



*Something NEW  
for the family . . .*

# **CONCORD!**

*An on-line miscellany of features from  
the publication of the same name  
available from*

THE HOLY FAMILY INSTITUTE

## *The Prince of Peace*

*The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
Upon those who dwelt in the land  
of gloom, a light has shone.  
You have brought them abundant  
joy and great rejoicing,  
As they rejoice before you as at  
the harvest . . .  
For a child is born to us, a son is  
given us,  
Upon his shoulder dominion rests.  
They name him Wonder-Counsellor,  
God—Hero, Father—Forever,  
Prince of peace.  
His dominion is vast  
and forever peaceful,  
from David's throne and over his  
kingdom,  
Which he confirms and sustains  
by judgment and justice,  
both now and forever.  
The zeal of the Lord of Hosts  
will do this!*

*- Is. 9, 1 -6, First Reading Midnight Mass*

# *John the Baptist*



*He knew who he was and  
he was not afraid to say it!*

One of the major figures of the Christmas Season is John the Baptist who makes his regular appearances in the Advent liturgy and then tends to fade from our memory

It is a pity that he should fade because John is an admirable figure and worth thinking about every day of the year.

We first hear about John in Luke's Gospel (1,5). His father, Zachary, is in the Temple and presiding at the liturgy. It was a major event in his life. Unlike in our time, there were too many priests for the available liturgies and so they drew lots each year for who would go to the Temple.

Already tense because he knew this was a once-only event in his life, he is suddenly startled out of his wits by nothing less than the appearance of an angel who tells him that he will become a father in spite of his advanced age and the age of his wife, Elizabeth.

### WHAT WILL THIS CHILD BE?

Zachary returns home and — contrary to all expectations — his wife conceives. For six months life continues normally for the couple though not entirely normally because, after the shock of the angelic appearance, Zachary has lost his voice.

Then comes an unusual intervention: a young cousin of Elizabeth, called Mary, arrives to pay a visit because she has heard the joyful news of Elizabeth's pregnancy. And what a visit it was! Mary was carrying with her no less a person than the Lord of Heaven and Earth. And from her young, teenage body, a limitless power emanated to cleanse in Elizabeth's womb the future John the Baptist, to cause Elizabeth to cry out "in a loud voice" and to move Mary to respond with what we call "the Magnificat" - a wonderful hymn of praise to God.

Cleansed in this very special manner of what we call "Original Sin" (as happens to us when we receive Baptism), John is born in the normal way and his father, Zachary, recovers his voice to say what name will be given the infant and to sing another hymn of joy we call the "Benedictus." The name, "John," stirs up some discussion among the neighbors but Zachary insists that this is what the angel had told him to do and, when he tells the full story of his Temple experience, we read in the Gospel that "fear descended on all the neighborhood." Something truly remarkable was taking place.

### JOHN THE STRAIGHT-SHOOTER

After his birth, a long silence descends upon John's life until he appears again striding along the banks of the river Jordan and calling people to repent of their sins. At that point he becomes a model for Church people and, indeed, for every convinced Catholic.

In his Advent appearances he is asked three questions and he gives three clear answers - not a very common occurrence in our day. He shows that he knows who he is and what his work is to be.

Why he was so clear about himself and his role in the plan of God? Perhaps the simplest answer is that he knew who he was because he knew who Christ was, what Christ stood for and so what John, his advance-man, should stand for.

## A CRISIS OF IDENTITY?

There is nothing more important than to know who we are and what is expected of us. When we forget this, then there develops what we call a "crisis" or split in our thinking.

Some decades ago there was much talk of a "crisis" among the clergy who were alleged to be agonizing over who they were and what should they be doing.

But not only the clergy. Members of the professions, teachers, police, and professionals generally were alleged to be equally confused. Now in our time this confusion is widespread and there is a growing lack of respect for proper behavior and proper standards. This is shown, among other things, by the way even good people miss Sunday Mass or show up for Mass dressed as if they were going to work.

## WHO ARE WE?

How can we come to a full understanding of who we are?

