



# The Oblate

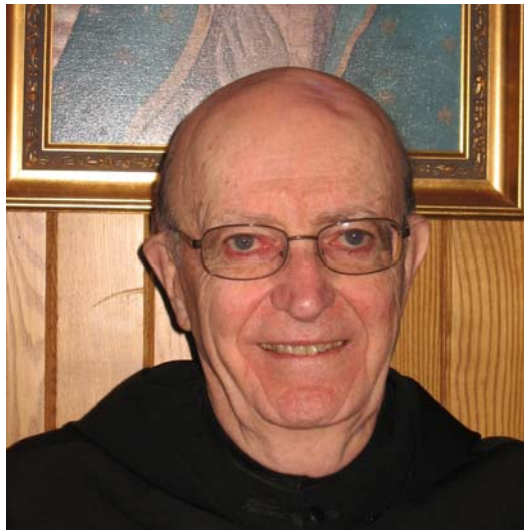
*News Magazine of the Oblates of Saint John's Abbey*

October 2018

Volume 62, Number 3

Fall Day of Reflection November 18, 2018

Fr. Simeon Thole, OSB, arrived at Saint John's from Moorhead in 1949 at the age of 14. After Prep School and two years of university, he followed his older brother



Tom and his younger brother Otto into the monastery in 1955. Following seminary studies he was ordained in 1962, when he began to teach English and religion in the prep school for more than fifteen years. He wrote a novel, *Peter Prep*, undoubtedly inspired by his years at Prep. Father Simeon was chaplain for the Sisters at Mount Saint Scholastica Monastery in Crookston for ten years, pastor of the local Saint John's parish for five years, and the administrator of Saint Leo's Abbey in central Florida for over five years.

Since returning to the abbey in 2000 he has been conducting retreats as well as providing spiritual direction and chaplaincy services for Sisters.

From 2006-2016 he led the Benedictine Day of Prayer (BDP), a monthly Friday day-retreat begun in 1996 by the Abbey Spiritual Life Program.

## Who Do You Say That I Am?

Our faith tells us that we are baptized into Jesus Christ and become members of his body. In his conference Father Simeon will focus on several fundamental questions: "Who am I?" and "How did I get that way?" We think of ourselves as inhabiting our present lives. But that is not all of who we are. Our past is within us, and so is our future.

**Registration by November 10 is necessary for our preparations. No need to fill out forms; just inform the oblate office that you will attend.**

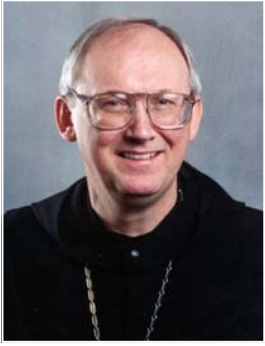
**Email: [oblates@csbsju.edu](mailto:oblates@csbsju.edu)**

**Phone: 320.363.3022 (or 363-2018)**

**Cost: Free-will offering**

- 9:30 Arrival in Great Hall**
- 10:30 Community Eucharist**
- 11:30 Lunch in Q264**
- 12:45 Group *Lectio Divina***
- 1:30 Conference**
- 2:30 Discussion and Prayer**
- 3:00 Departure**

## Message from Abbot John



The miracle of the Incarnation is that out of all the ways God could have chosen to redeem us, he chose the most risky, the most costly. God sent his only Son into the world, not to condemn the world but so that all who believe in

Christ might have the fullness of life. This Jesus was not a tourist, coming for a while and then leaving when it came time for the heavy lifting. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

Jesus did not escape being a child or take a rain check on growing up with parents, on learning how to be family, how to sweep, how to cut a board, how to play, how to obey in small things. Imagine Mary insisting that Jesus eat the edges of the pita bread. Imagine Jesus getting a piggy-back ride on Joseph's shoulders. Or Joseph taking Jesus to the synagogue and teaching him how to pray, calling upon God as Abba.

When Jesus does address God as Abba, something pretty amazing happens, for the relationship is fully there. Jesus had to learn how to learn, had to discover himself and his mission. When Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan there is a moment of revelation. For evangelists and later artists it is a Trinitarian scene: The Holy Spirit overshadows Jesus and a voice from heaven declares, "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

In the Incarnation we celebrate the mystery of God embracing the human condition: simplicity, poverty, vulnerability, uncertainty, the contingency. We know that this Son will ultimately give his life for us. For now it is enough to ponder God's loving decision on our behalf. It is enough to ponder Mary's response to God's invitation and our own openness to grace. These moments of grace make all the difference.

