



FROM THE HEART OF

# The Pelican

NUMBER 16

SUMMER 2015



**PRAYING FOR A RELEASE OF  
THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT  
ON PENTECOST SUNDAY**

## Editorial

SR. GERTRUDE GILLETTE

### DEAR FAMILY AND FRIENDS,

WHILE LIVING IN EUROPE some years ago, I had the chance to visit Medjugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina (the site of an apparent Marian apparition, about which Rome will soon make a statement) and meet the visionary Mirjana, who begged everyone present to *pray for unbelievers*. She went on to explain that if they were not converted, the world would endure terrible sufferings at their hands. The rapid expansion of ISIS in recent times has brought to the fore the need to heed Mirjana's words and has enkindled my desire to pray for unbelievers and those who do not know the love of God.

To better familiarize myself with the global phenomenon of militant Islam, I read several books on the subject, including first-hand accounts from those living in the Middle East. My prayer has been that God would raise up saints from within the Muslim community to lead these people to Christ. I was therefore delightfully astonished to learn that the Lord had indeed raised up an apostle from the Middle East—though not a former Muslim—who has been highly successful in converting *millions* of Muslims to the Christian faith.

This daring apostle is Fr. Zakaria Botros, a Coptic priest who appears on Arabic TV stations, holding a Bible in one hand and a Koran in the other, inviting unbelievers to call in with any question. He informs them of what the Koran says on the subject and then what the Bible says, and ends with the challenge: You decide! His phenomenal success in converting Muslims to Christianity has resulted in al-Qaeda naming him #1 Public Enemy and placing a bounty of \$60 million dollars on his head!



Needless to say, I was delighted that the Lord had answered my prayer a couple of decades before I had even started praying it! Since then, I have read many stories of conversions from Islam, including the marvelous story of Mario Joseph, an Imam from India, who was converted to Christianity by reading the Koran.

Most recently, I have learned of another phenomenon taking place in the Muslim world: Jesus is appearing in dreams to Muslims all over the Middle East—even to members of ISIS—inviting them to follow him. Some of these new converts have already shed their blood for their new-found Savior. Each story leaves me in awe of God's amazing grace and mercy.

Let us continue to pray and offer sacrifice for the conversion of unbelievers that they might know the love of Christ and profess belief in our awesome Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. May He be blessed now and forever. Amen. ✚

There are many YouTube videos about Fr. Zakaria Botros. A good introduction is the nine-minute interview with Michael Coren.

For Mario Joseph's conversion, see the YouTube video, "Changing Tracks."

For more about Jesus dreams, see *Killing Christians: Living the Faith Where It's Not Safe to Believe*, by Tom Doyle (Thomas Nelson, March, 2015).

# News & Updates



*Celebrating Rachel's birthday in May with a baby giraffe at Zootastic, a local park with zoo animals.*



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## The Pelican

ISSUE 16: SUMMER 2015

The Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Peace

363 Armour St.

Davidson, NC 28036

Tel: 704-827-2490

email: qopbenedictines@gmail.com

web: www.qopbenedictines.com

Editor: Sr. Gertrude Gillette

Layout: Michael Schrauzer

Photography: Sr. Gertrude, *et al.*

Cover Photo: Rachel Hoffman

**T**HIS YEAR TOOK A FEW UNEXPECTED but happy turns for us. During Advent, **Rachel Hoffman** — a woman from the Charlotte area — made an observership, living our monastic life with us for four weeks while discerning a vocation. She returned to us after Easter to begin the first step in her formation or postulancy. This step is very much an orientation to the religious life and a transitional step between the world and the more serious step of becoming a novice. We ask you to keep Rachel in your prayers as the discernment continues on both sides.

In anticipation of **Rachel's** joining the community, we decided to send **Sr. Scholastica** to Stanbrook Abbey in England for three months from early January to late March. Stanbrook had been instrumental in Sister Gertrude's own monastic formation many years ago, which is evident in many of our house customs. It was therefore a dream come true when **Mother Andrea Savage, O.S.B.** kindly acquiesced to our request for Sr. Scholastica to live with them and observe their beautiful spirit. We invite you to read Sister's impressions of her visit in the article directly below these updates.



