

# January 2008 Newsletter

## S. CLEMENT'S CHURCH

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The Rev'd Richard Wall, *Curate*

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Peter Richard Conte, Organist & Choirmaster

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## From the Rector

My dear People,

The last year at S Clement's has been one of steady growth in all sorts of ways. The one that pleases me most is our outreach to various groups who do not actually worship with us.

The first of these is the large number of people who view our web site. Our webmaster tells me that we have hundreds of unique visits every day, and certainly I hear from a large number of people from all over the world who enjoy our site, for the music, the liturgy and the photographs. Many are helped forward on their Christian pilgrimage by what the site contains, they tell me, and quite a few send donations and join the Friends of S Clement's so that they can share in some of our work.

Part of that work is outreach to people in our city who are needy. I would like to thank all those who this Christmas bought gifts of pajamas, bed linens, slippers, etc. for the elderly and housebound. They were given to the Episcopal Community Services office and taken to those in need. Thanks also to Curt Mangel who organized a visit for twenty children from the S Barnabas Shelter to the Christmas show in Macy's and to their Dickens' Village. At the end of this visit, Curt asked me to give out to each of the children huge soft toys; they were clearly delighted with them. Thanks to all of you who bring quantities of non-perishable food items during each month, and then to those who deliver this food to S Mary's kitchen in Bainbridge Street. Every evening at Shrine Prayers we pray for "a greater devotion to S Mary, and for a wider practice of her invocation." Well, I can't think of a better way of showing our devotion to the mother of him who for our sakes

became poor than to take part in this outreach to the poor and needy of our city.

Another sign of growth is the number of people from outside our regular community who are coming to High Mass on great feast days of the Church. For example, on the Assumption, the congregation this year was almost double the size of last year's. (If it doubles again, we won't have enough seats!) Much of this can be attributed to the publicity and reminders that are given on our web site, but there is also a growing number of people who find in S Clement's a place to celebrate some of the Feasts and Festivals which are being neglected in other parts of the Church.

All I hope for the year ahead is that we shall continue to be faithful to the heritage we have received, and also that we will be willing to expand that heritage and share it with all who come through our doors. The year 2009 will be the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Mass being offered in S Clement's, and Vestry and I are thinking of several ways of celebrating this milestone. These include special preachers, a new Mass Book and an up-to-date history of the Parish; if you have any other ideas about how to mark what is technically called our "Sesquicentennial Year" I would very much like to hear them. And no—we cannot replace the spire or choir gallery, unless your kind suggestion is accompanied by the appropriate check!

God bless you all in the coming year. May it be a time of spiritual growth for all of us.

Affectionately, your Rector,

# Kalendar

January 2008 – *The Holy Name.*

- 1 Tu **Circumcision of Our Lord.** [Parish]
- 2 W **Most Holy Name of Jesus.** *Octave day of S Stephen, First M.* [For guidance in the New Year]
- 3 Th Octave Day of S John, Ap. [S. John's, Norristown]
- 4 F Octave Day of Ss Innocents, Mm. *Abs.* [Children threatened by violence or vice]
- 5 Sa Vigil of the Epiphany. *S. Telesphorus, P.M.* [Preparation for the Epiphany]
- 6 Su **Epiphany of Our Lord.** [Parish]
- 7 M Of the Octave. [Thanksgiving for graces of the Christmas Season]
- 8 Tu Of the Octave [Guild of All Souls]
- 9 W Of the Octave. [Christian families]
- 10 Th Of the Octave. [The Society of Mary]
- 11 F Of the Octave. *S Hyginus, P.M. Abs.* [The Living Rosary of Our Lady & S Dominic]
- 12 Sa Holy Family. *Epiphany I* Of the Octave. [All Saints Sisters of the Poor]
- 13 Su **Octave Day of the Epiphany.** [Parish]
- 14 M S Kentigern, BC. *S Hilary, BCD.* S Felix, Priest, M. [The Church in Scotland]
- 15 Tu S Paul the First Hermit, C. *S Maurus, Ab.* [Pauline Hermits at Doylestown]
- 16 W S Marcellus I, PM. *Monthly Requiem.* [January Chantry List]
- 17 Th S Antony, Ab. [Br Steven & the Community of the Resurrection]
- 18 F Chair of S Peter, Ap at Rome. *S Prisca, VM. Abs.* [Pope Benedict XVI & The Roman Church]
- 19 Sa Anticipated Mass of Epiphany II. *S Elizabeth Seton, V.* Ss Marius & His Companions, Mm. [Rowan, Archbishop of Canterbury & the Anglican Communion]
- 20 Su **Septuagesima.** *Ss Fabian, P & Sebastian, Mm.* [Parish]
- 21 M S Agnes, VM. [Church of the Ascension & S Agnes, Washington]
- 22 Tu Ss Vincent & Anastasius, Mm. [Acolytes of our Parish]
- 23 W S Raymond of Penafort, C. *S Emerentiana, VM.* [More frequent use of the Sacrament of Penance]
- 24 Th S Timothy, BM. [S. Timothy's, Roxborough]
- 25 F Conversion of S Paul, Ap. *Abs.* [Catholic Reunion]
- 26 Sa S Polycarp, BM. [The Church in Turkey]
- 27 Su **Sexagesima.** *S John Chrysostom, BCD.* [Parish]
- 28 M S Peter Nolasco, C. *S Agnes, VM.* [Christian suffering in Moslem lands]
- 29 Tu S Francis de Sales, BCD. [Those who teach and learn the Faith]
- 30 W S Martina, VM. *King Charles the Martyr.* [Christian kings & rulers]
- 31 Th S John Bosco, C. [The Bishop & Diocese of Pennsylvania]