## Message from Father Michael



When I became a novice monk 22 years ago, the abbot asked me, as he asks every novice, "What do you seek?" My ritualized reply was, "The mercy of God and fellowship in this community." Was I seeking two things or really one? One! The mercy of God is indeed found in community. God is in our fellowship with others.

For instance, in the monastery dining room, there's a little room off to the side we call the snack room. It's a place to get a cookie, coffee, or a place to eat when you don't have time to eat with the community during our regular meals. Recently, I was having a rather busy day and was standing in the snack room, quickly eating a bowl of soup for lunch. An elder monk was in there too sitting down, quietly eating a cookie. He looked at me and said, "You know, Michael, the way you're eating isn't very Benedictine. Sit down with me and tell me how things are going with you." With annoyance, I thought to myself, "Can't you see I'm busy!" But my Minnesota nice kicked in, I sat down, and we had a rather nice conversation! Why hurry? I had ten minutes. What a good thing simply to enjoy one another's company around food and story.

We cannot love the Word made flesh unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other. We know God in the breaking of bread, and we know each other in the breaking of bread, and we are not alone. God is with us. Heaven is a banquet and earth is also a banquet, even with a delicious crust. Let us seek the mercy of God in the fellowship of the community where we live.

## News and Notes

In this issue leading up to and through Advent, Christmas, and the Baptism of Jesus, we want to shed light on the mystery of the Incarnation as God is incarnate in the lives of oblates and of others, of course. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, exhorts the Letter to the Hebrews. Prefer nothing at all to Christ, exhorts Saint Benedict. Your editor urges you to keep this issue handy through mid-January so you can reflect on the “incarnational” articles and the feasts (pp 7-11) of the Advent and Christmas seasons.

### Candidate Investitures

**Ryan Courtade**, Lisbon, OH

**John Grek**, Ashland, WI

**David Neff**, Denver, CO

**Tom Primmer**, Ankeny, IA

### Final Oblations 2018

**July 11. Timothy Gossman** from Chatfield, MN, is an SJU grad. “Oblate life gives me greater reasons to act as a person who serves both in my community and my church.

**July 14. Edward Horski** from Owosso, MI, is a SOT Alumnus 1999. “Oblate life helps me give of my education, parish ministry experience and care for others. I wish to pass on Benedictine values to future generations.”



Ed Horski, Carol DeLaRosa, Carol Hlebain with Father Michael in the Great Hall after making their final oblation.



Abbot John and Father Michael, assisted by Master of Ceremonies Brother John Brudney, receive the oblation promises of Edward, Carol D and Carol H during Evening Prayer of the Vigil of Sunday.

**Carol DeLaRosa** from Raleigh, NC. “Oblate life helps me strengthen my sense of hospitality, especially in my work as a nanny and helping the elderly. I feel very close to the prayer life of the monks.” Carol’s husband, Mark, is an oblate.

**Carol Hlebain** from Avon, MN. “Oblate life helps me center myself more deeply in the sacred and connects me closer to Saint John’s Abbey. Regular prayer helps me act more tenderly to those around me.”

**July 16. Jane Rodeheffer** from Rochester, MN, served on the SOT Board 2004-2013. “Oblate life helps me integrate Benedictine values as a wife, mother, professor and Catholic worker.”

**Richard Rodeheffer**, husband of Jane, from Rochester, MN, served on the SOT Board of Overseers. “Oblate life gives me a sense of place, continuity, and friendship with the Saint John’s community.”

May God, who has begun the good work in all of these sons and daughters, bring it to perfection in the Kingdom of Heaven.



## News and Notes, continued

### Deaths



**Caroline Nester**, age 97, died May 17 in New Hope. She had been an oblate since 1955. Caroline and Oblate Eugene, married more than 64 years, raised eight children.

**Erik Floan**, age 48, died May 30. He had just made his final oblation on February 12 this year. Music was central in Eric's life, and he shared his gift in many ways in parish life.



**Richard "Dick" Haeg**, age 84, died August 14.



He was an oblate since 1960. A close neighbor to the abbey, Dick loved art and was good at it. He assisted Bruno Bak with the stained glass façade of the abbey church, where his funeral was held.

**Alcuin Ringsmuth**, age 94, died August 15. He was an oblate since 1955. Al worked for Burlington Northern Railroad for 42 years and was mayor of Waite Park for 38 years. He and his late wife, June, raised 11 children.