In this year of St. Paul we find him taking the lead in his Letters to establish just who is he and, more important, WHY he is. Read any of those Letters and see can you find a place where the name of Christ and the reality of Christ and the love of Paul for Christ is NOT mentioned. Paul began by persecuting the new Christian faith and he has not forgotten that part of his life, but he is more concerned about

what he did right and why he did it. When he passed from his ancient Jewish faith and when he went out to the world of his time to preach about a very controversial individual called “Christ” whom in his lifetime he had not met and who had ended his days executed by the Romans, he might well have felt himself in a crisis of doubt. But he tells us the very opposite.

*“I have come to rate all as loss in the light of the surpassing knowledge of my Lord, Jesus Christ. . . all I want to know is Christ and the power flowing from his resurrection, to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death, in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life” (Phil. 3, 7-11).*

That’s how Paul saw things and how right he was! If there is widespread confusion in our time that is because we have forgotten about the great Figure at the center of the world and at the center of the universe. And, to the extent we have forgotten, to that same extent is life meaningless. We are unsure of ourselves because we are unsure of him and even more unsure of ourselves.

## HAVING CLEAR IDEAS

John the Baptist described himself as a Voice crying in the wilderness, proclaiming the coming of the Word. John understood his role: I am not the Christ, the Promised One. I just prepare the way for him.

Right on, John! There is only one Redeemer, Jesus the Christ. He alone died for all peoples everywhere, but he rose again and is in no way a figure of the past but a figure of the present. He is living and active in every well-meaning baptized person.

**He is especially living and active in the members of the Holy Family Institute because each of them has reaffirmed his/her baptismal consecration by a further, Church-regulated commitment.**

What we call “the work of the Church” is done, yes, by people but really by Christ in and through these people.

And indeed if it is not being done by him it is not being done at all! The effectiveness of “the work of the Church” is measured by the part Christ plays in it. NOT by the external, numerical power of such work. We like to talk about “modern media” used for good., But media in themselves can impress, they cannot convert. “Impression” means we react to something favorably; “conversion” means we reflect on our reaction. Without Christ this reflection and conversion cannot last or will not even be begun.

In the Church today what we call “the **Pauline Family**” - various religious groups of men and women - uses “modern media” to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ and has a certain visibility in this work.

But – if the Family is accomplishing anything at all - that is taking place because its members are “consecrated” or “set apart” or “dedicated to” . . . to whom? To Christ whom they serve in this way as other Religious groups serve him in the poor and sick and uneducated.

In other words **it is Christ himself acting in these men and women** who reaches out through the media they operate to touch the lives of those they contact, sometimes in ways they can see, most often in ways that will be revealed only in Paradise.

**NO IDENTITY CRISIS!**

John the Baptist knew who he was because he related to Christ - the One he was to announce. St. Paul knew who he was because he related to Christ and saw all other relationship as insignificant. The members of the Pauline Family, including the members of the HOLY FAMILY INSTITUTE know who they are and why their lives are supremely worthwhile.

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*It's God's idea - not ours!*

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# The Family

We can readily recognize that the existence of families is an essential part of normal human life. Every hour of the day and night seventeen thousand infants cry out in distress as they come for the first time into a very different world from the one they knew up to then. Many of them will die of starvation, others will grow up in poor families, others in war situations. A growing number will be born into families broken by divorce, by domestic violence, by drugs and by a hundred other disorders which will have decisive influence on them. "The sins of the fathers are visited on the sons."

Every now and then we hear talk of a "new era" and "a new world." But the "world" is made up of people and it is they who must be renewed, and that renewal begins inevitably from the human family, the very "heart of the world," the true center of society and the fundamental organism of human life.

## THE ORIGINS OF THE FAMILY

When a young couple begin married life together they are fundamentally happy in that arrangement and usually don't take time to speculate why they should love each other - it comes naturally. It is a mysterious bond linking one to the other. It begins and ends with them - or so they might be inclined to think.

But the reality is that, to understand human love better, we have to look far beyond it. And our guide on this search is none other than John the Evangelist. He writes:

*“Love, then, consists in this:  
not that we have loved God  
but that He has loved us  
and has sent His Son as an offering for our sins.  
Beloved,  
If God has loved us so,  
we must have the same love for everyone.”*  
(1 John 4: 10 – 11).

