

How Far Is It to Bethlehem?



Dear Friend:

Christmas 2013

Many cultures and religious traditions speak of life as a journey. Human beings intuitively understand this; it seems written into our very DNA. Another universal realization is that life's journey is full of surprises – and not without hardship. Finally, no matter how bright and beautiful the journey, or how painful and difficult, what matters most is reaching the destination, the goal.

At Christmas we celebrate several journeys – that of the Son of God from heaven to earth, that of Mary and Joseph on their trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and that of the wise men from the east in search of the Child. We too are called to join them in their pilgrimage of faith – and that is the great consolation: none of us makes this journey of life alone.

*How far is it to Bethlehem? Not very far.
Shall we find the stable room lit by a star?
Can we see the Little Child, is he within?
If we lift the wooden latch, may we go in?*

(Frances Chesterton)

A number of events marked the conclusion of the celebration of our 25th anniversary year. In June postulant Myriam received the novice's habit and became Sister Myriam. She is hoping to have companions in the novitiate in 2014!

Each year we welcome many visitors to our monastery. Some come to pray in our chapel, to speak to a Sister or to purchase cheese. This year we hosted a special group – 34 of the 2nd graders from the Charlottesville Catholic School came for Mass on a lovely October morning! We were delighted to meet them and their parents and to tell them something about our life.

Our means of self-support, *Monastery Country Cheese*, was featured in several Virginia magazines during the year, and also on the Christian Broadcasting Network program. The video of this can be viewed at <http://www.cbn.com/tv/2661344064001>. The various writers and photographers who came were appreciative of our vocation, and managed to convey in their media that the cheese-making is a part of something larger and deeper – our way of Christian discipleship. The response from people all over the country has been heartening, and we are grateful for all our many new friends and the support of their prayers.



The new novice with novice director Sr Kathy



Over the years we have been blessed by a multitude of good friends who have accompanied and supported our community in so many ways. It is difficult to imagine what life would be like without them! We are grateful to each and every one – and all have a special place in our hearts and in our prayers. This year we would like to highlight the “*Marvelous Monastery Mailers.*” This group of eight or so valiant souls arrives several times each year with sleeves rolled up and brown bag lunches in hand to help us mail our various newsletters and brochures. This is a formidable day-long task which they accomplish with zest and much good humor. How thankful we are!



As we shared with you in our letter this past summer, our whole community has been engaged in planning for our new church. It is both a symbol of the reason for our monastic life and a reality that will further that life and enable us to continue sharing it with others. The generous response to our appeal for contributions makes us realize how much it means to our friends to be part of this. We now have 1/3 of the total amount needed. We are grateful for all the donations we have already received, and we invite you to continue helping us build this house of prayer. Any financial contribution you can make will be greatly appreciated, and you will have a perpetual remembrance in the prayers of the Sisters. Thank you for your support and prayers as we move forward in this endeavor.

We began this letter with reflections on the journey theme in each of our lives. There is also the journey of all of humanity, of this flawed yet magnificent human nature we share. It is a journey from darkness to light, from misery to mercy, from death to life. *How Far Is It to Bethlehem?* Another favorite carol tells us it is as close as a Christmas prayer:

*O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray.
Cast out our sins and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell:
Oh, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.*

(Phillips Brooks)

This is surely the deepest meaning of Christmas, the heart of the mystery, the unquenchable cause of our joy. We wish and pray for you this joy in abundance, now and throughout the coming year.

Christmas Blessings!

The Sisters of Our Lady of the Angels Monastery



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*kneeling: Srs Joanna, Barbara, Sophy, Nnaemeka
standing: Srs Kay, Kathy, Maria, Mother Marion, Srs Francis, Jan, Myriam, Linda, Mary David, Claire*