumphant and the tragic, the hearty and the half-hearted. Every age, race, occupation and condition is represented. It is as though the artist is determined that every type of man, woman and child may see himself or herself in the presence of the divine Infant. These pious works of popular art reveal the need in every human soul to be close to the heart of Christ, to feel him as present in our everyday lives, to gaze on him as he gazed for the first time with the eyes of a human on the world and all the creatures he himself had made.

Although many of the figures and settings in these Nativity scenes are entirely alien to the Holy Land and are not to be found in the infancy narratives, they too convey truth. If they are not literally drawn from Scripture, nonetheless they communicate an important and orthodox aspect of our faith. The Nativity crèche, whether simple or elaborate, is an emblem in wood or paper, clay or stained glass, marble, corn husks, fabric or stone, of the Incarnation itself. When the Word became Flesh and dwelt among us, he did just that. He did not come as an angel. He did not come into a pristine, spiritualized utopian world. He did not come into the Garden of Eden. He came as a helpless newborn human being and truly dwelt among us in all of our messy, fallen, disordered human nature.

In the words of the Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, the world into which God himself became man was “bleared, smeared

with toil”; it “wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell.” In taking on the burden and finitude of matter, He confirmed once again the judgment of God the Father that the created order, the material world, man, woman and every created thing is good. In the beginning, God walked in the “cool of the day” with Adam and Eve. After the fall, He continues to walk with man in the heat and humidity of an urban street brawl, in the frigid isolation of a prison cell, in the tedium of a thankless job, in the pain and suffering of a hospital ward, in the serenity of the cloister and in the fog of war.

The tradition of the Nativity crèche is said to have originated with St. Francis of Assisi who reenacted the events surrounding the birth of Christ using live actors and animals with stars twinkling through the branches of the trees overhead in Greccio, Italy in 1223. We make feeble attempts to recreate that vision with our strands of electric lights. Much has changed in the way we visualize the birth of Christ in the past 700 years. But the poignancy of the tradition remains as we recognize ourselves in the diverse assembly gathered in hushed reverence around the manger.

As Pope Benedict XVI concluded in *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives*, it is likely that the miraculous events of Christmas night and the visit of the Magi did occur substantially as recounted in the narratives of the evangelists Luke and Matthew. “... [T]o contest the historicity of [the Scriptural] account on mere suspicion exceeds every imaginable competence of historians.” These were historic events that did occur in a particular time and place. Luke was especially precise in his dating of the event within the reign of Caesar Augustus and at the taking of the worldwide census. But God, who condescended to take on human flesh in the fulness of the time and the specificity of the place he had created, is not himself bound by time and space. The birth of the Child Jesus—the

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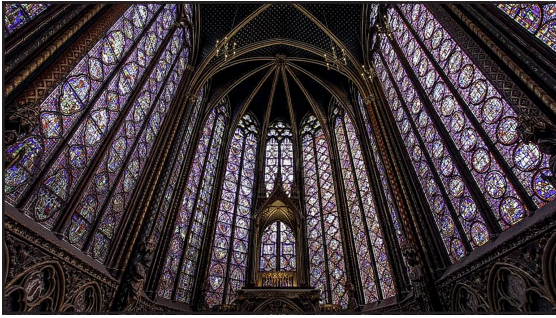
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The Catholic Mass: Source of Art and Beauty

by John Horvat II



The image above is of the vaulting and windows of Sainte-Chapelle in Paris.

Paris is the City of Light, full of spectacle, beauty and art. Yet [during Coronavirus], the theaters and concert halls are silent and dark. Artistic beauty finds no refuge from the draconian restrictions that constrain the body and stifle the soul.

The New York Times culture critic in Paris, Laura Cappelle, recently sought to fill the cultural void. She found solace in what she called the only authentic cultural event now re-allowed by authorities—the Catholic Mass. Indeed, she claims the Catholic Mass expressed by tradition in the city’s magnificent churches is the only setting where art can repose unperturbed. It is “the only show in town.”

