

*A CHILD IS BORN
to US, a SON
GIVEN US!*
19:5

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. A light has shown upon them. They rejoice before you as people rejoice at a harvest. His Dominion is vast and forever peaceful."

Open to Joy, open to the zeal of our new life my friends!

Thank you for opening our Christmas greeting to you! Now, take a moment – if you wish - to read this. You might, though, wish to close your eyes, pause a moment in the midst of all of the other things that ask you to pay attention to them! We are simply inviting you to be attentive! ... A "light has shown upon us!" Take a moment and experience and sense that light.

As Children might, we might this season open our eyes anew, our ears opened to a timely deep, rich message, which has always been here! The message: God created us in God's own image. "We are God's children now!" God will never leave us alone; in fact God came among us, born of flesh as we are, as one of us, known as Jesus of Nazareth, Son of David, Son of God - the Christ.

The world is full of many voices, many images - more voices and images than a few pages can carry. Listen here to our Mountain voices carrying to you the joy and peace of this season from their hearts to your heart. May they fill your heart now as you pause and sit, being attentive, listening as you wish and where you might, exploring the blessedness of this time with us and joining in the hope, the blessedness of our hearts as we are preparing for "a new day," a New Year.

The Wind is swirling right now around La Paz - where I live - beside our forest on our Mountain. I feel the vastness of



Winter has again arrived at La Paz.

Mt. IRENAEUS

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the winter, the closeness of the woods, the winter sky moving toward us, soon to surround us, and soon ... real snow!



We have lived here on the Mountain now for many years. Our first five winters I was privileged to share much of this time with the trees after I had driven students back to school and other guests went back to their own homes. At that time our community began to grow and the capacity to have people here in cabins and in our house. We became a place of family, of resident friars, a rich human life shared with many, but always beside the rest of creation in the midst of the glory of God and the many seasoned earth.

The intimacy of Christmas and our larger community has grown. It is an amazing movement; a movement of the *immensity* of God's love. God's love is *immense and intimate* at the very same time, holding us always, each of us by name, sharing now the life that is ours in Jesus Christ in whom we are "co-heirs."

The intimacy of Christmas, again, the immensity of God's love is showing forth and we know this love by name both in Christ and in each other's names – many faces, voices and names - and in the love of God for the Son, the God who, like a mother, holds us each as God's own child, nestling us near, drawing us out from the coldness of our own days into immense compassion for the whole earth, sun, moon and stars.

This is not only a Christmas wish my friend, but it is the gift of God's Christmas love for us! We have this gift of love so that with the *immensity* of God's love we might grow to love each other and all others with great tender *intimacy*.

Ah, and yes the stars! As you read each Christmas reflection here you are greeted by a "star," a member of the Irenaeus "stellar system," the Mountain family, each of us wishing to let our light shine with you, illuminating your heart and the hearts of many who have shared the Mountain family's life and light over this past year and years. Let our stars shine!

It is not too soon to ask you to come and take time with us here this coming year. Explore with us the universe of your own heart where the God of creation dwells and swells up in mercy for people who are living in our time, challenged and burdened in other places, those who have been forced from their homes or flee with real fear. Here, in this place, Mt. Irenaeus, where fear flees, in this community, which you are a member of, we sit with one another with food and stories, hopes and hearts open to this most extravagant love!



Mountain on the Road in Binghamton with some of our student ministers standing among alum and friends.

Who is both Intimate and Immense, the One
who creates and dwells among the sun, the moon and the stars.

*MERRY BLESSED
CHRISTMAS!
Dan O'Connell*



A healing prayer service at the Intercollegiate Weekend Retreat.

Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss.

Truth will spring from the earth; justice will look down from heaven.

Psalm 85: 11-12

For many years now these two lines from Psalm 85 have reminded me of the birth of Jesus, when God came to the earth to become one of us. The starting point of the incarnation of Jesus was and is Love. Jesus' whole ministry was to make God, who is Love, more present to the people of his day. Jesus kept telling people, "If you want to know who I am and who God is, do like I do- feed people, take care of the sick, help the alienated to make their way back, open up the circle, make more room for the outcast." It is fascinating to think that when we do these things out of Love, even today, we also will make God present to the people of our day.

God Love you and bring the attitude of Christmas (Love) to the whole year.

~ **Br. Kevin Kriso, ofm**



Our Christmas tree has bare branches.

Well, it's pre-lit so not quite bare. Several years ago we put off decorating our Christmas tree due to this and that until it was finally Christmas Eve. We hadn't strung lights on our house or in windows, no garland or signs or Santa's. It was on the verge of midnight and we were still assembling the tree.

It was cold outside and the house was not brightly lit so that we could test the lights on the tree. When the tree lights came on something magical happened. For some reason, this bare tree with its colorful lights was perfect as it was. I couldn't bring myself to decorate it and ruin its simplicity. It reminded me of how we had made a conscious decision to live a more basic, simple life. We didn't need three fully decorated trees like my mother-in-law or the blow up yard ornaments of other relatives. When I told my aunt, she nearly cried thinking we lost something that Christmas and when I explained it to her she still didn't agree, but that's fine, this bare tree was ours and it held significance to us.

The following year I succumbed to my aunt's words and fully decorated the tree and it just felt wrong. I lived with it for a couple of days, took pictures to send to her and then stripped it bare again. Over the past couple of years some of our extra special ornaments have crept back on the tree but discretely off to the side. We lead a simple life, we have a simple tree.

Our Christmas tree has nearly bare branches and that is perfectly right for us.

May you find the joy and happiness in the simple things this Christmas and from my family to yours, have a happy and blessed holiday season.