## Agenda:

- 1 January      **Circumcision of Our Lord**, *a Holy Day of Obligation*. High Mass, 11.00 a.m.
- 5 January      **Vigil of the Epiphany**. Low Mass with Blessing of Epiphany Water, 10.00 a.m.
- 6 January      **Epiphany of Our Lord**. Regular Sunday schedule. Procession with Blessing of Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh and Chalk & High Mass, 11.00 a.m.
- 22 January     Monthly meeting of Vestry, 7.00 p.m. [Anchor Room]
- 2 February     **Candlemas**. Candlemas Ceremonies with Blessing of Candles, Procession & High Mass, 11.00 a.m.

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### Music for the Month – January 2008

6<sup>th</sup> January, Epiphany of Our Lord:

Ordinary: *George Malcolm*, Missa ad Præsepe

Motet: *Orlandus Lassus*, Omnes de Saba

Organ: *Maurice Duruflé*, Prelude on the Introit for the Epiphany

*Duruflé*, Fugue on the Hour Chime at Soissons Cathedral

13<sup>th</sup> January, Octave Day of the Epiphany:

Ordinary: *Josef Rheinberger*, Missa Brevis in F

Motet: *Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina*, Surge, illuminare, Jerusalem

Organ: *Rheinberger*, Cantilena

*Rheinberger*, Poco agitato (Sonata XI)

20<sup>th</sup> January, Septuagesima:

Ordinary: *Francisco Guerrero*, Missa ‘Simile est regnum cœlorum’

Motet: *Guerrero*, Simile est regnum cœlorum

Organ: *Sigfried Karg-Elert*, Pastel No. 3

*Zoltan Kodaly*, Epigram No. 5

27<sup>th</sup> January, Sexagesima:

Ordinary: *Johannes Brahms*, Missa Canonica

Motet: *Brahms*, Lass dich nur nichts nicht dauren

Organ: *Brahms*, Fugue in a-flat minor

*Brahms*, Prelude in g minor

## Some Principles & Practices of the Spiritual Life

*by Basil W. Maturin, Mission Priest of the Society of S John the Evangelist, Oxford*

### V. Self-oblation

THERE are many things that belong to man's life on earth in his fallen state that will cease with his earthly condition. Much of his life and thought is necessarily taken up with such things. It is a strange contrast that is presented by the seriousness of life as we are taught it in Holy Scripture and the multitude of trifles and superficial things that fill up the days of so many of us, yet no doubt all these things have their value in the discipline of character.

And there are many virtues that can only be developed under the present conditions of life, such as faith, contrition, patience, though these virtues, rooted deeply in our nature, will bear their perfect fruits in eternity. What the effect of an ever-deepening penitence on earth will be when the soul has been cleansed from every consequence of sin and sees God face to face through eternity, we cannot tell; or what the result of the discipline of a life of faith when faith is lost in vision, we cannot tell; or what place an enduring patience that has been fought for so bravely here can have in the soul that can never again be thwarted or tried, we do not know; though we can readily see that one trained in such a school, when he passes upward out of the present condition of things, bears within him a certain tone of character that can develop, under other circumstances, into other types of perfection of which these may be but the seeds and roots, just as there seems but little connection between the lessons and discipline of the schoolroom and the developed powers of some great statesman or artist.