Of course, the Mass is not a show, but there is something profound about her affirmation. The church teaches that the Mass is an act of worship by which Catholics fulfill their obligation to adore God. Many times, the faithful do not realize the sublime beauty or the cultural richness expressed by the Mass. Sometimes it takes the eyes of an avowed nonbeliever to help worshipers appreciate the treasures in their midst.

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birth of God—as an act of God, is an eternal act that resonates throughout human history and gladdens the soul every year at this time. Even if the multitude of characters depicted in a Christmas crèche did not literally stand with Our Lady around

Traditionally, the church has done everything possible to appeal to humanity’s aesthetic sense. The primary aim of liturgy is God’s public worship, but that activity also produces intense beauty. Before modern innovations intervened, the church’s ancient liturgies were spectacles of poetic expression and solemn ritual.

Everything liturgical has meaning and purpose that teaches the truths of the faith with great dignity and seriousness. Choral arrangements are composed having in mind heavenly joys, not earthly bliss. The church understood that the beauty of her liturgy was an occasion for grace to act upon souls so that they might better know, love and serve the Blessed Trinity.

Thus, Ms. Cappelle’s search for art and beauty at Mass makes sense, limited though it might be. She is drawn to the “elaborate costumes, choreographed flourishes and live music” that she found when attending Masses celebrated at several Parisian parishes. At the church of Saint-Sulpice, she was particularly struck by a pre-dawn Rorate Mass that starts in darkness, illuminated only by candlelight, and ends with the first rays of the sun peeking through the windows. Celebrated during Advent, the Rorate Mass symbolizes the Light of Christ, which dawns shortly after on Christmas Day.

Unfortunately, the author’s perspective is restricted to the esthetic sphere, in which she circulates. Her standard of comparison is solely theater and the performing arts. She is impressed, however, by “the ritualistic
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the manger, Christ is nonetheless present to each one of us in our own time, place and circumstances. The Nativity crèche is man’s heartfelt attempt to enter into that event—to whisper along with all of heaven and earth: **O Come to us; abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel.**

Mass *continued from page 3*

nature of the event, the dramatic buildup from scene to scene—even the slightly labored monologues.” She witnesses a wide range of styles from warm and simple intimacy to “old-school pomp, with full processions and choreographed genuflections.” The church understands art and therefore masters that dramatic tension found in the “push and pull between performance and solemnity, flamboyance and restraint.”

The music at the churches also enchants with a wide variety of choirs and organists. The acoustics of the ancient churches and their fine organs provide an atmosphere for the appreciation of classical composers and sacred music. The author is exposed to Gregorian chant, which she describes as “a sacred, virtuosic form” from the Middle Ages, which expresses “unshowy beauty.”

The art critic also observes those attending the service, whom she finds surprisingly young. All is peaceful and meditative as those present mix “quiet reflection and togetherness” in their soaring search for union with God. These various elements come together to present an otherworldly experience that touches the sublime.

The greatest spectacle for her was at the parish of Saint-Roch, known as the “church of artists.” What draws the artists there is the celebration of the traditional Latin Tridentine Mass in all its splendor. The author is amazed at the over 400 people she finds at the church, the largest crowd she has seen indoors since the pandemic began.

At this Mass, she comes the closest to having a religious experience, commenting that she “was moved, at Mass, by the love and devotion I recognized in many attendees” She defends the churchgoers against critics in the secular arts who

think churches should be locked down: “there is no reason to begrudge believers their worship.”

Laura Cappelle’s report has lessons for Catholics. The first is that the church’s traditional splendor is extremely attractive to postmodern souls. Through her, even *The New York Times* records the sublime beauty found in the ancient liturgy. The report refutes the myths about the unattractiveness of the traditional church. Indeed, the author is surprised to find young people and artists drawn to the Mass. Catholics would do well to take notice. Many people might convert to the faith if exposed to the grand apostolate of beauty.

Secondly, what attracts people to the church is not social-justice sermons, dreary contemporary music or cheap imitations of the modern world. People are searching for authenticity, certainties and truth. The art of the church expresses profound doctrines, firm teaching and long tradition. When truth and moral goodness intermingle, they give forth a beauty that cannot fail to speak to those seeking God. Only the church can quench the insatiable thirst for the sublime that is so much a part of human nature.