### Regional Chapters

#### Joan of Arc, Minneapolis

Coordinated by Oblate Ron Joki, the chapter meetings at Saint Joan's this year will focus on some of the retreat topics—reverence, service, stability, justice—enlarging on them and allowing each one to see how the Spirit of God has woven them into the fabric of our lives.

### Fargo

A core group of eight oblates opened the season of meetings on September 8, the birthday of Mother Mary. A good discussion of "Silence" followed the Liturgy of the Hours. Oblates volunteer to choose a chapter of the Rule as subject of the discussion. This procedure works well and keeps things fresh. Father Don arranges meeting space and Judy Doll handles the communications for the group.

### Japan

Oblates in Japan regularly gather in Tokyo on or near March 21, the Passing of Our Holy Father Benedict, and November 3, Culture Day in Japan. Eleven oblates at the spring meeting were inspired by the talk of Oblate Kojima Kazuko-san and the music of Katsumata-sensei's Gregorian Choir. Fr. Cyril Gorman — "Tony" in Japan — serves as liaison between oblates in Japan and Saint John's. He will join their chapter in November, when they renew their oblation promises.

### Collegeville

On September 16, the Collegeville oblate chapter met after summer break for their monthly gathering. Fourteen oblates joined the monastic community for the Eucharist, followed by lunch with Father Michael at the Guesthouse. Then Pam Keul led the discussion on "Community and Communication," chapter 10 of Michael Casey's *Monastic Practices*. Members shared many stories of how community can be both a challenge and a blessing. One oblate compared community to a rock tumbler—we all soften one another's sharp edges. Rick Koetter introduced us to one of Fr. Kilian McDonnell's poems. Every month an oblate volunteers to lead the discussion on the next chapter of the book.

## Contemplation in a World of Action

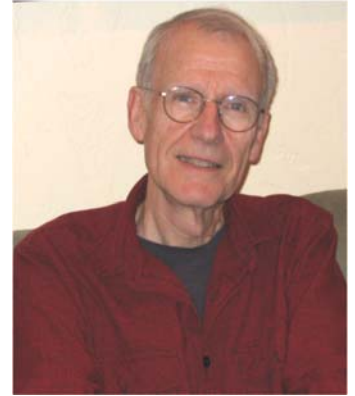
Throughout the history of Christian spirituality there has been a collegial relationship between contemplative experience and active engagement with the needs of the world. They are two aspects of the same reality. Neither should be emphasized to the diminishment or exclusion of the other. The self-emptying—*kenosis*—and openness of contemplative experience is the womb giving birth to compassionate relationships, words and actions in our daily lives. Opportunities for spiritual growth and transformation challenge each person to manifest God’s presence in a complex world.

Over time, our periods of “exile” will gradually become a pattern of prayer in which we *experience and become formed by the God we believe in*. Each person’s period of exile is a sacrificial offering of herself to God that opens the space for the *logos*—the Word of God—to become a living presence in her life. This dual sacrifice of openness and union is an offering that completes the formation of each person’s life. God receives our sacrifice and speaks us into fullness of life. Hear St. Paul, “*It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me*” (Gal 2:20). This happens every time we pray and reaches unique consummation in the Holy Eucharist.

We do not know, with our senses or intellect, what is really possible for human beings. Yet there is *another form of knowing* that releases immense power for love and compassionate engagement in the world’s conflicts and challenges. It is a relationship that releases living water for the life of the world. The desert abba Paul of Thebes reminds us to “keep close to Jesus.”

During my reading and contemplative prayer this past year I have discerned three questions

## David Keller



that I believe individual Christians and Christian faith communities must consider at the present time. This is prompted by my firm conviction that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—and his continuous presence among us through the Holy Spirit—brings both the opportunity for transformed human life and the responsibility to mend and transform broken human lives and institutions. The fact that we share this opportunity with other world religious traditions does not diminish our unique Christian commitment to the life of the world.

- ◆ What are the most urgent needs and challenges that confront national and international societies at this time in the twenty-first century?
- ◆ How will union with Jesus Christ enable individual Christians to become personally involved in responses to these needs and challenges?
- ◆ How can Christian faith communities challenge and engage society with spiritual formation and worship opportunities commensurate with the human problems we face at this time.

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David Keller is co-founder and director of The Contemplative Ministry Project. He collaborated with Fr. Thomas Keating, OCSO and others to produce *Spirituality, Contemplation, and Transformation: Writings on Centering Prayer*. David was the first steward of the Episcopal House of Prayer in Colledgeville from 1994 to 2002. He is now Adjunct Professor of Ascetical Theology in the Center for Christian Spirituality Seminary in New York City.

