During Advent we usually focus on remaining watchful, nourished by prayer, on the approaching Nativity of Christ. Advent is about anticipating the coming of Christ. As we wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior himself warns us again and again: “Be watchful! Be alert!” If we remain attentive, we can be certain that when the Lord comes, we will be ready for him.

In our Advent journey this year, we may also wish to consider the role of Mary, the Most Holy Virgin, in the birth of the One who, by his coming among us, brings the priceless gift of peace to all humanity on Christmas. By the Incarnation Mary truly became the Mother of God. At the Annunciation the Archangel Gabriel said to Mary: “Thou shalt conceive and bring forth a son, he shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Most High” (Luke 1:31). At the moment when the Blessed Virgin pronounced the assenting words, “Be it done to me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38), the Son of God was, through the supernatural activity of the Holy Ghost, conceived in Mary’s Womb.

Shortly after the Annunciation, Elizabeth, under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, confirmed this by saluting Mary as the Mother of God: “And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me” (Luke 1:43). Through His generation in the bosom of the heavenly Father, Christ is the true Son of God. By His generation in time from the Virgin Mary, He is the true Son of Mary. But in Christ there is only one, undivided divine Person, hence the Son of God and the Son of Mary are one and the same Person — Christ is God, and Mary is the Mother of God.

Mary is the greatest saint of the New Testament because no one else was so intimately associated with the Incarnation. She voluntarily conceived, gave birth to, and nourished Christ. Our Lord derived from her the very flesh and blood of His body. Because Christ, the source of all graces, came to us through Mary, she is called the Mediatrix of all graces. She prepared the Divine Victim for the immolation, and standing beneath the Cross offered Him for the salvation of mankind.

Mary was intimately associated with Our Lord in the acquisition of graces and is therefore invoked in the Church under the title Mediatrix of all grace. All the graces which flow from the redemption of Jesus Christ are granted to the human family through the motherly intercession of Mary. Jesus gave Mary as a spiritual mother to us all: “Son, behold your mother” (cf. Jn 19:26). For this reason, Vatican II refers to Mary as a “mother to us in the order of grace” (Lumen Gentium, n. 62) and several twentieth century popes have officially taught the doctrine of Mary as Mediatrix of all grace.

So as we go through the Advent season and approach Christmas this year, let us be thankful that Mary said yes to the Lord.

—Adapted from Catholic Bible Study-The Incarnation
When Monsignor O’Neill told us that he was taking a trip to China and Korea, some of you may have conjured up images of him standing at the DMZ jeering at the North Korean guards or protesting in Tiananmen Square. Either of those events could have gotten him into a lot of trouble, but he came back to us in one piece, none the worse for wear. He is armed with many fascinating stories and insights.

The primary reason for his trip to the Far East was to make a personal pilgrimage to the sites where his cousin, Bishop Thomas Quinlan, had served as a missionary in China and Korea. Ordained as a Columban Father in 1920, Fr. Quinlan originally went off to China with a pioneer band of Columban missionaries. After spending 13 rough and tough years in China, he was imprisoned and expelled and eventually was assigned to a new territory in Korea. The Japanese were overlords in Korea at the time and looked with suspicion on everything the missionaries did. After Pearl Harbor, Korea was annexed by Japan and Fr. Tom and the other Columbans were imprisoned and kept under house arrest for the duration of the war.

After the war, Korea was cut in two along the 38th parallel which ran right through Quinlan’s church. When the Communists invaded South Korea in 1950, Monsignor Quinlan, now prefect apostolic in Chunchon, decided to stay with his people. Three of the Columbans were murdered but Monsignor Quinlan and two others were forced to join 700 Americans and nearly 60 other civilians on the infamous death march to the Yalu River. While imprisoned, he was befriended by a prison guard who was secretly a Catholic. Monsignor Quinlan celebrated Mass in his cell from memory using crumbs of bread. The jailer gave him a ring in gratitude, which Monsignor O’Neill wears to this day.

Released after three years, Monsignor Quinlan went home to Ireland and received a hero’s welcome. That was when Monsignor O’Neill first met his cousin and it inspired him to consider the priesthood and missionary service. In 1955 Thomas Quinlan became a Bishop and returned to Korea as the vicar apostolic of Chunchon. After 46 years of service in the missions, he retired in 1966 as Bishop of Chunchon, leaving behind two flourishing dioceses with over 70,000 Catholics. Only a few primitive parishes had been there when he came. He died in 1970 and is buried in Chunchon.