Finally, a return to beauty is only possible with a return to God, about whom St. Augustine wrote: “Too late have I loved Thee, O Beauty so ancient and so new. Too late I have loved thee.” The postmodern world is rapidly exhausting itself. Let’s hope that—soon—a chastened humanity will come to see the foolishness of abandoning the ways of beauty and will take those words of the saint to heart.

This article was originally published in The Catholic Thing on Dec. 26, 2020. The author is scheduled to speak at a Catholic Citizens Forum Luncheon on May 8, 2026.

The Catholic Church Stands Alone

by G.K. Chesterton, Thursday, May 22, 2025

It does not merely belong to a class of Christian churches. It does not merely belong to a class of human religions. Considered quite coldly and impartially, as by a man from the moon, it is much more *sui generis* than that. It is, if the critic chooses to think so, the ruin of an attempt at a universal religion which was bound to fail. But calling the wreckers to break up a ship does not turn the ship into one of its own timbers

But in a much more profound and philosophical sense, this notion that the church is one of the sects is the great fallacy of the whole affair. It is a matter more psychological and more difficult to describe. But it is perhaps the most sensational of the silent upheavals or reversals in the mind that constitute the revolution called conversion. Every man conceives himself as moving about in a cosmos of some kind, and the man of the days of my youth walked about in a kind of vast and airy crystal palace in which there were exhibits set side by side. The cosmos, being made of glass and iron, was partly transparent and partly colorless; anyhow, there was something negative about it; arching over all our heads, a roof as remote as a sky, it seemed to be impartial and impersonal. Our attention was fixed on the exhibits, which were all carefully ticketed and arranged in rows; for it was the age of science. Here stood all the religions in a row—the churches or sects or whatever we called them; and towards the end of the row there was a particularly dingy

and dismal one, with a pointed roof half fallen in and pointed windows most broken with stones by passersby; and we were told that this particular exhibit was the Roman Catholic Church. Some of us were sorry for it and even fancied it had been rather badly used; most of us regarded it as dirty and disreputable; a few of us even pointed out that many details in the ruin were artistically beautiful or architecturally important. But most people preferred to deal at other and more business-like booths; at the Quaker shop of Peace and Plenty or the Salvation Army store where the showman beats the big drum outside. Now conversion consists very largely, on its intellectual side, in the discovery that all that picture of equal creeds inside an indifferent cosmos is quite false. It is not a question of comparing the merits and defects of the Quaker meetinghouse set beside the Catholic cathedral. It is the Quaker meetinghouse that is inside the Catholic cathedral; it is the Catholic cathedral that covers everything like the vault of the crystal palace; and it is when we look up at the vast distant dome covering all the exhibits that we trace the gothic roof and the pointed windows.

The essay above is excerpted from GK Chesterton's The Catholic Church and Conversion which was written in 1926, four years after the author's conversion to the faith. As a result of the persuasive power of Chesterton's earlier writings, many converted to Catholicism before Chesterton himself took that step.

Church Is
Sui Generis

5

...unless we relate all things to God, neither man nor city can survive. For relationship to God is a constitutive part of human nature as such, and therefore also a constitutive part of the earthly city as such It is natural man who is directed towards God by the very fact of his nature.

Prayer as a Political Problem

by Jean Daniélou, SJ

As Catholic citizens, we have an obligation to bring our faith into the political sphere and to be prudent, in keeping with our Catholic faith, about the political leaders and policies we support. What about the obligation of politicians—as politicians—to create a society in which we can be faithful believers? Do politicians, in their governance of the country and promotion of civic welfare, have an obligation to create a society that makes it possible for the average Christian to practice his faith and to—*live virtuously*? Can a society survive with an impregnable wall of separation between church and state? Does a society, as a political organization, benefit from a pervasively religious populace? Is prayer an exclusively religious problem—or is it a political problem?