It may perhaps be that all those virtues that especially belong to our condition here on earth

will develop into the one perfect and many-sided grace of love, a love that has been tested in every conceivable way, and comes forth from the fires purified and unchangeable.

But there are some ruling principles of the Christian life whose continuity we can see more clearly; there are virtues and practices begun here that are to be continued through eternity. Worship, praise, adoration, the love of and submission to the Will of God—these, and many other such habits, are to be exercised for ever. Here, indeed, they are to be learnt under circumstances that form our probation; there they are to be our joy. But there is an orderly growth and development in these graces; the soul that struggles with itself against all that would lead it away, to cling to and obey the Will of God, will find its eternal joy in living beneath the perfect rule of that Will; all that is counter to it will have passed away, and it will know that to serve Him is to reign. So again the efforts after worship and praise amidst all the distractions and temptations of life, prompted and supported by faith, will be crowned by the glorious worship of heaven in the full vision of God. Habits are being formed here under the pressure of temptation and difficulty that unfold in perfect form and beauty when the soul that has developed these habits passes into its true home. Those very temptations which made it so difficult to persevere were really the means of developing these powers. The spirit of prayer and worship grew on; hampered and oppressed by the distractions of life, it fought its way in spite of them and thus gained strength; then, when all these were removed, it opened out unhindered in its perfect growth. Now there is one fundamental principle of the spiritual

life that has to be learnt and practised here, mostly with suffering, often with the very keenest suffering, sometimes even involving the sacrifice of life itself; and yet suffering, though so closely associated with it that it almost seems a necessary part of it, is indeed only accidental, and one day will altogether cease, while the grace that has been fought for and developed in so much agony will live on for ever, and be the delight of the soul through eternity. I mean the principle of sacrifice and self-oblation.

In the worship described in the vision in the Apocalypse the four-and-twenty elders fall down before Him that sat upon the throne and worship Him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne. They lay their crowns, the symbol of their attainments, at the Feet of Him that sitteth upon the throne; and while these glorified saints are thus offering themselves in delighted homage in heaven amidst surroundings that tell of perfect joy and peace, some poor struggling Christian upon earth has broken away with tears and an aching heart from what he loves most that he may do more thoroughly what he believes to be the Will of God. The principle that moves both is the same—sacrifice and self-oblation; only here the will is being purified and cleansed, loosening itself with pain from the creatures to which it clings inordinately, that in faith, and often with little sensible love, it may give itself to God. There, in that picture in heaven, we see the result; there is no more need of struggle or effort, the will is free, bound for ever into the Will of God, and it is the joy of the soul for eternity to cast itself and all it possesses at the Feet of its Creator.

Suffering, in our present state, is indeed an integral part of the life of sacrifice, so much so that we scarcely think of sacrifice as apart from suffering; but it is good for us, when we are called upon to make the most painful sacrifice, to remember that there is no necessary connection between the two

ideas. Originally there certainly was none; when Adam stood in Eden, clad in the garment of original righteousness, and cast himself in worship before God, it was his supremest joy to offer himself; there was no obstacle between him and God to hold him back, no barrier obstructing the will through which it had to force its way. And certainly the hosts of angels know no life apart from God, and have no will save His; yet their life of heavenly joy and peace, into which no pain or discord has ever entered, is a life of sacrifice. So far as we know, there is but one spot in creation where there is any association between suffering and sacrifice, or where there is associated with obeying the Will of God any idea of difficulty or pain, and that is here on earth. For here sin has entered and set up barriers between man and God; but we look backward and forward, and we see that originally it was not so, and hereafter it shall not be so. Such a condition belongs only to our present state; here we must fight our way in spite of all the obstacles that seek to hold us back from doing God's Will, knowing that whatever it cost us, it is our only true life, and that the struggle and the pain are the conditions of our regaining our true relationship to Him and for ever rejoicing in His Will.

We may look up, then, when conscience calls us to make some great and painful sacrifice and say, the pain only belongs to my present state; countless multitudes of my fellow-creatures find such acts of sacrifice their greatest joy, the pain will soon cease, for the will will soon know that its completest life is in following the Will of God; meanwhile every struggle and painful choice for God helps to restore the balance which sin has destroyed, turning the will away from the Creator to the creature.

