

Gloria in excelsis Deo! We greet you this Christmas with hearts full of gratitude for all God has done for us. We give Him thanks and praise as we gather at the Crib to entrust all of you, dear friends, to the care of our Infant Savior.

During the Christmas season, we think often of St. Joseph, that “just man” whose care and protection guarded the Holy Child and His Mother at so many crucial moments. Even on ordinary days, our thoughts turn to him as we invoke his aid. Recently, one Sister needed him when the cuff she was “single-handedly” buttoning simply refused to cooperate. “St. Joseph, send me some help!” No sooner had this short prayer darted to Heaven, than a figure appeared at her side, leaned down, and fastened the button. It was another Sister passing by - *carrying a statue of St. Joseph!*

The Serrans: who are they? They are an organization of Catholic men and women who pray and work to encourage and support vocations to the priesthood and religious life. It has been our privilege to have the Serra Club of Montgomery come for Mass and a visit annually these past five years. Not only have they provided us with many material helps, but they have also arranged “nun-runs” for interested young women, sponsored essay contests to promote vocations, and given much assistance to our seminarians. The seminarians now number twenty-two, of whom four will be ordained this summer. It will be a great day in Heaven when the many vocations the Serrans encouraged will come forward to say, “Thank you. We are here because of you.”



This year Our Lady received a beautiful present on Her birthday, September 8th, when our Postulant, Sister JulieAnna, received the Dominican habit and her name in religion. We had no clues to help us guess what it would be, and so were on pins and needles until Mother said, “In the Order you will be called Sister Mary Philomena of the Crucified Christ.” Sister told us that she was attracted to St. Philomena, the early virgin-martyr, and to the meaning of her name, “daughter of light.” She chose “of the Crucified Christ” as her title because she never wanted to forget what Our Lord has done for us.

A second special blessing was the entrance of a new postulant. In imitation of Our Lady, Sister Nicole began her life in the cloister on the Feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, November 21st. We ask Our Lady to make of these fervent young souls Her Guards of Honor as they prepare to become the Spouses of Christ.

This past summer was the summer of FIGS. We have always had a fig tree. The pickings were usually slim to none. But this year surpassed any other. Every day three Sisters came in each bearing a bucket of fresh figs and exclaiming, “The fig tree is out of control!” As day after day we saw the same quantity arrive in the kitchen, we realized that consuming figs at the table would never handle the supply. We shared. We cooked. Fig preserves, fig cookies, fig muffins, fig cobbles, even fig smoothies! Fortunately, before we had to search out other recipes, the tree stopped producing. There are still a few jars of preserves on the shelf, however, if you come to visit.

Among our many beautiful Advent practices is that of praying 4000 Hail Marys in honor of the 4000 years the world waited for the Birth of the Messiah. Another is that of preparing a bed for the Infant Jesus by small acts of mortification, kindness and prayers. For each deed, we place a straw in the manger. The imperfections of our offerings may make them more prickly than soft, but as He did not spurn the poverty of the stable in Bethlehem, so He accepts our poor efforts. Can not He who is the Word made Flesh, Who made water into wine and Who transforms bread and wine into His Body and Blood every day at Mass, transform our straw into the gold of His grace returned to us? He did not ask for a feather bed or down comforter. Nor does He ask impossible things from us. O Jesus, Who humbled yourself in becoming man, grant us all the humility to be content with doing little things for you with the confidence of a child in professing great love.



May the **King of Peace** be with you now and forever.

Mother Mary Joseph, O.P.

Mother Mary Joseph, OP and Sisters