Surprise, surprise! **GOD IS THE GREAT LOVER, THE REASON WHY THERE IS LOVE IN THE WORLD - INDEED, THE REASON WHY THERE IS A WORLD!**

The world did not begin when we came into it. We made a difference but we did not make the world. The love of one spouse for another already existed because the world and the whole marvel of Creation is the result of an unstoppable action of God Who — to put it in plain terms — cannot contain Himself, cannot be satisfied until He has given everything that He, God, can give.

God, the great Lover, in what we call “Creation” made a lavish display of His limitless powers. It was a marvelous spectacle. . . but there was no one to enjoy it! So He took a piece of earth - “Adam” - and raised it to know itself and all around it. From Adam came “Eve” and now in these two — the first human beings — God has laid the foundations of our human race.

But He did not want a situation where each human being loved Him and related to Him. . . but did not relate to each other. And so from the very beginning we find two human lovers united in their love for God and showing that love for God by loving each other.

And here we have the intrinsic meaning of “family.” not a purely human arrangement but an essential part of a divine design, a species of human temple where God is worshiped and where He creates and multiplies life. This was the idea behind the description Vatican Council 2 gave of the family: “the domestic church.”

And now perhaps we can understand better that matrimony and family are not institutions which developed in the human race over the years just as, say, languages developed or skin-color developed. They are not something which human beings invented.

### MATRIMONY AND FAMILY - DIVINE INSTITUTIONS

Yes! These two elements are part of the divine plan for us from the beginning! It is principally in the FAMILY that God wishes to be served and loved and honored - even before He is served and honored in religious structures. We cannot honestly honor Him in church if we have not honored Him during the week in and through family life.

It is, therefore, principally in the FAMILY that people are **called to be holy, to sanctify themselves.** This is a very important principle which we have largely forgotten. The family is not just ONE of the places where God’s plan for humanity is brought to fulfillment: it is the PRINCIPAL place!

Let’s enlarge on that. We readily understand that the family has enormous social importance and especially for the children - where else? But many of us would then say that to become holy, “to work for the Church,” we have to go away from the family atmosphere and get involved with the poor, with the sick, with teaching Christian doctrine, with serving in the liturgy, etc. We would say that we have

to get away from the ordinary, the everyday, the monotonous.

But this is not the case. **The family is the place where God is most easily found and served: the husband in his wife and children, the wife in her husband and children, the children in their parents and in each other.**

The Bible puts the idea like this:

Then God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our own likeness.., and God created man in His image, in the divine image He created him, male and female He created them . . ."  
(Gen. 1:26 -- 31).

How's that for clarity? Husband, wife and children are **made in the image of God!** And when they love, honor and serve each other **they are loving, honoring and serving God!** This is in general but especially when all three groups have been BAPTIZED and so made into "Christophers," "Christ bearers."

And when the Son of God came on earth to be our Way, our Truth and our Life, he spent about two or three years working miracles and preaching the God News . . . but **he spent about twenty years in a normal human family!!** And this was not because he lacked the ability to teach - what about his questions and answers at the Finding in the Temple? - but because **family life was where he served his Father most perfectly.**

The collapse of the family in our day — and family life problems in every generation - explains the many and terrible ills in social, business and political life. When people lose respect for each other in the family context, why should they suddenly acquire it in public life? In fact they don't. They simply manifest in a different way the contempt and disrespect they have shown to their spouses. The love they should have found in the home, they try to find it in promiscuity — a futile search, like ship-wrecked sailors drinking seawater. The ability to share and be generous which they have not practiced in the

home extends to their political lives and eventually to a desire to invade and conquer other lands and people.

The sociologists can tell us what they like but the plain words of the Bible are much more precise. We remain animals like all the others and they, of course, also live in families in ways which resemble the human family. But at that point the resemblance ends,

God IS life . . . life without end or limit of any kind, full exuberant, glorious, eternal, powerful, without boundaries.

But the question is: what is God DOING with all these terrific advantages? Enjoying them?

No. God is SHARING them. He is GIVING. We might say that "Giving" is His middle name. "He made us, His we are." And we little human beings can serve God best when we GIVE and especially when we give in the family context.