*Sr. Scholastica with one of the novices at Stanbrook Abbey.*



Another not-insignificant event for **Sr. Scholastica** was her naturalization as an American citizen on April 6th. It was a happy end to all the paperwork and waiting which took nearly ten years to accomplish. Congratulations, Sr. Scholastica!

Our summer plans include a drive in late July to Atchison, Kansas, where we will make our annual retreat with the monks who run Benedictine College. We will also visit several other abbeys in the area or en route, including Mount St. Scholastica's—the sister community of the monks in Atchison and incidentally the Benedictine community which our co-founder, Sister Theresa, joined in 1948. We will also visit St. Louis Abbey, Conception Abbey, and the Priory of Our Lady of Ephesus—all three in Missouri. The last named monastery has become well known in recent years for their chant and music productions. Sister Gertrude will tag on to the end of this trip a short hop to California where she will give two mini-retreats at St. Andrew's Abbey in Valyermo, one on the *Interior Castle* of St. Teresa of Avila and the other on Our Lady.



**Sr. Gertrude** continued teaching Latin at Christ the King High School and was very pleased that eight out of her ten students won recognition on the National Latin Exam, three of them winning gold medals and two silver ones. She also continued to lecture for the Women of Joy. The theme last Fall was *Mary in Scripture and Tradition*, and this Spring she covered the first half of the *Acts of the Apostles* with them. Just before Pentecost, she was part of a team (along with Fr. Bob Ferris and Deacon Louis Pais) which led a Life in the Spirit Seminar, culminating with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday. Many good fruits have come from this Seminar, including two physical healings! Praise You, Jesus!





Several members of our Oblate group made their final commitment this Spring: **Isabel Melby** and **Rachel Leach** (above left) in February, followed a month later by **Ed and Donna Leach** (above right). Congratulations!

### SOJOURN AT STANBROOK ABBEY

Sister Scholastica kindly responded to a few questions about her three month visit to England earlier this year. Here are her responses:

*Q. How would you describe your overall experience?*

A. My experience at Stanbrook can best be described in the words of the prophet Hosea:

I am going to lure her and lead her out into the wilderness and speak to her heart. I am going to give her back her vineyards... (Hos 2:16).

A number of factors collectively contributed to my Stanbrook experience being one of a retreat or wilderness experience coupled with a time of renewal. Among the most prevalent factors were (i) the physical location of Stanbrook Abbey which is nestled in a forest preserve where peace pervades; (ii) the cloistered experience of not having to ever leave the abbey cultivated a deeper sense of faith and trust in the Lord as I felt time and again that I did not have to busy myself or my mind to get my daily needs but God provided for me right there; (iii) my shortened work days allowed me to have more

time for prayer and reading; and finally (iv) the opportunity to observe as well as converse with the nuns who each revealed a unique way of living out the Benedictine charism.

*What struck you most about community life at Stanbrook?*

The sense of respect that the sisters held for each other. This was evident, for example, in their attentiveness to each other when they spoke and in the charitable things they said about each other.

*How would you describe Mother Abbess' interaction with the other sisters in community?*

Mother Abbess radiated a lot of joy and a willingness to teach, guide and also enjoy the personal qualities of the nuns. For example, when Mother Abbess walked through the hallway she always smiled at and sometimes nodded her head in acknowledgment of the approaching nun.

*Did you find that your visit changed you or your outlook at all?*

Yes, most definitely. I gained a deeper appreciation and love for the monastic life as a result of witnessing so many beautiful expressions of love, support and encouragement of the nuns of Stanbrook Abbey towards me and each other.

One of my most memorable experiences was on February 10th, the feast of St. Scholastica, and my patronal feast day. I was pleasantly surprised each time I stepped out of my cell (bedroom) that day to find another card or present pinned or laid outside my door. I enjoyed the uniqueness of each card. Some were petite and precious and others were large and expressive but each one was reflective of the respective sister's desire to wish me well in that day's proceedings, as well as in my religious vocation.

*You also were able to visit your cousins and see a bit of England while you were there. Can you give us any highlights about these excursions?*

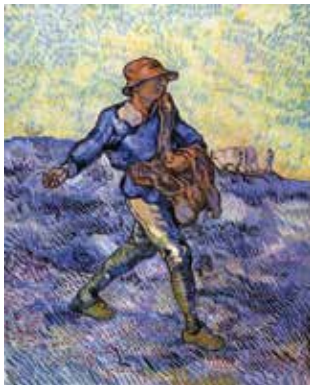
Mother Gertrude allowed me two weekends away from the monastery in which I was able to see the Lake District and sights within London, such as Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament, the London Eye, St. James Park, Westminster Abbey and Westminster Cathedral. By far the highlight of those weekends was the opportunity to both reconnect and reminisce with my cousins and one of my uncles.

