Old age setting in?
Every year the Cathedral is decorated in an elegant seasonal manner, which substantially enhances our Christmas experience. Over 15,000 people visit the Cathedral each year during the Christmas season while these beautiful decorations are on display. Many of the visitors who come through the Cathedral and marvel at the exquisite beauty and detail of the Crèche scene have said, “This is the most beautiful Christmas display in the United States.”

Orlando Cuadra came up from Florida again to oversee setting up the display with Brother Robert’s guidance. It may not be obvious how much is involved in creating the Crèche scene when you just see the finished product but it takes many hours over several days to bring up all the wooden staging, decorative materials, trees, buildings and figures from the basement up to the Cathedral to complete the beautiful Christmas scene we view every year. A special thank you to the K of C who helped bring up these
heavy items as well as Bart Traywick, Lynne Everett and Wim Salien for their dedicated assistance in setting up the display.

According to Orlando, this year’s theme is “From womb, to birth, to death.” Last year the display extended into the St. Anthony altar area where the crucifix was located to emphasize that Jesus was born outside the city in the countryside of Bethlehem, and he was crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem on a hill called Golgotha. This year he wanted it to not only be beautiful but also more biblically and historically correct. So he added the emphasis of Jesus in the womb symbolized by new statues of the Blessed Virgin Mary great with child and her spouse Joseph coming over the hill in the rear of the scene, journeying to Bethlehem before Jesus was born. Arriving late at night and unable to find a place to stay, they took refuge in a cave, which is more historically correct, that Joseph knew of from the shepherds who inhabited the area.

Over the years there have been several humorous stories associated with the Crèche. The number of figures in the display has grown as people have given Brother Robert different statues. Upon closer examination you may notice different animals that are certainly not indigenous to the Holy Land. If you look more closely, you will find penguins which Brother Robert has whimsically included for years. I’ve told him there are no penguins in the Holy Land unless they are “short nuns.” He just smiles and says, “They are all God’s creatures.”

The Wise Men are now displayed deep in Our Lady’s Chapel coming to Bethlehem from the east. I for one miss the arrangement where they began their journey near the Bishop’s chair on Christmas Eve, progressed to the front of the altar by New Year’s Day and made it to Bethlehem on the Epiphany to pay homage to the new born King. This route always insured that on Christmas Day, Monsignor O’Neill had to make the following announcement: “I know some of you are wondering why the Wise Men are coming from the north. But Brother Robert stores them in the back behind the altar, so they come from the east, and then take a left turn to Bethlehem.”

Brother Robert began setting up the poinsettia tree, which traditionally adorns the opposite side of the church, when he came here 27 years ago. Originally it contained only 60 plants but over the years has grown to the size it is today. The beautiful conical shaped tree starts out as a metal frame which must be erected ready to accept the 250 poinsettia plants that are painstakingly hung on it by dedicated volunteers, including Carly Lanier, Brian Connerat, Meg Hearn and Arnie Cook to produce the beautiful 22 foot tree.

Thank you Orlando and all the volunteers who worked so hard to create the beautiful Christmas decorations for the Cathedral again this year.
The recent Italian saints article prompted the following inquiry from Mary Rooney:

“You published a story in Twin Spires a while back about the images of Italian saints in the Cathedral. I’m wondering, did you ever come across any information indicating why we have both a stained glass window and a mural of St. Anthony of Padua in the Cathedral. Even though he was not from Padua, St. Anthony is very much loved in that part of Italy (the Veneto) which is where my grandparents are from. I have always wondered why a parish that was so Irish in make-up, would have two very prominent pieces honoring the man known simply as “Il Santo” by the Venetians. Any ideas?”

In researching the answer to Mary’s question, I discovered that when the Cathedral was rededicated in 1900 after the fire, there were actually five representations of St. Anthony in the corner of the south transept of the church, sometimes referred to as the St. Anthony Shrine. In addition to the stained glass window and mural, this area also contained the St. Anthony altar, a statue of St. Anthony on the altar like that of St. Joseph and an image of “Il Santo” on the tabernacle door. With the incorporation of the tabernacle into the new Ambry during the latest renovation, the statue was removed and replaced by the crucifix; it now stands downstairs in Our Lady’s Chapel.