## Annual Retreat — July 13-15, 2018



Above, left to right: Peggy Stokman and Darryl Hensel welcome Dennis Cavanaugh, his wife Marilyn, and Sally Haik as they check in to begin the retreat experience.

Mass at 5 pm was followed by supper, evening prayer and the first retreat conference, "Reverence in Prayer," which **Jan Robitcher** delivered. She combined information with prayers and singing. Father Michael, at the piano, accompanied the singing. For many, Jan's conference set an enjoyable prayerful tone for the retreat.



**Teresa Roberts and Jim Secord**, below, spoke on "Mutual Service" in seemingly small but actually large ways. With examples from family life, this married couple told of life-giving outcomes from kind and caring assistance.



Father Michael used his flute to summon the group for the third conference. **Mark DeLaRosa**, top, is a teacher by profession and it showed in his powerpoint contribution on "Stability." He covered a lot of history as well as accessible spirituality. **Mark's dad, Julio**, above left, offered wisdom accrued during many years of marriage and more than 25 years as an oblate. They come to the retreat from Raleigh NC just about every summer. This year Mark's wife Carol made her final oblation, giving their family a rich summer.

The closing conference on Sunday morning followed a substantial breakfast.

**Nickolas Tangen** fed our minds and hearts right before Eucharist with a dynamic presentation on *incarnating* "Social Justice" in our lives. He made a strong case for contemplation in action that serves one's neighbors in many helpful, life-giving ways. He urged oblates to get involved in social causes in their parish. What did Jesus say? "What you do for one of my least ones you do for me."







Photo: Brother David M. Mahan, OSB

The group gathers for the yearly photo after Mass and renewal of oblation in the abbey church on Saturday morning.



Even the weather was beautiful for this wonderful occasion. Here some of the oblates leave the abbey church after Evening Prayer on their way to the banquet on Saturday evening.

Leading (?) the way on his "electric chair" is the assistant oblate director, Father Don. Actually the oblates did not have to be led as they know the way to nourish their bodies as well as their souls.

### Banquet

And then it was time to celebrate: candidates' oblations, oblate renewal, and plenty of time to engage and reengage with other oblates and monks.

Save the dates for next summer: July 19-21, 2019.





## Advent Longing

Advent is my favorite season. This morning I read a meditation on Advent and “desire.” This season of waiting and preparation stirs up within us an awareness of desire and what our hearts most long for. The last few months have had some times in which I felt unsettled and unsure about the future. With the coming of Advent, I have felt a layer of peace descend upon me. As I walk or run amid the winter landscape, I am struck by the stark beauty of these days.

### **Prefer Nothing to Christ and Seek God Daily.**

This Benedictine value seems to be the heart of the gospel, the heart of the baptismal life, the heart of my ordination vows. Certainly my vocation is intertwined with prayer, service, and witness in the name of Christ. Yet, living fully in the present moment—always attentive to the stirrings within and without—for me, draws me to a deepened connection with being a Benedictine oblate, and with the community of Saint John’s Abbey, more specifically.

When I hear about the pace and busy schedules of my peers, I feel fortunate that I can live a bit like a monk in the city, and then have several days each week at our cabin for renewal amid nature. I have always been good with boundaries, and am able to get my work done so there is time for reading, meditation, recreation, exercise, and reflection.

Yet since so much of my week is related to religious, pastoral, and spiritual matters, sometimes I find my spirit renewed through running, chopping vegetables, baking bread, talking with a friend, listening to music, or savoring the simple gifts of daily life.

## Candidate Craig Mueller

I find that one of my goals in preaching is to help the listener make spiritual connections with their daily lives. That means that I must be practicing what I preach, and finding the space and time for that stillness. This is increasingly difficult for many because of the distractions that smartphones and other technology bring.

I recently read a wonderful book about longing, called *The Five Longings: What We’ve Always Wanted and Already Have* by David Richo. Since longing is a rich theme in my own life, and at the heart of Advent, I pause to remember a phrase that has stuck with me for years: *We wait for what we already have.*



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*Pastor Craig Mueller is an oblate candidate of Saint John’s. This is one of the reflections he has written as part of his oblate formation. Craig is now Lead Pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in Chicago. He recently received a Doctor of Ministry degree through an ecumenical program in Hyde Park. His thesis topic was: Any Body There? Embodied Worship, Virtuality, and Human Authenticity. Think incarnation.*