Monsignor O’Neill’s itinerary took him first to Korea where he was met by his cousin Fr. Noel O’Neill. He runs a center for mentally handicapped children in Gwangju. The church is alive and well in Korea with all the churches full at the daily Masses. The Korean people are prosperous and believe they should go to church to thank the Lord for their good fortune. Vocations are also very strong in Korea. The regional seminary was full with over 200 seminarians, 70 of them studying to become priests for the local diocese. They have a sufficient number of all native priests and religious to serve the faithful.

While visiting his cousin, Fr. Noel, they spent a weekend in a Buddhist Monastery. They rose for morning prayer at 3:00 am and their time was spent in meditation and listening to lectures.
– all in Korean – which of course Monsignor O’Neill did not understand.

He also made the obligatory trip to the DMZ, not quite an hour’s drive from Seoul.

“The overwhelming feeling you experience when you are standing at the border is one of an eerie silence. I waved to the guards across the border and a jeep came driving towards us. I thought they were coming to get me but instead they were only coming to escort some diplomats across the border. So I went over to the barbed wire fence and stuck my hand through into North Korea. While at the border I noticed a flock of Siberian geese flying south for the winter. It occurred to me that birds have the freedom to fly over barriers while man is restricted by them.”

Upon his return to Seoul he visited his cousin Tom Quinlan’s grave in Chunchon on All Souls Day, November 2. Immediately after Mass in Chunchon Cathedral, many women who had attended the Mass went to the grave with Monsignor O’Neill and prayed with him. The Koreans have a great veneration for the dead.

Then it was off to China to see the sights. While in Beijing he visited Tiananmen Square, which is a massive space according to Monsignor O’Neill. “I thought St. Peter’s Square in Rome was big, but it’s a back yard compared to Tiananmen Square. And they have 4 or 5 large video screens all around the square which were playing scenes from their recent mass celebrations marking the 60th Anniversary of the Communist Party coming to power in China.” Although he had to pass through security to get into the main part of the square, Monsignor O’Neill was surprised you could go anywhere in China without an escort, which was different from what he had expected.

He continued on his way past the Forbidden City to see the Old Cathedral. Upon entering the cathedral he noticed a booklet lying on a table which proved to be the Stations of the Cross in Chinese. One of the docents came over to him and gave him some pamphlets. Once she realized that he was a priest, she went down on her knees, prostrated herself and kissed his hand. Then she called several other ladies over and he gave them his blessing.

An excursion to the Great Wall was a very interesting experience. Since the wall follows the contours of the ground it goes uphill in several places. This is why they refer to a visit as “climbing the wall”. Since it was snowing quite hard that day and the footing was treacherous, not much climbing took place.

“My overall impression about the people in both China and Korea is that they are quite friendly. In China, people who are trying to practice their English will try to help Westerners with directions. They may get frustrated if they can’t help out but will try to find someone who can. And in Korea it is not unusual to pass through a toll booth and be engaged by the toll collector in a prolonged conversation.”

Monsignor O’Neill reflected that when he applied to enter seminary it was to the Columban Seminary with a view to ministry in the Orient in the footsteps of his cousin Bishop Tom Quinlan. It was at this time that he heard the late Monsignor Daniel Bourke make an appeal for priests in the “missionary” Diocese of Savannah, and the rest is history. But in his heart he always wanted to at least make a visit to that distant land in the Orient where he believes his ministry would have been if he had not heard another voice calling him to the Diocese of Savannah.
The Ninth Annual Cathedral Heritage Ball was held on Saturday, November 21, 2009 at the Hilton Savannah DeSoto Hotel to benefit the Cathedral Endowment Fund, which is used to preserve the architectural soundness, integrity and beauty of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist as a symbol of our faith for future generations.

Bishop Boland expressed his gratitude to all the attendees whose presence was testimony to their support of our beautiful and historic church as well as to the committee members who worked so hard to bring this event to fruition.

Chairperson Mary Lawrence Kennickell was very appreciative of the outpouring of financial support to maintain this extraordinary Ecclesiastical Landmark. “Thank you for supporting the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist by attending tonight. Your presence will guarantee future generations the opportunity to visit Savannah’s most magnificent church.”