These are the questions asked by Jean Daniélou, SJ, in 1965 in a small but very important book entitled *Prayer as a Political Problem*. A few intriguing excerpts from that book follow.

“The question which this book presents to the readers is this: What will make the existence of a Christian people possible in the civilization of tomorrow? The religious problem is a mass problem At the mass level, religion and civilization depend very much on one another. There is no true civilization which is not religious; nor, on the other hand, can there be a religion of the masses which is not supported by civilization. It would appear that today there are too many Christians who see no incongruity in the juxtaposition of a private religion and an irreligious society, not perceiving how ruinous this is for both society and religion. But how are society and religion to be joined without either making religion a tool of the secular power or the secular power a tool of religion

The reader might well be surprised by the title given to this chapter and this book. Public policy and prayer are two realities not usually brought together in this way. I have chosen the heading deliberately, because it seems to me essential to make it clear—perhaps somewhat provocatively—that there can be no radical division between civilization and what belongs to the interior being of man; that there must be a dialogue between prayer and the pursuit and realization of public policy; that both the one and the other are necessary and in a sense complementary. In other words, there cannot be a civilization within which prayer is not represented; besides, prayer depends on civilization Religion as a fact supposes an environment in which it can develop

There cannot be a personal Christianity unless there is a social Christianity. If personal religious life is to be able to flourish, it must have a certain minimum of help from outside, for without this it is normally impossible for the majority of men

Experience shows that it is practically impossible for any but the militant Christian to persevere in a milieu which offers him no support

The civilization in which we find ourselves makes prayer difficult. The first thing that strikes one is that our technological civilization brings about a change in the rhythm of human existence. There is a speeding up of tempo which makes it more difficult to find the minimum of freedom on which a minimum life of prayer depends. These are elementary problems, but none the less basic. Prayer is thus rendered almost impossible for most men, unless they display a heroism and a strength of character of which—we must face it—the majority of men are not capable

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What Has Santa Claus to Do with Christmas?

by Adam Lucas

Santa Claus

7

The skies are growing darker. The air is crisp, even biting. The torn-up Main Street in my sleepy little Pittsburgh borough is ever so slowly prickling up with snowflake banners, evergreen and sparkling lights. My son is buzzing whenever he rolls past the newest Santa decoration in the department store. The magic of Christmastime is in the air—almost, anyway.

But this time of year, there's also a less joyful air among committed Catholics. Often, I've observed—and in all honesty, fostered—an antagonistic attitude toward all these bubbles of "Holiday Cheer" rolling up after Halloween. All this is really the junk of a secular world's Consumer Christmas, we might complain, not a true marking of the birth of our Savior.

There's something real about that sentiment. The Christmas of the world is driven a lot more by the Almighty Dollar than the Almighty God

So, we cast biting glances at the houses with Christmas lights up before Advent ... This antagonism, while understandable, misunderstands the nature of our feasts.

"Rockin' around the Christmas Tree" can be just as much an ingredient in a holy feast as "Oh Holy Night." Music and fellowship, presents and pretty lights, cookies and sugarplums—these are the things that make a feast, no less than Mass and incense and worn out *prie-dieux*. Our festivals are embodied celebrations, and so they naturally include all the God-given joys of our bodies. *What* the festivals are celebrating, and whether they are ultimately good for us, will depend more on the spiritual rituals and reasons for the seasons. But these high things are the leaven—not the dough.

The church fathers knew this. Their feasts were embodied just as they were spiritual. Ascending to the loftiest heights of doctrine and worship, they nevertheless lived among a Christian people eager to baptize the cultural mores of the Roman Empire into the new Christian festival. Their liturgical calendar was Incarnational. And the entire person, individual and societal, was transformed by it. Processions closed down the streets. Slaves were commanded

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Prayer *continued from page 6*

It has been the argument of this book that while the church has need of civilization, civilization also has need of the church The truth is that civilization consists in an order of things where the material elements, which come of technical progress, are made to serve the authentic ends of the human person [The function of the earthly city] is to provide for the fulfillment of the human person in this mortal life; that is to say, ... to provide the conditions which will allow human beings to develop themselves to the full.

