

Love Came Down at Christmas



Love came down at Christmas — love all lovely, love divine ... These are words from a simple little carol, a poem by Christina Rossetti. Tradition designates the candle of the 4th Sunday in Advent the Love candle (after Hope, Peace and Joy). As we wait a few days more to celebrate God's incarnation, we pause to dwell in the love present in this season. Which is timely, as families travel to be together, last gifts are

purchased and wrapped, and finishing touches are put on the

liturgies and decorations of our church Christmas celebrations. Love is evident, love in action this time of year.

So it's lovely that our garden was planted just this week; it's lovely that we glory in beautiful art and architecture; it's lovely that we dote on our children, sing glorious music and take care of those who need help. Love is lived out in intention and activity, shown by how we treat one another. Christmas is sacramental in that way: a chance to highlight love and its power, love that pervades our lives every day of the year. *Love shall be our token, love be yours and love be mine.* Merry Christmas, beloved! — *Mother Kate*

A Merry Christmas Season of Renewal



Notre-Dame Reopens

Our Paris correspondent Shauna Hankoff revisits the landmark and sends photos. See Page 2.

The Elevator Rises

On May 12, Bishop Matthew Heyd blessed the renovations enabled by the generosity of parishioners to Doors Wide Open.

Last month the elevator made a quiet, practical debut. The Saturday Kitchen re-routed the food delivery system so that the heavy grab-and-go bags could travel down by elevator to the new outside east pathway to the guests. Before, runners carried the bags down the Parish House's steep steps.

For some mobility-challenged visitors, the elevator provides the first access to, say, the recital hall. Many community groups couldn't use the Parish House unless it was accessible.



The elevator is multipurpose. "There's enough space to accommodate a piano," John Avery points out.

For all the possibilities that the elevator presents, in action it seems unassuming and familiar. Workers, tenants, volunteers, clergy,

singers and visitors use it as if it had always been there.

Genesis 28:12: "When (Jacob) reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ..."



Michael Lehmann trucks Christmas pageant costumes to the second floor.

The East Garden Replants

Spring is already underway in the revitalized east garden, with its brand-new planting bed by the east walkway — all the result of the generosity of parishioners to Doors Wide Open. Parishioners and the entire community benefit from the oasis.

Denisha Williams, a landscape architect who has been involved in DWO planning (and now planting), worked closely with Walter Cain and Lauren Attinello to envision the garden. (For decades, Lauren and her husband Dan Schneider have volunteered as our gardeners.)

The garden is a St. Michael's family affair. Denisha, a principal at Being Here Landscape Architecture, and her colleague

Patrick Weisel, who happens to be Betty Mosedale's son-in-law, collaborated with Lauren and Dan on the design.



Bring on spring: A garden plan draft hints at the variety of plantings and how the garden orchestrates and celebrates them.

"We're trying to echo the west side of the garden while blending beloved older species with new ones," Denisha says. "We designed for four seasons, with a succession of blooms putting on a show throughout the growing season, starting with snowdrops, then daffodils. Later come azaleas, lilacs, hydrangeas, peonies, small rhododendrons and quince, among others."

The team long debated the ideal tree: an Okame cherry, to stand just off-center.

"This garden is a wordless reminder of God's glory for all our neighbors," Denisha says.



An Emotional Return to Notre-Dame



It was overwhelming to experience the reopened Notre-Dame after living through these past five years when it was so wounded, right there in the center of Paris. I was walking around in tears.

We all feel grateful to the artisans and the armies of people doing intricate work to restore the cathedral.

The outpouring of passion and support reflected the French sense of history, what they call their “patrimoine.”

I thought back to a hike in the countryside I had taken years ago with a French friend. We ended up walking through a forest where all the trees were straight and tall and old.

I told him I had never seen a forest like this and he said, “This is our ‘patrimoine,’ our patrimony. The trees are planted this way so they’re available if needed to reconstruct old buildings.”

Such beams replaced the latticework of oak beams that supported Notre-Dame’s leaden roof — they call it “la forêt,” the forest.

For years I’ve walked a section of the Camino de Santiago. You come upon a church on the trail there and go inside and recognize how old it is.