~ **Mary Giardini**



Merry Christmas good people! How this year has flown by!

When I look back at the year the feeling I have is gratitude. I am so grateful for my family, my friends, my ministry with the Mountain and most of all all of you who come to the Mountain and support us in so many ways. We are so blessed to have benefactors, friends and family that do so much to keep the Mountain running. You who take the time to come here and help out with work and planning . . . you who are so financially generous to us and help to heat, clean and maintain the buildings and grounds we so cherish . . . you who pray for us, visit us and minister on the road with us For all of you, I am so grateful.

You are our Mountain family.

In this New Year I wish for you all the best. May this year be filled with joy, love, friendship, beauty and fulfillment. You will be in my prayers each day and in my heart always.

Blessings and love to you all!

~ **Michelle Marcellin**



The Christmas Gift

The tree is a beauty; cut down a short way away yesterday by Joe and several students. It was put in its stand just a short while ago after the students had arrived for the Advent overnight. Strung with lights by another group of students before supper was served, it is now filled with all the ornaments originally laid out on the coffee table. Each of those ornaments were individually placed by students who offered a prayer intention for each one put in place. Christmas gifts will fill in underneath the tree as the day comes closer – people are very generous. Toward the back there is a small gift already that shines and sparkles differently than the others. Just a simple replica of a tiny manger spoken about so long ago. That was the time when the world received the greatest gift it has ever known – the Son of God among us. We celebrate again that gift.

May the gift of Jesus be in your hearts, homes and lives during this Christmas season and all through the New Year. Let's continue to be that gift for one another.

~ **Lou McCormick, ofm**



Wishing you all special blessings during this precious time of the year. Heartfelt thanks to the countless volunteers and benefactors that support the Mountain! Your gifts bless us every day. From my family to yours... Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

~ Mary Schlosser

Not having yet experienced Christmas at the Mountain, I can only imagine the incredible food, company, music, and decorations that accompany the day (along with substantial snow shoveling). Yet, looking forward to the Advent season, I find myself reflecting, don't we always cook? Don't we always share music and art? Although the tone will be different, the essence will be the same one that stays here year round. As the newcomer to the community, I focus especially on the company, because I wouldn't be here at all if it weren't for a conscious tradition of inviting others to the table.

I wasn't always a newcomer. Through events attended and friendships made, I was part of the spiritual community of Mount Irenaeus before I ever had to settle into the physical community here. There's not a single person I know who is involved with the Mountain who hasn't been embraced in that same way. The best part about this is that we're not kept in the outer circle, even when we don't stand on the soil of Mount Irenaeus property. Think of any Nativity crèche you've ever seen. It takes place in a physical structure, but one entire wall is open to you in welcome to adore the baby, Jesus. Most of the time, the figures in the scene spill out of the stable itself: magi hiking out of the East, an angel on the roof, shepherds looking on, taking in every detail in preparation to spread the story. You and I are no different. We come to the table, to the Mountain, to be nourished, and then we go out again because what we've found is no secret. I pray for many blessings to all of you, newcomers and veterans alike, who share the joy they've found with us in this and every season.

~ Joe Flynn



I have been truly blessed to have Mt. Irenaeus in my life for about 27 years. Over that time I have experienced the Mountain way of life in many different roles – as a student, a Mountain Community Leader, a summer resident, and a Partner in Ministry to name a few. Seven years ago I was voted onto the Board of Trustees and last year I was honored to be elected as the Chair of the Trustees for Mt. Irenaeus. Having been given these great gifts, including meeting so many good people through my experiences at the Mountain and on the road, it is truly humbling to be asked to help lead a talented and impassioned group of volunteers to bring the mission of the Mountain forward for years to come.

Over a recent weekend, we had a Board meeting at the Mountain. As you might expect it began with prayer, fellowship, and of course a delicious meal! There was also a lot of work done, and we left with an energy and a commitment to take on important initiatives that will help secure the future of the Mountain for generations to come. Our group was also enriched with the welcoming of new Board members who bring distinct talents and wonderful gifts to all of us. The weekend continued down in Olean where many of us enjoyed the festivities that make up the annual Mountain Auction.

As we prepare for the upcoming holiday season I am so thankful for all those who worked tirelessly with Fr. Dan over the past 30 years to make the Mountain what it is today. I am grateful for all their efforts and that I now have an opportunity to give back to this wonderful place, and make sure the Mountain will be present for others over the next 30 years and beyond.

~ **Mike Fenn**

Merry Christmas to all of the Mountain community! As Christmas approaches my thoughts are on all of the relationships that I value. On a recent visit to the Mountain on All Souls Day, we heard a sermon about relationships. It stirred some thoughts that have been turning around in my mind since that day. As a new member of the Board of Trustees for the Mountain, I feel like I am being blessed with new relationships and with changing relationships. I have always had a relationship with God and with the Mountain, but both relationships have been given new life this fall. A simple change in relationship has given a different perspective on so many things! I also think about my family and friends throughout the Country and realize how many relationships I treasure still or have treasured with those who have passed. At Christmas I might not get to be with all of the friends and family, or be at the places that I treasure, but they will be in my heart and prayers throughout the Christmas season. Again, Merry Christmas to all of the Mountain community! May all those who are touched by this newsletter enjoy and treasure your relationships this Holiday season!

~ **Kate Rinaldi Trosch**





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HOLIDAY MASS SCHEDULE

Christmas – December 24, 2014

9:00 p.m.

Christmas Mass at Night

December 25, 2014

11:00 a.m.

Mass for Christmas Day

New Year's – December 31, 2014

11:00 p.m.

New Year's Eve Prayer Service

January 1, 2015

11:00 a.m. Mass