... For this, three things are necessary ... First, the utilization of material

goods [for the welfare of all citizens.] ... Secondly, civilization supposes that there is friendship between men, that there exists a communion of persons Finally, unless we relate all things to God, neither man nor city can survive. For *relationship to God is a constitutive part of human nature as such, and therefore also a constitutive part of the earthly city as such* It is natural man who is directed towards God by the very fact of his nature. Therefore, when Christians defend God's place in the city as being an essential element of the city, it is not God whom they defend—he has no need of anybody's defense and is not even threatened—but man himself.

Santa *continued from page 7*

to rest. And tables were full, as far as able, with sweetness and melody.

The Christian Grinch might note that this sounds very *unlike* our secular lead-up to Christmas. Traffic piles up; it doesn't disperse for the Eucharist. Our bosses demand longer hours to keep up with demand; they're unwilling to risk profits for quiet contemplation of a poor manger. And while our tables are full, within minutes so will our bellies be; and yet, we will keep eating.

Yes—there's plenty that is *imperfect* in our civic wintertide.

But consider that we Christians have to fight against our culture to claim the embodied character of many of our feasts. There are not many workdays off or cookie platters for sale around Assumption, for instance. *But not so for Christmas.* Christmas is really celebrated, still, by the bulk of our secular and consumer culture. As far as they know, many are celebrating department stores, being nice, and the triumph of Coca-Cola's feel-good marketing. But they are actually, even in their circumspect ways, marking the high liturgical feast centered around Dec. 25. And this is why, even amid the most furious of secular and consumer-driven celebrations, they can't avoid something of real substance: the goodness of gift and the brotherhood among men.

For this reason, I can't help but think we miss the mark when we fret about celebrating Christmas wrong. We seem to have in mind that the *real* holy Christmas would be a month of stark chant, on our knees before the Eucharist, dreaming up speculative theology. But a real Christian Christmas mixes the prayer and hymnody with happy decorations, shredded wrapping paper, and just *a little* overeating. In other words, something very much like "secular" Christmas.

This secular Christmas is impoverished. We may need to direct it a little. It's largely ignorant of what or why it even exists. But it is not, by and large, wrong. We should absolutely keep Christmas religious. We must add to the secular season knowledge of who and what is the cause of our celebration, and we must give plenty of space for the corresponding prayers, charity and (above all) liturgical life. And yet, when it comes to making a true feast, these things only add to and perfect a good Christmas party.

Tertullian once asked, questioning the compatibility of pagan philosophy and Christian revelation: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" We may also ask: "What has Santa Claus to do with Christmas?"

In both cases, it turns out a great deal.

We want our Christmas to mean something. We want it to mean what it ought to mean, for us and our loved ones. Thanks be to God, the task is over halfway done already, and not by you! Our Christian heritage, weakened as it is, is yet strong enough that Dec. 25 transforms our whole society into a sparkling, musical and sugary winter wonderland. It forcefully presents itself, to the smallest babe and wisest man, as a great occasion. All that is left to us is to remember *why* it is so. An extra Mass or two; some gentle prayers by a quiet crèche; an extended grace before the shiny ham. The precise details are up to you. The bulk of the feast-making work is not.

So, sneer at your neighbor's holiday display, if you would like. But while you're knocking the snow off your town's lamp-posts, don't forget to throw in a hearty: "Bah, humbug!"

This essay appeared originally in Crisis Magazine on Nov. 19, 2025.

The Very Heavens Declare the Glory of God

For what purpose did God place the “lights in the vault of the sky” on the fourth day of Creation? Scripture tells us they were placed there “to separate the day from the night.” Interestingly, we are told that God had already separated the day from the night on the first day of Creation. So why these lights on the fourth day? In Gen. 1:14, it is said that they were to “serve as signs to mark sacred times. And indeed they do.