I would like to thank Mother Gertrude for having the vision and wisdom to make my

journey to England possible as well as for all her direction before and during my stay. I would also like to thank Mother Andrea and the Stanbrook Abbey community for allowing me to be privy to their expression of Benedictine spirituality and for making my stay with them such an enjoyable and memorable one. God bless you all! ✚



*Sr S is at her patio garden again, with great success.*



*A Sower went out to sow...  
Some seed fell upon good  
ground and yielded grain,  
some a hundredfold, some sixty,  
some thirty. Mt 13:3, 8*

## THE SOWERS' CLUB

**W**E WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL OF YOU WHO HAVE been so kind to us this past year. Your prayers, support, and kindness have touched us deeply. Please be assured that you are in our daily prayers. We would also like to express our gratitude to all our dear friends and readers who belong to the Sowers' Club — thank you for the generous donation of \$100 which you send to us once a year. Your generosity is a terrific help to us at this time when we have only part-time employment. For those of you who have not yet joined the Sowers' Club, we invite you to consider doing so. You Sowers are planting the seeds which God in due time will turn into a harvest. Thank you again — all you "old" and "new" Sowers — for thinking of us this year.

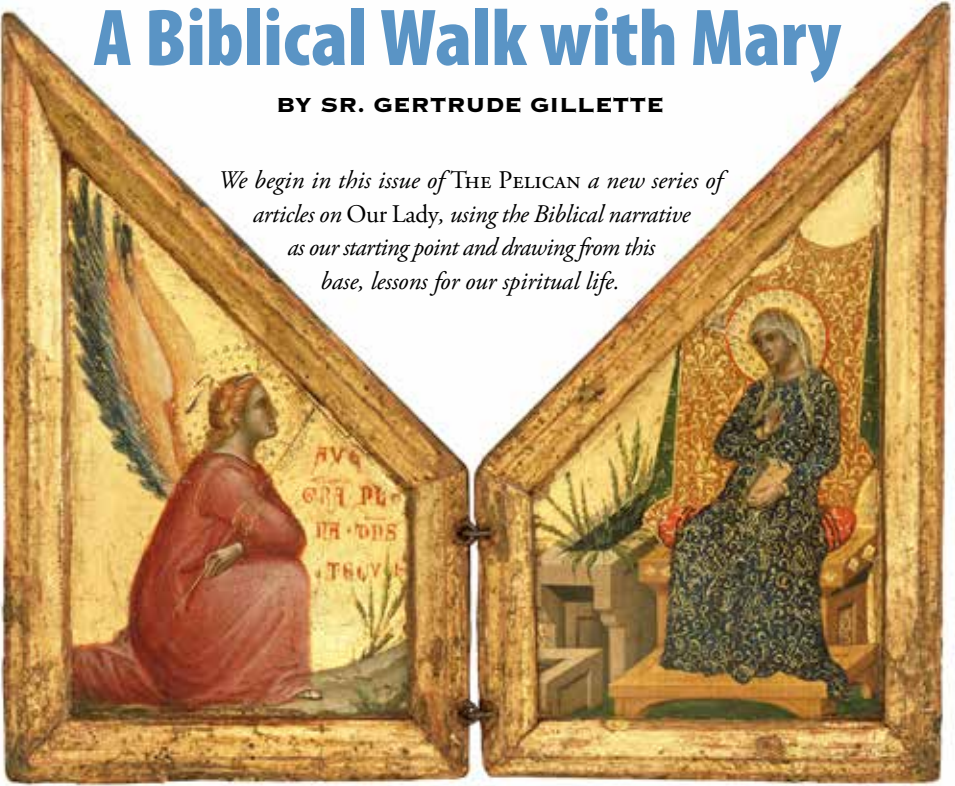
Please make your checks payable to *Benedictines of Mary, Queen of Peace*, and mail them to: 363 Armour St., Davidson, NC 28036. Include any particular intentions that you would like us to remember in our daily prayers for you. And please remember us in your prayers as well! God's gracious blessings upon you!