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*Since we for our part are surrounded by this cloud of witnesses (Heb 11), let us lay aside every encumbrance of sin which clings to us and persevere in running the race which lies ahead; let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who inspires and perfects our faith. For the sake of the joy which lay before him he endured the cross, heedless of its shame. He has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. Remember how he endured the opposition of sinners; hence do not grow despondent or abandon the struggle. In your fight against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood (Heb 12: 1-4).*



## THIS NIGHT A CHILD IS BORN

*To David: "Your throne shall be established forever."  
(2 Samuel 7:16)*

To the plucker of strings,  
slayer of Goliath,  
the whole of Palestine,  
with fixed borders,  
a chain of fortified cities.  
The bridle taken out  
of the Philistine's hands.  
The Ark in Jerusalem.

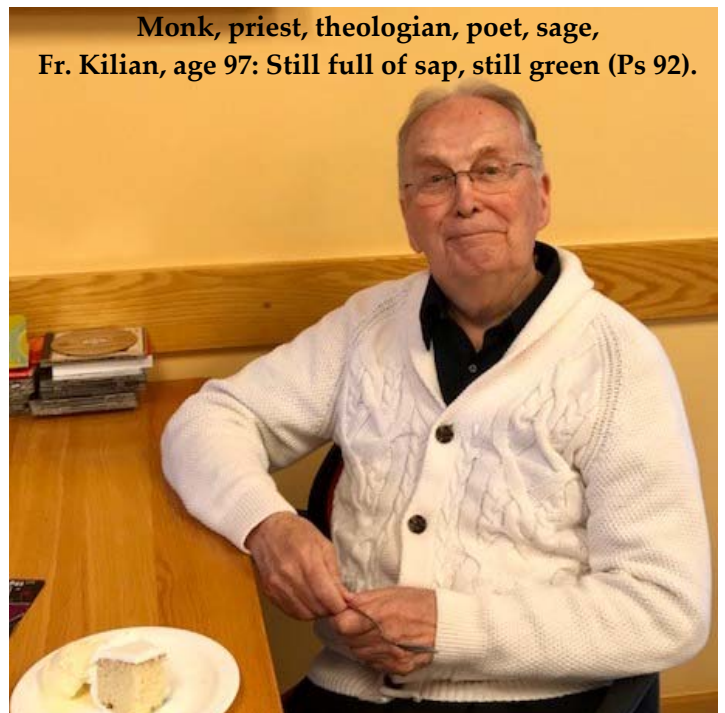
Yahweh swore  
David 's dynasty  
would rule forever.  
By a perpetual covenant  
his seed would sit  
upon the throne.  
The gold of the nations  
would flow to Zion.  
Kings would kneel.

But the scribe's indigo  
ink was not dry  
on the Acts of Solomon,  
in the Chronicles of Israel,  
when Jeroboam cried,  
"To your Tents, O Israel,"  
tearing the kingdom,  
scattering the pieces.  
Perpetuity crashed.

The priests still sang  
over the ruins of Zion:  
"By the word of the Lord  
the heavens were made.  
The Lord decides  
the number of the stars,  
calls each by its name.  
The word cannot fail;  
it stands forever."  
Tonight Word  
becomes history.  
The seed of David  
sits upon his throne,  
a kingdom without fixed  
borders. Kings kneel,  
bringing gold,  
frankincense and myrrh.  
His reign is forever.

♦ Kilian McDonnell, OSB, *Swift, Lord, You Are Not.*

**Monk, priest, theologian, poet, sage,  
Fr. Kilian, age 97: Still full of sap, still green (Ps 92).**





OMG, when we contemplate the mysterious event of God's manifest entry into human life—yours, mine, and ours—we can enter more deeply, consciously, and gratefully into

the liturgical preparation and presentation of the various celebrations of the Christmas season with their amazing grace. "All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). If we are not transformed more and more into the "same image" we contemplate, then what is gained? If we are so transformed, millimeter by millimeter if need be, then we know the work of the Spirit and the revelation of God-In-The-Flesh, aka Incarnation.

The weeks of Advent present promises of God for our reflection and celebration. Imagine God viewing humanity and hearing cries for help. God says: "You want a messiah to rescue you? What if I become one of you and give you an irreversible participation in my God nature, my divinity? What will you do? How will you live?" God knows our needs and our helplessness, so Jesus, God's Son, "appears"—is revealed—in many and varied ways that we celebrate liturgically throughout the Christmas season. The Nativity of the Lord; Holy Family; Mary, the Mother of God; Epiphany of the Lord; and the Baptism of the Lord, which ends Christmas season.