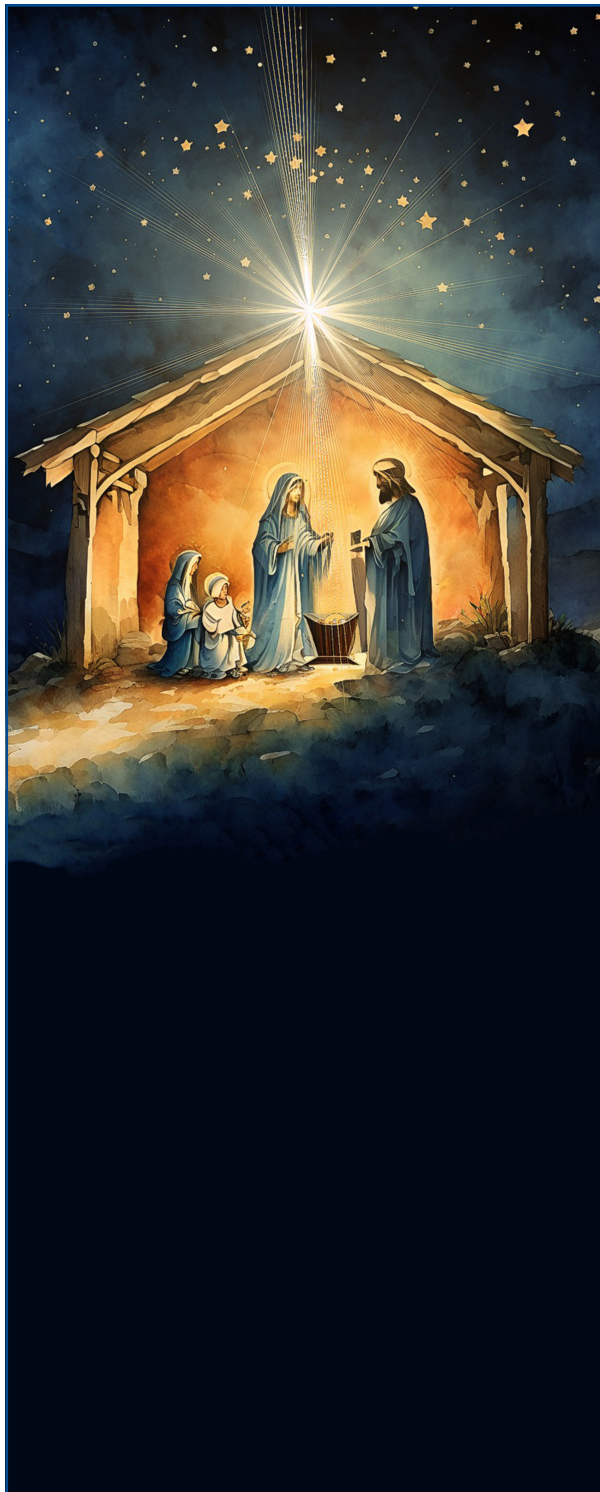
Our Blessed Mother traveled in haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth when the latter was six months along in her pregnancy. The church has traditionally celebrated the birth of the Baptist on June 24. This falls just three days after the summer solstice, the longest day of the year, either June 20 or 21 in the Northern Hemisphere. Accordingly, *after the birth of John the Baptist*, the days begin to grow shorter. This gradual shortening of daylight hours continues until the winter solstice on Dec. 21 or 22, just prior to the traditional dating of Christmas on the 25th. After Christmas, the days begin to grow longer. As early as the patristic period, the significance of this cosmic coincidence was seen as a confirmation of the words of John that he himself must “decrease” while Jesus “must increase.” The course of events set in motion by God in the fullness of time are reflected in the movements of the heavenly bodies set in motion by that same God at the beginning of time.