It is, then, in following the Will of God, in spite of all difficulties that may arise both from within and from without, in the constant offering of ourselves to God as the creatures of His hand to do and to be

what He would have us, in the surrender of one thing after another that comes between us and Him and holds us back; it is in such acts that we unite ourselves with those glorious beings who cast their crowns before the throne, and with those unfallen creatures who have never known what it is to have a wish or thought apart from the Will of God. Amongst those glorified saints there are, indeed, many whose wills were for a long time in revolt against God's Will, and who brought themselves at last into subjection, many to whom the Will of God here on earth meant the sacrifice of everything the heart most loved, many to whom it meant the sacrifice of life itself. But all that is past and over, and its fruits alone remain the eternal life of oblation and union with God, where one Will rules those countless multitudes and binds them together and to God, where each one of those countless millions lives his own complete and perfect life yet never jars on any other, where each is perfect in itself and all together compose one perfect whole the Body of Christ. This is the outcome of that life of sacrifice and discipline on earth; it is for this that the will has to be so constantly broken in, and that God demands of us what costs so much, every act of painful sacrifice helping to cleanse the will of its obstinacy, selfishness, adherence to the creatures, until, brought completely under the control of God, the soul is ready to take its place in the glorified Body.

Or, to put it in another way, man was created under the law of sacrifice. It is the fundamental law of the creature's life to surrender himself wholly to his Creator's Will. In fulfilling this law he found his own perfection and his own completest happiness. Then came the fall, when man fell from his life of union with God, and chose the creature rather than the Creator, and thus gave the creatures a power over him which they had not originally, and raised up barriers between him and God. But still the law of his life remained; his truest happiness and his only perfection consisted in living the life of self-oblation. But

now all kinds of difficulties beset his path if he would live this life; much of his time had to be taken up, if he would live, in things that only concerned the present, and seemed to have no relation to God or the future; the penalty inflicted upon him at his expulsion from Eden, "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread," bound together the preservation of his life with labour. If he would not work he could not eat; and what connection could there be between such labour and the worship of God? Its tendency was, as we know too well, to drag him down and make him less spiritual. The life of toil does drag down and weary the mind, and it is hard for the labourer to realise as he goes forth day after day to his work and to his labour till the evening, that this nature, which seems to fit itself so aptly to the life of the beast of burden, was made for worship and for God. Yet, however worn out and wearied with toil, however clouded the mind may be with care and too tired to think, the law of man's life still remains unchanged; his only true happiness and perfection is to be found in the life of sacrifice.

But not only did this law of labour make it difficult for him to live the life of worship and oblation; there were other difficulties which beset his path at every step. Opposition coming from others, sometimes inspired by hate, sometimes by the love of those who would hold him back by their tenderness from doing what seemed so hard, often conflicting claims of duty when the rights of others seemed to stand in the way of fulfilling what appeared to be the Will of God, and those countless trials which clip the wings that would soar upward and drag the soul down to earth, the irritations and sorenesses that spring from the thoughtlessness of others, the lack of sympathy that makes life so chill, the miserable mistakes by which the most ill-assorted lives are bound together, bringing in their train a multitude of temptations which rob the soul of any power to rise to God, the irresponsiveness of those we would help, and the countless worries and

vexations which cloud the atmosphere and drive the soul steadily downward to earth. Certainly many who recognise the law of self-oblation have found it so difficult to fulfill that they have given it up as hopeless.

And then our Lord came, the second Adam, into a world that was disordered by the sin of the first Adam, to show us how to live on earth amidst all these altered conditions true to the primary law of the creature's life. He did not exempt Himself from any of the conditions under which man has to live; He came to show us how it was possible to live amidst all these difficulties the perfect life of sacrifice.

He came down from the midst of the perfect worship of heaven, assumed our nature and lived in it from His birth to His death, in absolute obedience to the great vow of the incarnation, Lo, I come to do Thy Will, O my God. Such was the motto of His life, and He carried it out perfectly and without swerving, though every obstacle that man or devil could devise was thrown in His way. But those very efforts to hinder Him were made the means by which the Will of God was worked out. There was, indeed, but one place where any real obstacle could be raised, and that was in the will of Him who came to offer Himself; unless that failed, nothing else could really hinder Him.