I checked with Diocesan Archivist Gil Brown, to see if she could shed some light on this matter. Gil was at a loss to explain the rationale for these multiple representations, but she did share with me the contents of a publication entitled, “The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist 1799-1902,” which provided some key information on these multiple features as follows:

*The Altar of St. Anthony, placed in the southeast corner of the Cathedral after the fire, is a memorial to one to whom we owe the former building and inscribed, “In Memory of Archbishop Gross.”*

The five foot St. Anthony statue atop the altar, imported from Munich, Germany for the 1900 dedication at a cost of $90.00, was donated by Mr. Will J. Harty, Jr. And the lancet stained glass window, showing St. Anthony with the Infant Jesus, costing...
$75.00, was a gift of Miss Mary A. Nally. The mural above the altar depicting St. Anthony receiving an apparition of the Infant Jesus was conceived by Savannah artist Christopher P.H. Murphy, painted by Paul Gutsche along with his team of artists in Greenwich Village, New York and installed in the Cathedral in 1912.

While the reason that these many representations of St. Anthony are in the Cathedral remains shrouded in the mists of time, we are blessed to have them with us.

Who was Saint Anthony?

Saint Anthony of Padua, O.F.M. (°Fernando Martins de Bulhões; 15 August 1195 – 13 June 1231), was born and raised by a wealthy family in Lisbon, however he moved to Italy and joined the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor in 1220. The city of Padua is inextricably linked to the figure of St. Anthony. He is venerated all over the world and patron of the city itself. Noted by his contemporaries for his forceful preaching and expert knowledge of scripture, he was a strenuous defender of Catholic doctrine. Because of his visions of the Child Jesus, he is often depicted carrying the Infant. He died in Padua at age 36, and due to the miracles attributed to him, he was canonized less than one year after his death by Pope Gregory IX, the second-fastest canonized saint (after St. Peter of Verona).

He was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church on January 16, 1946 by Pope Pius XII.

Editor’s note:
Whenever people hear the name Saint Anthony, they immediately think of him as the patron saint of lost items. Visitors to the Cathedral often mention that Saint Anthony has never let them down when they asked for his intercession with regard to lost or misplaced items, even reciting the familiar childhood jingle enlisting his assistance:

“Saint Anthony, Saint Anthony, please come around,
Something is lost and needs to be found.”

I must admit to being skeptical about these sort of traditions but a few years ago I had a first-hand experience that made me a believer. I was over at the Cathedral helping put away the priest vestments after the ordination and when I got home my progressive eyeglasses were missing. I looked all around the house but they were nowhere to be found. I even retraced my steps to the Cathedral and searched in all the places I had been, but no luck. The next day, we left for our summer home in Maine and I struggled through the next several months alternating between reading glasses and driving glasses.

Upon returning to Savannah, I resumed my tour guide duties. During a lull on the first day giving tours, I looked up at the St. Anthony mural and irreverently said, “Hey, Anthony, aren't you supposed to be working on this. Get on the stick!” Before heading home after the tours were over, I went back downstairs to look in the vestment closet one more time and low and behold, found my glasses in a box on the closet floor which I had not searched before.

St. Anthony comes through again.

There are no extant pictures of the original altar and tabernacle. Those on the previous page were reconstructed from current pictures.
Our Beautiful Organ Needs Some TLC

By McDowell Fogle

The Noack tracker organ which was installed in the Cathedral in 1987 has given us good service these past twenty eight years, but it is beginning to show its age. There has been a deterioration of the mechanical parts as well as the continuing failure of the electronic components of the organ. The mechanical parts are incredibly important for a ‘tracker’ organ. These thin strips of wood that link the keys on the keyboards with the valve that allows air to flow into a pipe, are beginning to fail.

Due to the humid, salt-air coastal environment, the leather has started to deteriorate, and the wooden parts have begun to warp causing a leakage of air, which in turn makes the pipes speak without a key being touched or a stop being pulled out. This is happening frequently and when it does, the organ firm has to make an expensive emergency visit. The problem with the electronic parts of the organ, which are mainly located in the console, are also a big concern as the electronics were created in 1987. Imagine trying to work with a computer from 1987. There have been many improvements to computers since the 1980’s and the same holds true for the electronic parts of the organ; 28 year old electronic parts wear out.

The configuration of the organ console makes playing for Catholic Masses very difficult for the organist. A piece of music that requires many quick changes is difficult for the organist to play with the limited number of buttons (8) available to set different sounds on the current console. The proposed changes will allow for more “spice” and balance in the sound, and allow for the blend to be easily and more quickly changed.