Honorary Chair, Frank Rizza also thanked all those who supported this event so that this historic treasure, symbol of our Faith and Catholic Heritage, will be preserved forever.

Over 300 attendees started arriving at 6:30 PM to begin bidding on the many silent auction items which included art, jewelry, wine, health & beauty packages, restaurant gift certificates and hotels stays, to name a few.

The highlight of the evening was the live auction. Spurred on by auctioneers Artie Pinckney and Joe Welch, spirited bidding on such items as a dinner at Bishop Boland’s house for 12 people and trips to Ireland, Tuscany, as well as a week in New York City, almost $20,000 was raised by the auction alone. “This year’s ball was a big success. We raised $94,000 versus about $60,000 last year,” according to Mary Lawrence.

Mark your calendars now for next year’s Ball which will be held on November 20, 2010.
The Twin Spires

Barbara Paolucci & Gay Stevens
Fr. Ferrim & Bebe Rose
Fr. Gerry Schreck & Patty Schreck
Mary & Frank Finocchiaro
Carol & Bob Letcher, Loretto Lominack
Barbara Paolucci & Gay Stevens
Larry & Mary Downs
Jack & Gretchen Reese
Fred & Becky Hester
Br. Robert, Sharon O’Neill, Sr. John
Cathedral Gartland Award Recipients

Judy Roddy and Charles Ganem were among this year's recipients of the Gartland Award. The Bishop Gartland Service Awards are presented each year by Bishop Boland on the Feast of Christ the King at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist to individuals who have performed outstanding service to the Church community over a period of years, in the tradition of our first Bishop, Francis X. Gartland. We congratulate Judy and Charlie on this well deserved award and thank them for their many years of volunteer service to the Cathedral.

Cathedral Holy Hour for Priests

On the First Friday of each month for the remainder of the Year for Priests (through June 2010), there will be a Holy Hour celebrated from 5–6 PM in Our Lady’s Chapel (the Lower Chapel).

Bishop Boland suggested that each parish do this throughout the Year for Priests for one special intention: a growth in holiness of all the priests of the Diocese of Savannah.

Father Daniel Firmin will expose the Eucharist for adoration and lead the group in prayer. The dates for the Holy Hours will be December 4, January 8, February 5, March 5, April 9, May 7, and June 11. Please come and pray for our priests.
Our Cathedral is a beautiful place, which visitors regularly say compares favorably to the great churches in Europe. Every year since 1986, Brother Robert has decorated the Cathedral in an elegant seasonal manner, which substantially enhances our Christmas experience.

When you enter the Cathedral, the first thing you see are the 42 inch wreaths and red bows hanging from each column. As you progress up the aisle, you notice the window trim and then the impressive altar treatment. The centerpiece of his decorations is the Crèche representation of the Infant Jesus in the manger, surrounded by figures of Mary, Joseph, shepherds, animals, and the Wise Men, with a Jerusalem backdrop. Expanded several years ago, now extending to the full depth of Our Lady’s Chapel, it contains trees, mountains and running water.

Visitors are permitted to stroll through the Holy Land to view his masterpiece. Brother Robert uses his own personal collection of figures and animals, which he has amassed over the years, in setting up the elaborate display. If you look closely, you will probably find plants and animals which were not among the flora or fauna indigenous to Palestine at the time of Christ.

Over 18,000 people visit the Cathedral each year during the Christmas season to see these beautiful decorations. Many people make an annual pilgrimage from various parishes around the diocese. Snowbirds from up north regularly stop here en route to Florida to see our beautiful Cathedral decorated for the season.

One of the most significant and unique aspects of the decorations is the Poinsettia Tree which over the years has grown to its current display of 250 plants standing over 22 feet high. Brother Robert particularly likes the way it unites the members of the parish both alive and deceased, as people honor their deceased loved ones as well as family members who are still living.

The decorations and crib scene are completed in time for Midnight Mass and the Wise Men are initially placed by the Bishop’s Chair. This prompts Monsignor O’Neill to tell our visitors every Christmas morning, “I know you are thinking why are the Wise Men over by the Bishop’s Chair, which makes it appear as if they are coming from the North, but in reality Brother Robert stores them in the back, behind the altar, so they do come from the East and then make a left turn going to Jerusalem.”

Our thanks to Brother Robert for making our Christmas so meaningful every year.