Will living family life properly bring peace and prosperity to the world? How do we know it won't? It's never been seriously tried.

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# *The Silence of MARY*



We are accustomed to seeing on TV or the Internet the President or the candidates for the Presidency or other people of a certain importance as they move from Point A to Point B, making their important speeches and announcing their important decisions.

What they say is recorded as they leave and when they arrive at their destination the newsmen and women are there to greet them and there are statements and announcements and promises and most of us wonder if all this sound and fury will produce any real results.

But when Our Lady was greeted by the angel at the Annunciation, when she was invited to become the Mother of God, there were no reporters or photographers or men and women with microphones. There were no witnesses. Nobody human was involved apart from her.

And yet more of importance took place in that incident than in all the other events that have ever taken place on earth.

At the Annunciation the process began which was to change the human situation from being men and women on the way to Hell, to men and women before whom the gates of heaven were opened up; from being men and women wandering on the face of the earth to being men and women to whom Mary would give the One who said: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."

But no one knew it except Mary and the angel and God.

There were no reporters in Bethlehem either. Of course the whole concept of "reporting" was very different then from what it is now, but we have a profound conviction that, even if Bethlehem were taking place for the first time this December, God would see to it that the number of participants was minimal.

Only in silence can the bud open, can the flower bloom. There are no cameras or microphones on hand during the long days of summer to record the miracle, of a billion wild flowers unfolding in a million fields far from the human eye.

Beautifully, harmoniously, incredibly . . . flowers that the gardeners

don't even know yet , rise from the cold earth and turn to the sun. And there is no noise, no discussion, no shouting or violence . . . everything takes place in the most absolute silence as God wants it to take place and a billion flowers give Him praise and glory in a billion hidden places without uttering a word.

So the Annunciation took place in silence, so the Nativity was a very private event. And so also May's Assumption into heaven took place in silence. It is the divine style.

We know little about the details of May's life, about her early years, her years in exile in Egypt, her years in Nazareth and, finally, the closing years with St. John. And this may lead to the mistaken view that she does not in fact deserve to be removed from the shadows.

But that is not how things are. Our Blessed Mother remains shrouded in silence because some realities cannot be properly expressed in human words.

Are there not moments in our own lives when words fail us, when we cannot properly share our joy or sorrow with others, when we keep repeating the same words over and over in a futile attempt to make ourselves understood?

Mary remains mostly hidden in the pages of Scripture because there are no human words that can adequately describe her. And we can see why this is so. After all, are we not surrounded by mysteries - other men and women - and are we not mysteries to ourselves. When do we ever fully know other people and when do they ever fully know us? So why should we be surprised if we fail to understand completely a great lady chosen and prepared for a mission such as no other woman ever had? Such as no other woman ever will have?

Our Lady said: "All generations will call me blessed, "and perhaps that statement gives us a further reason why she passes only fleetingly through the pages of the Gospel.

Like her son, she belongs to all generations and so it is fitting that each new generation should come to know and love and praise her in the language and with the culture of that generation rather than with the terms of a past age.

The more noise people make in their lifetime, the more a great silence seems to fall after their deaths - and, indeed, this may well be preferable to the sort of revelations about their real lives which sometimes emerge as time passes. In any case, we who remain are notoriously forgetful and purely human characteristics and accomplishments are swept away and disappear down the stream of time.

But when a life is lived according to the desires of God, then every slightest and apparently unimportant aspect of such a life is sustained by the power of God and will never disappear.

In the plan of God nothing is wasted. A brilliant orator can move the hearts and minds of his listeners, but there are times when a single resigned cry from the lips of a sufferer in some forgotten corner of an hospital may be more powerful before God than all the orators in the world.

- Consider the value of bearing pain in silent patience.
- Consider the value of praising God in moments of trial or of forgiving injuries when there is every reason NOT to forgive.

It is the mark of the Divine presence that everything should be in its proper place and everything happen at the right time. It is this mark which gives glory to a summer garden or a Fall sunset.

And it is the mark of the divine in Our Lady's life that she should be largely silent while her Son speaks. Anything else would cause confusion - like two people trying to speak at the same time.