When the organ was installed, they did not have enough money to finish “Voicing” the instrument. When altering a stop (a pull-knob for a sound) so that it blends with the other sounds in the organ, voicing affects the tone, pitch and most importantly for our purposes, the “color” of the sounds. The keyboard for the pedal is too soft to project the lower or bass sounds into the vast space of the Cathedral. And all 2300 pipes are supplied with air from one wind reservoir. That means when the organ is being played with all of the stops on, usually after the final hymn, there isn’t enough wind to supply all of the pipes with the needed amount of air, so the pitch lowers.

At the outset of the project, the organ console will be removed and we will use a loaner electronic organ for a few months. All electronic parts in the console will be replaced and additional buttons will be added that will allow more variety of sounds to be available quickly. The mechanical parts that are failing, the wood-leather linkage previously mentioned, will be given a stress test; any that fail will be re-leathered and re-glued. Two new wind reservoirs will be added to supplement the one reservoir currently in use. Corrective voicing will be done and all of the metal and wooden pipes will be reviewed and re-voiced to reflect a warmer sound. Additional electronic speakers will be added for the lowest pedal bass sounds, to supplement the lack of bass sounds; these electronic assists will not sound different from speaking pipes. All of the pipes will be cleaned because each time the organ is used, all of the humid salt air in the Cathedral flows through the instrument as well as much soot and dust.

The proposed changes will allow the organ to have the potential to become one of the premier instruments in the southern Atlantic coastal region. It will be much easier to play, much easier to listen to, and will be able to handle a wide variety of uses, from the many demands for liturgies, to concerts as well. While this instrument is approaching the age of needing major maintenance, it will, with continued care and proper maintenance, continue to inspire the clergy, musicians, parishioners and visitors at the Cathedral for many years to come.

We are currently developing a detailed restoration recommendation with input from several reputable firms. Stay tuned for more updates as the project develops.
How are we doing?

In May 1998 we published the 1st issue of our newsletter which was at that time unnamed. The Name the Newsletter contest in that first issue produced the Twin Spires name we are all familiar with today. Here is the introductory article from that issue:

Welcome to the Newsletter ...

One outcome of the recent parish study was a call for better communications within the Cathedral Parish family. This newsletter is a beginning attempt “to respond to that call.” The parish council hopes to meet the following objectives in sending a newsletter out to every household registered in our parish:

- To communicate with all parishioners on a quarterly basis
- To provide information on Parish activities
- To invite participation in Parish 'activities of all households
- To create a closer sense of community

So, after 16 years, how are we doing? Did we meet our initial objectives. Have we exceeded your expectations. We would appreciate your feedback so please email petepalu@aol.com with your comments and any suggestions for stories you would like to see us cover in the coming issues.

We hope to communicate with you on subjects ranging from the renovation to the Right to Life Committee, from Parish Council elections to information on the Cathedral staff. And we have a few favors to ask of you:

- Help us name this newsletter.
- Read this issue thoroughly and let us know what you think about the articles.
- Send us information about your Parish activities and concerns.

With your help, this can be a vehicle to make us all aware of just how much our Parish does for itself and the community. It will also provide us with information about coming events we don't want to miss. So, welcome to the newsletter!

Back by popular demand

The booklet Art and Symbols of the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist is available once again. Originally published in 2007, it has been out of print for several years. The book is designed to share the artwork of one of Savannah’s greatest treasures. It will serve as a guide for historian, artisan and student as well as be a wonderful keepsake for sharing the Cathedral’s beauty with family and friends. The books are on sale at the docent’s desk in the rear of the Cathedral for $20.00 each.
A new Cathedral Christmas tradition was born as the Cathedral choir and brass performed for a standing room only crowd on the Sunday afternoon of December 21. The program opened with the entire audience joining the choir in the singing of “Oh Come All Ye Faithful”. The choir, under the direction of McDowell Fogle, accompanied by the brass quartet, directed by Robin Beauchamp, presented a program of traditional carols and anthems. Soloists, Jillian Pashke and Cyril Durant performed excerpts from Handel’s “Messiah”.

Albeit with an empty manger, the occasion was also the unveiling of the Cathedral creche display created by Orlando Cuadra.

The program closed with the entire church joining in the singing of “Hark the Heralds Angels Sing”. Mark your calendar for this not to be missed event of Christmastide for the Church and the City of Savannah.