We watch Him, then, entering into the life we know so well, and passing through those troubles and temptations which have held so many down; and we see Him press on, though obstacle after obstacle was thrown across His path, but still He never swerves. Sometimes He has to wait, sometimes to hold back, sometimes to retire, but never for a moment does He swerve, and rarely if ever does God intervene in the natural order of events to help Him. No; He must live as we live, under the same conditions, not a life surrounded or protected by miracles. Men are free: they may listen to or scorn Him, they may try to make Him a

king or kill Him; God leaves the world and leaves His Son, as He leaves us, to fight His way through it, and to answer by His life, not merely by His words, how in such a world man can live true to the law of the creature's life.

At times the difficulties were so great that it seemed as if it would prove impossible to carry out His purpose. Misunderstanding, misrepresentation, unfaithful friends, treachery, deliberate injustice, envy, organised opposition, the slowness of perception of His own most faithful followers, the narrow prejudice of His hearers. On all sides difficulties sprang up, apparently making it impossible for Him to carry out the work He came on earth to do, till finally He was arrested and brought to trial and condemned to death. But meanwhile, within His most holy Soul, His human Will was ever pressing through all these difficulties upwards towards God. His Will pierced through these things that were meant to hinder Him, and they all formed so many elements in His life of sacrifice. Can anything hinder Him? No; for the very obstacles are transformed. They were meant by Satan to block the pathway of the will Godward; but that strong loving Will forced its way through them and rose, and the effort and struggle enhanced the value of the offering.

See Him at last as He hangs upon the Cross the one great sacrifice of the world, that sacrifice which we constantly plead upon our altars, the central act of our worship. This it was that was forefigured in the gorgeous ritual of the Temple; it is upon this that we alone rest our hopes, through it alone that we can ever approach God or offer an acceptable prayer. Yet did it look like a great act of worship? No; it looked to all appearances but a terrible scene of cruelty and crime. And so it was; everything that the eye could see or the ear could hear was low, degraded. Was it amidst such scenes, such sounds, that God could be worshipped? It seems a degradation that any noble life should be exposed to such scenes of shame,

yet even there, amidst that vile base mob, the offscourings of the slums of Jerusalem, amidst jeers and blasphemies, the most sublime act of worship and sacrifice ascended before God that had ever been offered on this earth. Nay, more, those very things that crowd around the cross of shame, the words, the deeds, the acts of cruelty, they form, so to speak, the instruments for the offering of this divine liturgy. Rising up through all, transforming, hallowing all, was the pure Will of Him who hung upon the cross, accepting, offering all to God, and using the sins of men and the pain and humiliation which their sins brought upon Him, as elements by which the value of His offering was enhanced.

Yes, by stooping so low, by permitting Himself to be the victim of all that hatred and envy, He shows us that there are no circumstances so low, no trials so humiliating, that they cannot be transformed by the will that rises through them and offers them to God.

This, then, is the lesson of our Lord's Life and Passion. All difficulties, all sufferings, all obstacles that cross our path to hinder us from offering ourselves to God, all these are to be looked upon as the instruments of our sacrifice: we are to use them, to rise through them. The will forcing its way through such opposition makes the sacrifice more costly.

In the sacrifice of our Lord there were things both great and small, the teasing thorns and the cruel nails, the jarring voices of the ignorant mob, and the cold-blooded villainy of Caiaphas. So it is with

us, things great and small take their part in consummating our sacrifice: the irritations arising from those we live with who do not understand us or who are not congenial, the cutting word that wounds our pride, the weariness and monotony of life's routine, the drag of our earthly nature that will not rise, the uninteresting, unexciting, commonplace duties, ill health all these things and a thousand more that torment us day by day and seem sometimes to take all power of resistance from us; and the greater trials, strong temptations, bitter disappointments, failures, sorrow, bodily pain, loss of friends, all these tend to keep the will down or to rouse it to revolt; but as we struggle through them, making acts of oblation and acceptance, clinging, while the lower nature cries out in pain, still clinging to God and offering them up, then we are following the lesson of our Lord's life, using life's difficulties as the instruments of our sacrifice. Every time we offer up the Holy Sacrifice we offer it with deeper meaning, and bring its lessons into our daily life, we learn to live the life of sacrifice. It was the genius of sanctity which transformed that which had been the symbol of shame into the symbol of all that is noblest, holiest, highest, and we in our measure and degree as we draw closer to Him can transform the lowest, poorest, most humbling of our troubles by the way we bear it, seeing in every trial a part of our cross, an instrument of our Passion, and looking on to that eternal life beyond, where countless myriads live the life of perfect oblation, and cast their crowns before the throne with the joy and peace that has been gained through the cross and sufferings of earth.