— *The Sisters*

# A Biblical Walk with Mary

BY SR. GERTRUDE GILLETTE

*We begin in this issue of THE PELICAN a new series of articles on Our Lady, using the Biblical narrative as our starting point and drawing from this base, lessons for our spiritual life.*



**W**HY STUDY MARY? MARY is an integral part of divine revelation. Christ was born of a woman. Who is this woman? The Creed encapsulates our faith:

For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man.

Thus Mary has a place in the Incarnation, in God becoming man. In the past 50 years, three papal documents were issued on Mary. They stress that Mary is intimately connected to:

1. *Christ*: she is the most exceptional fruit of the Incarnation; she is the humble handmaid who put herself at the disposal of God and his work, co-operating with Christ in the mystery of Redemption.

2. *The Church*: she is the most eminent member of the Church; the Mother of the

Church and of all those who are redeemed; she is a teacher of the Church: as virgin, mother and spouse, Mary shows the Church who she (the Church) is; in turn, the Church reflects on Mary's obedience and other virtues, following Mary in order to be more and more connected to Christ.

3. *The Holy Spirit*: Mary is the unique Temple of God in that the Holy Spirit dwelt within her to the "nth" degree, so much so that we can say she is the Spouse of the Holy Spirit.

An understanding of Mary leads to a deeper sense of:

1. *Christ*: Mary's own mystery is only understood in relationship to her son. The more we understand Christ, the more we see how unique Mary is.

2. *The Church*: The Church sees her own origin, mission and destiny by contemplating Mary.

3. *The vocation of Mankind*: Mary represents the human race. She shows us what God can

do with each one of us, if we let him. She has, therefore, universal value; she is our sister.

Our first biblical starting point is, naturally, the story of the Annunciation. The first few lines tell us:

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary (Lk 1:26-27).

A closer look at a few of Luke's terms can enlighten us on what is taking place.

1. *Nazareth*: an ancient village with about 200 people at the time of the Holy Family.
2. *Virgin*: normal age for betrothal was 13–14, so Mary was probably very young.
3. *Betrothed*: the first of a two-step process, which legally bound the two people to each other and to follow through in a reasonable amount of time with the second step of living together.

In *The Fiddler on the Roof*, the father (Teyve) arranges to marry his oldest daughter (Tzeitel) to a wealthy man, the local butcher. When the daughter refuses — because she's in love with the village tailor — it is very embarrassing for Teyve, who is compelled to renege on a contract which was considered binding. The film shows how old traditions were changing in the modern times of 1905. For thousands of years, parents arranged marriages between their children and what they thought would be suitable and honorable spouses.

4. *House of David*: Joseph's lineage was royal. The Davidic dynasty lasted until 586 B.C., when the Babylonians conquered the Holy Land and carried off the last living king and his family who died in exile. When the Jews returned many years later, they did not resume the practice of

having kings. On the whole, the kings had failed miserably as leaders, often leading the people into idolatry. After the exile, the promise made to David, that one of his sons would sit upon the throne forever, was seen instead to point to a *future person* — whom the Jews referred to as the *Messiah*. The Jews of Mary's time, were well aware that there were a good number of Israelites who could claim to be part of David's family, but no one knew who would be chosen to be the Messiah's immediate forebears. They were in a wait and see period.

Spiritually, what can we glean from all this? If we glance through the window at that house in Nazareth, just before Gabriel enters, what do we see? What were Mary's dispositions and state of soul? What made her so attractive to the Most High that he would send an archangel to her with the most important message ever delivered to a human being?

As a daughter of Israel, Mary was immersed in the Old Testament and pondered the word in her heart (see Lk 2:19). In Scripture, the heart is the center of the person. By pondering the Scripture, Mary was already making the Word alive in her heart, entering into a relationship with her Lord through his Word in revelation. For the Word to go from her heart to her womb was therefore not a long journey! Mary teaches us to move into our own center, to ponder the word of God in our own hearts, and thus to enter more deeply into a relationship with our God who is waiting for us at our deepest center.

As we continue our reflection in future issues, remember that Mary is not a peripheral character in the drama of salvation ... but neither is she center stage. *Jesus is center stage*, but Mary's role is that of a *supporting actress* who truly supports her son in his mission and then helps each of us as well. ✚