Although only angels and human beings are conscious agents of their acts of worship, all of creation is ordered to the worship of God. In the Old Testament book of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to worship the man-made idols of Nebuchadnezzar, and in their canticle from the flames insisted that these material objects must themselves praise the one, true God. They exhort all the works of the Lord to praise the Lord—to “praise and exalt Him

above all forever.” In a kind of mantra, they call on the sun and the moon, the ice and the cold, the mountains and the rivers, the whales and all the birds in the air to “give thanks to him for his mercy endures forever.” When our Lord uses humble metaphors drawn from the natural world of agriculture or construction or household duties, he is doing more than employing a convenient poetic device. He is revealing the doxological orientation of every being created by God. It is because material creation cannot help but to render that mute praise that God calls it “good” in the beginning.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time on the back of a donkey, the Pharisees, impatient with the clamor of the crowds, urged him to silence his disciples. Calmly, he said that “if they keep quiet, the very stones would cry out.” As G.K. Chesterton noted, this prophecy was fulfilled in the “shouting faces and open mouths” of the marble gargoyles poised on the facades of Gothic cathedrals.

At the beginning of the Third Eucharistic Prayer, a priest intones that “all creation rightly gives you praise.” A full moon on a clear, cold winter night resembles nothing so much as the Blessed Sacrament elevated by a priest at Consecration. Suspended above the earth, and reflecting the light of the sun—which sun was created by the son through whom all things were made—the moon can be seen as a kind of cosmic benediction. The waxing and waning may be seen as shifting perspectives on the sacred Host as the priest moves it from right to left before an adoring congregation. As ever, this heavenly body and all of creation—from a mote of dust to every star in the skies to which God himself has given a name—serve as signs to mark sacred times until our Lord comes again to make all things new. ~ ~ MJM ~ ~



Our seasonal poem for December is *In the Bleak Midwinter* by Victorian poet Christina Rossetti. It is possibly better known as a beloved Christmas carol, having been set to several different melodies by prominent composers. The words of this poem echo the sentiment found in the more recent popular Christmas song *The Little Drummer Boy*—without the Rum-pa-pum-pum.

In the Bleak Mid-Winter

In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him
Nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away
When He comes to reign:
In the bleak mid-winter
A stable-place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty,
Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whom cherubim
Worship night and day,
A breast full of milk—
a manger full of hay;
Enough for Him, whom angels
Fall down before,
The ox and ass and camel
Which adore.

Angels and archangels
May have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim
Thronged the air,
But only His mother
In her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the Beloved
With a kiss.

What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd
I would bring a lamb,
If I were a wise man
I would do my part,
Yet what I can I give Him,
Give my heart.

Upcoming Luncheon Speakers for 2026

Speakers

- **Jan 9, 2026—Why the Catholic Conversions?** Dr. **Kenneth Calvert**, professor of history, Hillsdale College, will address the question of how to understand the surprising number of Catholic conversions in the United States and other parts of the world, particularly among young people taught to reject Christianity and Catholicism. Dr. Calvert will discuss this remarkable era in the history of the church by way of the robust number of conversions at Hillsdale College.
- **Feb. 13, 2026—A Catholic Lawyer Responds to the Bishops about Mass Immigration** Attorney **Kevin Kijewski** is seeking the Republican nomination for Michigan attorney general. He has served as superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of Detroit and the Archdiocese of Denver. Drawing upon the richness of Catholic teaching on the topic, he will offer a nuanced analysis of the issue of immigration that avoids the radical partisan positions of either side of the political spectrum.
- **March 13, 2026—Understanding AI: Challenges and Opportunities?** Dr. **Eric Jenislawski**, professor of theology and philosophy at Christendom College and a computer buff from a young age, will provide a non-technical introduction to the technology of artificial intelligence with an emphasis on the moral and intellectual threats it may pose to the Catholic understanding of the human person.
- **May 8, 2026—John Horvat II** Author and speaker **John Horvat II** is vice president of the American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property, and has been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, FOX News, *Crisis Magazine* and *The Washington Times*. Mr. Horvat will speak on a Marian topic yet to be determined during this month of Our Lady. We invite you to read an essay about the beauty of the Catholic Mass by this speaker in this quarterly newsletter.

Luncheons are held at **The Carlisle, 435 E. Butterfield Rd., Lombard, Ill., beginning at 11:30 A.M. Parking is free. Business attire. Reservations can be made at the website or by calling 708-334-2627.**

Cardinal Cupich to Commission for Vatican City State

by Gerard O'Connell

Pope Leo XIV, continuing to build his new administration, has appointed Chicago's Cardinal Blase Cupich and Cardinal Baldassare Reina, the vicar general of Rome, as two new members of the Pontifical Commission for the Vatican City State, the Vatican announced today.