## A Catholic Alphabet

### V is for Veil

The first veil we hear of in the Gospels is the Veil of the Temple which was torn apart (“rent asunder”) when Jesus died on the Cross. This veil separated the ordinary people from the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and into which the High Priest alone could enter, and even he only once a year. The sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross caused this veil to be ripped open, thus signifying that the way into the presence of God was now open to all. By the union between God and man (“the Atonement”) effected by Jesus Christ, we all now have direct access to God in prayer and sacrament.

The second veil is the veil that covers some tabernacles, such as the one on our S. John’s Chapel altar. This veil is simply to adorn the tabernacle, and it is opened constantly to bring out the Body of Christ for his faithful people. It honours the presence of God rather than concealing it.

And the third veil is also a veil of honour. It is the veil that is placed on the shoulders of the sub-deacon at the offertory at High Mass. In this veil he holds the paten, or plate, on which the Holy Sacrament will lie until it is distributed to the people. In the early Church of the city of Rome, the Pope would consecrate enough bread to send a small piece out to all the churches of the city. The sub-deacon used to hold it under the humeral veil until it could be mingled with the newly-consecrated bread, so symbolizing the unity of all the city’s churches with their Bishop.

### W is for White

White is the chief liturgical colour of the Church. It is the colour of vestments and hangings in church on the great feasts of Our Lord and Our Lady—Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension, Assumption, etc. Of course the white is often highly embroidered and embellished and often is more gold than white, but all this is still liturgically called white.

The other liturgical colours are red for feasts of Apostles and Martyrs, symbolizing the blood they shed for Christ. It is also the colour of Pentecost, the feast of the Holy Ghost, which recalls the fiery tongues which came on the apostles when the Spirit descended on them. Purple is used for the seasons of penitence and preparation before Christmas and Easter—Advent and Lent. Green is for summer Sundays, being the colour of growth in nature. Black is used on Good Friday and for Requiem Masses for the dead. A delightful custom has grown up of having a little rest from the purple on the middle Sundays of Advent and Lent by using pink or rose-coloured vestments on those days.

### X is the shape of S. Andrew’s Cross (well, you must admit there wasn’t much choice!)

S. Andrew is shown in the earliest icons being crucified on an X-shaped cross. The reason why the Scottish flag is a S. Andrew’s cross in white on a blue background is because in the ninth century a Scottish army was about to do battle with one from England in what is now the Border Country of Scotland. The night before the battle, S. Andrew appeared in a dream to Angus, King of Scots, and assured him of victory the next day. When dawn broke, the Scots saw in the sky clouds in the shape of S. Andrew’s cross, the Saltire, against the blue sky and under his protection cheerfully beat the English army.

Relics of S. Andrew were brought to Scotland that same century, and the primatial see of the country was established in the town now called S Andrews. They were of course destroyed at the Reformation, but

others have been brought to Edinburgh where they are enshrined in S. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral (the primatial see is now called "St Andrew's and Edinburgh").

### **Poem for Balthazar**

The slow earth turns, peels back the skin of day,  
Spills forth the dark, unfolds the map of heaven,  
Hangs out the moon and lights the stars,  
Those waymarks of the night, that glisten myriad as the drops  
Shed by a net, cast at a venture over sunlit Galilee.  
It is the travellers' time in desert lands, their map the sky,  
Trusted, complicit, known,  
Familiar as the back of a man's hand.  
And here they come, the travelers, robes close drawn  
Against the winter cold, the Bactrians stepping high and proud.  
No merchants these, but kings from distant lands,  
Come from the East, the cradle of the world,  
Seeking a special star, fresh in the firmament but long foretold,  
Portending great events;  
Their journey now near ended,  
Saddlebags laden with costly gifts,  
Gold, frankincense, and myrrh.  
Strange gifts for a babe laid in a manger.  
What did she make of it, the girl leaning over him?  
Wondered? Remembered the angel?  
Put all safe by to ponder in her heart?  
For the moment, the child was enough.  
Gold was for kingship, would pay for a schooling,  
Frankincense a thank-offering in the Temple.  
But myrrh? What of the myrrh?  
Myrrh carried a darker meaning, myrrh was for death.  
Did they have it with them, the two Maries,  
That morning a lifetime later at the empty tomb?  
Did she think back and weep  
For a time the child was hers alone?  
I think she did.

*Ray Bradfield*