It is the mark of the divine presence and the divine effectiveness in your life and mine that we should be silent. Not necessarily in the sense of saying nothing but in the sense of being at peace with

ourselves and of accepting calmly the challenges of living a good life. It is the mark of the divine in our lives that we should be satisfied with doing our best on each occasion, glad to have the privilege of serving the Lord no matter what our circumstances.

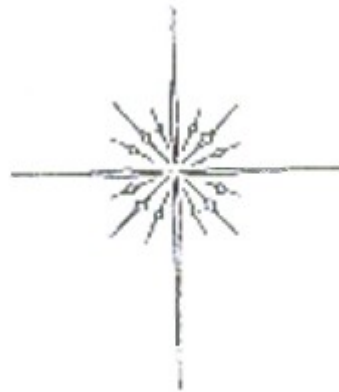
Some day praise and blame will equally disappear. Shouts of joy will fade away as will shouts of anger. Our human lives will have ended and at that point there will remain **only what we have done with God In mind.** And much of that will have taken place in silence as it did for Mary. Happy will we be if we have taken her as our mother and model during life, serving the Lord in loving and active silence.

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### **Our Christmas Prayer**

God grant you peace at  
Christmas  
And fill your heart with  
cheer;  
God grant you health and  
happiness  
Throughout the coming year.  
God guide you with his  
wisdom  
And keep you in his care;  
This is our special wish for  
you—.  
This is our Christmas prayer  
—Author unknown



### **The Christmas Heart**

The Christmas heart is a  
gentle heart;.  
Malice and envy have no part.  
Coldness and bitterness  
cannot stay  
Where the spirit of Christmas  
holds full sway.  
Joy will enter and grief depart  
When Christmas candles light  
the heart.  
—Author unknown

*“Less than a venial sin . . .”*

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# *A Most Unusual* **CHRISTMAS**

The Christmas Season should be a time of pleasant memories, of love and laughter, but for the infant Society of St. Paul in 1918 it was anything but.

The young priest, James Alberione, after years of prayer, reflection and advice from good friends, had launched in August of 1914 what was to become the worldwide **Pauline Family**. At Christmas of 1918 it was anything but worldwide, consisting mostly of a few second-hand printing machines, and a handful of inexperienced young people working in the then obscure northern Italian market town of Alba. But it was at least a beginning and it meant everything to them.

On Christmas Eve, in the best Italian tradition, the boys cleaned up the few rooms they were occupying and then went to dress for the Midnight Masses which Fr. Alberione would celebrate.

After Mass they enjoyed a meal of polenta and sausage and then retired for a well-earned rest, anticipating a late rise on Christmas morning.

But about 3 am they were wakened by the shouts of Fr. Alberione: "Get up! Get up! The pressroom is on fire!" as he raced to see what he could do to put out the flames. He was met by a cloud of acrid smoke and might have fainted on the spot if one of the stronger boys had not helped him out.

Eventually the firemen arrived, short on equipment and doubtless not at their brightest at that hour of the morning and that day of the year. They managed to contain and eventually extinguish the blaze but any paper the flames had not consumed was rendered useless by the water. A scared group of boys looked on in dismay at this scene of desolation. What would happen now? Their whole reason for existence had been almost wiped out before their eyes! And when they checked on Fr. Alberione they found him nursing a badly-bruised knee which he had banged against one of the machines in his desperate attempt to help. But there was nothing anyone could do and the young priest spent Christmas Day in bed with a high fever.

A few days later a local pastor, a good friend of Fr. Alberione, heard of what had happened and called to see if there were anything he could do to help. He found his friend limping painfully among the blackened ruins of four years' hard work, trying to salvage at least something from the wreckage."

"I'm terribly sorry this has happened," he said, "and to you of all people."

Fr Alberione looked at him for a moment and then replied: "This? It's less destruction than the destruction caused by a venial sin!"

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*This ends our first on-line publication. If you would like a FREE copy of the full, 60-page printed version, please write to: Box 498, Canfield, OH 44406. May the Infant Jesus bring you many blessings this Christmas. Be with us again here early in January!*

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