Every celebration in liturgy during the Christmas season is a "marvelous exchange" between divinity and humanity.

### The Nativity of the Lord

Mass at midnight reveals God as a baby born to a virgin. In liturgy we do not adore a baby; we worship the eternal God whose Son grew up, worked, died and rose from the dead. He comes to us now in sacrament, which is *anamnesis*, "remembering" history in such a way as to experience God present *now* as God is *now*.

When John assures us that "the Word became flesh," he immediately adds "and dwelt among us." Likewise, "we have seen his glory" goes far beyond infancy. Here we remember the words of Saint Irenaeus: "The glory of God is humanity fully alive." Divinity and humanity are inextricably united. For me, the most astounding thing about Christmas is that God exceeded the highest expectation of humanity's thirsting and longing for a Messiah.

### Holy Family

Shortly after Christmas the liturgy reveals the Holy Family. God is Emmanuel, "with us" as a member of a family with parents, relatives, friends and neighbors. God is with us as one





who grows and learns, scares his parents, impresses teachers, and learns obedience and devotion. He matures, just as we need to mature.

### **Mary, the Mother of God**

The solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, reveals a young woman who experienced pregnancy and childbirth with the sounds and smells, joy, wonder, and waiting that all moms know. There's nothing magical here, no gushy sentimentality, only gritty humanity, just the way God intended it and just the way God became human. Along with Mary and Jesus, we celebrate history and mystery with integrity and joy. First, we are led into recollection and recognition of their human historical experience of birthing, which we, of course, share. We proceed through the *anamnesis* of the mystery into communion with Mother Mary and her Son Jesus presently in glory *and* in our assembly.

### **Epiphany of the Lord**

On the solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord we celebrate the revelation of God present as a baby, but we worship the God who flings open the doors of the kingdom to all who want to enter. This is a day of light and love, a celebration of unimaginable possibilities. Our remembering—*anamnesis*—goes back to the birthplace and the welcoming of outsiders, already under the shadow of dangerous opposition from Herod's fierce fear. While we recognize and reconcile how myrrh (death and burial) fits with gold and incense (the beauties of life), we rejoice and hope because the Light has come and is with us.

### **Baptism of the Lord**

On the final day of the Christmas season, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord reveals Jesus as Son, anointed by the Spirit for mission. Baptism by John in the Jordan plunges Jesus

deeply into the human condition of sin's consequences: "For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). God sent Jesus to be kingdom maker, reconciler, savior, and healer. His ministry unfolds as we proceed from the Christmas season through Ordinary Time.

### **Liturgy and Life**

No matter how beautiful our environment, how celestial our singing, how stirring our proclamation, how brilliant our preaching, how "reverent" our prayer, how active our participation—our liturgical celebration will amount to nothing more than "a show" unless we are aware before, during, and after the liturgy that who we are and what we are doing is bigger than all of us. There is someone greater than Solomon here, someone deserving our attention and allegiance.

"The Word of God was made man that we might be made God," says Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*. Irenaeus said, "Jesus Christ . . . became what we are in order to make us what he is in himself," *Adversus haereses*. Continuing in the rich patristic tradition, Augustine, *De Trinitate*, says, "By being made partaker of our mortality, God made us partakers of his divinity." Also, "God was made man, that man might be made God," *Sermon 13*. Early Christian theologians and pastors used strong language as they wished to convey to believers the *admirabile commercium* (marvelous exchange) between God and humankind. It would be wonderful if we could hear more of this from contemporary preachers, as in the Eastern Church. What Christ is by nature (divine), we are by grace (divinized).  
OMG!



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THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED

NEWSLETTER OF THE OBLATES OF SAINT BENEDICT: *published three times annually (February, June, October).*

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### Mark Your Calendar — 2018-2019

**November 18, 2018: Fall Day of Reflection**

**March 17, 2019: Lenten Day of Reflection**

**July 19-21, 2019: Annual Oblate Retreat**

**Regional Chapter Meetings:** Collegeville, Red River Valley (Fargo), Joan of Arc (Minneapolis)

See website for details:

[saintjohnsabbey.org/monastic-life/oblates/reg/](http://saintjohnsabbey.org/monastic-life/oblates/reg/)



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**Contact Oblate Office:** 320.363.2018 (or 363-3022) [oblates@csbsju.edu](mailto:oblates@csbsju.edu) **Website:** [saintjohnsabbey.org/monastic-life/oblates/](http://saintjohnsabbey.org/monastic-life/oblates/)