In such places you feel a presence. You experience the continuity of the human spiritual journey. That’s partly what motivated the renewal of the cathedral. — *Shauna Hankoff*



Shauna Hankoff has lived in Paris for six years since her retirement. She’s mother to sons Damon and Alex.

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine is currently staging *The Cathedral of Notre-Dame: an Augmented Exhibition* through Jan. 31, 2025



Photos by Shauna Hankoff

The Day Before the Good News

On Saturday, Dec. 14, angels we have heard on high at the dress rehearsal for the Sunday performance of a pageant whose script derives from a 4th-century Christmas liturgy of St. Gregory of Nyssa. Then as now, somebody organizes. Adults here from left to right: Sherri Sandfort- Sémon, costumes; Emily Smith, director; Laura Inman, music director; and Mary Ellen Lehmann, director of children, youth and family ministries. Offstage: John Cantrell, organist and choirmaster.



St. Michael’s Christmases Past



THEN & NOW

During the 1920s and '30s, parishioner Blanche Yates created a memorable series of St. Michael’s Christmas cards in ink and watercolors. Blanche, the widow of surgeon and public-health physician David Yates, lived in the house they owned at 149 W. 81st St. — still standing — and maintained a boarding house. We don’t know what her artistic training was. Throughout the Depression, Blanche was a leader in St. Michael’s energetic Women’s Auxiliary. In the January 1933 Messenger, the Rev. Thomas McCandless, St. Michael’s sixth rector, wrote, “Our Christmas cards, thanks to Mrs. Yates’ artistry, were out in good season, so even those with a journey half-way around the world before them were sent off in ample time to arrive before Christmas. And, by all opinions, they were the nicest we’ve ever had.”

— *Jean Ballard Terepka*



A Nativity That Transcends Time and Place



The Nativity With the Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, on view through Jan. 26 in the exhibition *Siena: The Rise of Painting 1300-1350* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Altar panel from the National Gallery, Washington.

“For behold, unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”



Do you have a favorite Nativity? Maybe a creche from when you were a child or one that you’ve kept and put up each year? Or perhaps a painting?

One of the most memorable depictions of the Nativity that I know is currently on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the exhibition, “Siena: The Rise of Painting, 1300-1350.” You might like to take advantage of this unique opportunity to go see it. (The entire show presents an inspiring space for seasonal reflection.)

The artist is Duccio di Buoninsegna, 1250/1255-1318/1319. This Duccio Nativity is not large, but it formed part of an extraordinarily complex altarpiece, known as the Maestà, painted between 1308 and 1311 for the high altar of the Cathedral of Siena.

What, at least for me, makes this depiction of the Nativity so special is its singular beauty and the way it combines simultaneously multiple events and reflects multiple traditions and styles. It is timeless.

The place where Mary has lain down and given birth looks at first to be what we think of as the traditional stable with the ox and ass standing benignly behind the manger in which the newborn has been placed.

But look again: The stable is placed within a cave or grotto. The grotto is from a much older tradition and reflects the place in Bethlehem where pilgrims have venerated Christ’s birth since the earliest centuries. Around 330 C.E., Emperor

Constantine constructed a church over the site and today the compound includes three different monasteries: Catholic, Armenian Apostolic and Greek Orthodox.

Duccio has explored a timeless style that reflects his awareness of ancient Byzantine art but also looks ahead to the more palpably three-dimensional figures we associate with Western traditions beginning with Giotto. To those who first saw this picture, it must have looked both ancient and modern and thus all the more venerable.

I noted that several events seem to happen simultaneously. In the foreground we see two handmaidens who wash the newborn infant — a feature that has nothing to do with the gospels but that had captured the popular imagination in the first centuries of Christianity. After all, surely even the Virgin needed midwives!

In the lower right are two spindly-legged shepherds, their faithful dog and sheep. They simultaneously hear the good tidings from an angel and are about to turn to enjoy the vision of mother and child adored by a heavenly host of angels, their hands raised in a ritual gesture of praise and adoration.

This magical scene is flanked by two Old Testament prophets, Isaiah and Ezekiel, who hold scrolls foretelling the Savior’s birth. It all adds up to a portrayal that encourages a layered meditation, fixing itself in the mind as few others do and giving honor to the great miracle of Christmas.

— Keith Christiansen



Keith Christiansen is the retired curator of European paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Grotto in the Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem, where Jesus is thought to have been born.