The commission is the legislative body of the city state and was established in 1939. It has the power to approve laws and normative provisions, including the annual and three-year financial plans, for the smallest state in the world.

In Cardinal Cupich's case, today's appointment is seen in Rome as a sign of the

esteem that Pope Leo has for the cardinal archbishop of Chicago As cardinals, the two men had worked together as members of the Dicastery for Bishops for over five years, including from 2023 to 2025 when the future pope was prefect of that office, and got to know each other well.

The board of Catholic Citizens of Illinois continues to pray for our cardinal and congratulates and wishes him well as he takes on this additional responsibility in Rome.

This article is excerpted from an original article published in America Magazine on Oct. 15, 2025.

Winter 2025 Update

As a new liturgical year begins under the providence of Christ the King, we reflect on the past year and look forward to the opportunities and challenges of the year to come. This has been a momentous year for the church, for our country, and for the world. We have a new pope—from Chicago, no less—and a new president. We have new young saints to serve as sources of inspiration and exemplars for upcoming generations of Catholics.

We are particularly heartened by the elevation of **St. John Henry Newman**, a British convert to Catholicism canonized by Pope Francis in 2019, to the status of **Universal Doctor of the Church** by Pope Leo XIV this past November. Newman shares this distinction with only 37 other saints whose teachings and writings have expressed the doctrines of the Catholic faith with extraordinary clarity and orthodoxy.

Cardinal Newman, sometimes called the “invisible Father of the Second Vatican Council,” gave the church an enhanced understanding of revelation in many areas. But it is Newman’s writing on the special role of the laity that has inspired our work at CCI for nearly 40 years. He was a strong and early proponent of a well-informed and active laity at a time when this idea aroused suspicion among many of his contemporaries in the church hierarchy. He exhorted every baptized Christian to be well and faithfully informed about church doctrine, able to articulate what he or she believes and does not believe, equipped to defend the church against her detractors, and virtuous in personal witness to the faith.

It is fitting that it was Leo’s predecessor and namesake, Pope Leo XIII, who named John Henry Newman a cardinal in 1879. It should be a source of comfort to all Catholics that Leo XIV’s writings as pope—on issues such as immigration, border security, climate change, the liturgy, education, declarations of nullity, and

Christian unity—show him to be neither politically conservative nor liberal, neither Republican nor Democrat. (He does, however, appear to be a partisan of a certain South Side Chicago team!) Rather, he is, as chosen by the Holy Spirit, the Vicar of Christ on Earth, entrusted with preaching the Gospel without change or dilution and serving as a visible principle of unity within the church.

As we begin this new liturgical year, we invite you to join us for our Forum Luncheon Series. We already have several compelling speakers booked for 2026. This is a fascinating time to be a Catholic citizen. On one hand, the church faces levels of hostility and persecution from secular forces seldom seen in modern American history. On the other hand—and perhaps because of that very persecution—many young people are beginning to ask profound—and ultimately religious—questions about the meaning of their lives and what the future holds for them. Increasingly, they are discovering that the Catholic Church offers the answers they seek.

Here at CCI, we remain steadfast in our mission to provide resources to help lay Catholics bring the faith and culture into the public square—into their homes and workplaces, their schools and associations.

Will you help us continue this mission?

All our costs—speakers’ honoraria, luncheon menus, transportation, website maintenance, printing and postage—mount with each passing year. We are an all-volunteer board of directors and rely on your generosity to sustain our work. In the spirit of the season, we humbly ask for your prayers and financial support.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all our dear and generous supporters and friends. May our Lord bless you and those you love during these holy seasons of Advent and Christmastide.

Our Lady of Perpetual Help, pray for us!

If you are able, please mail a check to Catholic Citizens of Illinois, or donate through the general donation portal on our website, CatholicCitizens.org, using this QR code.

