St. John the Baptist joins Nativity scene
Page 4
The Advent season at the Cathedral began traditionally with the “Light Up For Christ” and Blessing of the Crèche followed by the Parish Supper which took place on Wednesday, December 5. Sponsored by the Knights of Columbus, Post 631, for the past ten years, this is a great way to begin the Christmas Season!

Fr. Schreck led the Prayer Service/Sing-a-Long at the Crèche outside the front window of the Cathedral Parish Center. In the absence of song books, our parishioners were asked to sing “O Come All Ye Faithful” and other traditional Christmas hymns from memory. I’m not sure our rendition would make the Top 10 but it was enthusiastically delivered.

The Prayer Service was followed by a bountiful Parish Supper. The Knights provided the ham and macaroni and cheese while the Cathedral supplied the fried chicken. In response to a request for parishioners to bring a favorite family size covered dish, the table was overflowing with an infinite variety of delicious side dishes. And of course the dessert table was filled with many delicious morsels as well. Some folks are known to frequent the dessert table first to insure they get a piece of the delicious strawberry cheesecake.

We had a very large turnout, almost 100 parishioners according to Bill Wade’s unofficial count. Eddie Mizelle was seen bringing in chairs from the classrooms so that everyone could be seated. The hall was beautifully decorated by the CCW for the holiday season.
Every Christmas season the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist celebrates the birth of Our Lord Jesus in a very extraordinary way. The Old and New Testament stories come alive in the narrative of the Christmas creche in Our Lady’s Chapel. In the last twelve months, I have prepared by meditating on the holy gospel and the writings of the saints as well as the work of the high Italian renaissance masters. Next to Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I admire Saint John the Baptist, the cousin of Our Lord and patron saint of this Cathedral in Savannah, Georgia. Saint John is one of the saints we should reflect on during the Advent and Christmas season.

This being my twelfth year coming from Lake Worth, Florida to create this nativity scene as a work of faith and art, I decided to add the figure of Saint John the Baptist, as a child, to the main scene next to the Holy Family since Saint John is mentioned prominently in the Gospels of Advent.

Let’s take a closer look at the scripture. The angel Gabriel was sent by God to announce to the Virgin Mary, ”Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you … The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.” And he added, “And now your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” (Luke 1:28…35-37).

Hearing these words, Mary set out immediately to visit her cousin Elizabeth. She entered the house of Zachariah and greeted Elizabeth. Upon hearing Mary’s greeting, the child leapt in Elizabeth’s womb.

Saint John ultimately became the voice crying in the desert as foretold by Isaiah, preaching, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”.

In the Gospel of Saint Matthew in chapter 11 verses 7-11, Jesus praises John the Baptist saying, “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ Truly I tell you, among those born of women none has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

And Saint John did prepare the way as depicted in the three stained glass windows in the Cathedral apse:
- On the right he is proclaiming the Gospel of repentance, “I am the voice crying in the desert…make straight the way”
- On the left he is pointing out Christ in the rose robe, “Behold the Lamb of God.”
- And in the center window, he is baptizing Jesus in the River Jordan, the Holy Spirit is descending upon him in the form of a dove and above, inscribed in
Latin on the ribbon are the words of the Father, “Behold this is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.”

When we examine the works of the masters of the high Renaissance we find numerous paintings of Jesus and St. John pictured together. Sandro Botticelli’s Madonna and Child With the Young Saint John the Baptist is a classic example.

Saint John the Baptist, the “Preparer”, is a logical addition to this year’s crèche scene.
Once again our Cathedral was beautifully decorated for Christmas. In addition to the beautiful crèche, the rest of the church was filled with poinsettias and evergreen decorations to commemorate the season.

According to Bart Traywick, it takes about a week to complete. This year we had about 25 volunteers, thanks to the recruiting efforts of John Pryor. We are especially pleased with the number of younger volunteers who showed up to help.

Heavy wooden staging must be brought up from the basement to provide the foundation for the crèche scene. Then the Blessed Virgin Mary Altar must be covered to create the mountain background look, before all the structures, vegetation, water features and finally the figures are added.

While all this is going on the rest of the Cathedral is being decorated too. The massive job of hanging the 42 inch wreaths on the ten columns of the nave requires a scaffold which must be laboriously moved from column to column.

The framing for the poinsettia tree must be assembled before the 250 plants can be hung on it. More poinsettias are placed on the reredos and side altars while aisle windows are also decorated with evergreen garlands and bows.

All this was accomplished by an additional group of 25—30 volunteers, including the CCW and Flower guild.

The crèche and decorations were complete by December 16th in time for the Christmas at the Cathedral Concert and the Christ Child was ultimately laid in the manger by Bishop Hartmayer on Christmas Eve at Midnight Mass.

Thousands of visitors come every year to see the crèche and decorations during the Christmas season which comes to a close after the Epiphany on January 6. Then John and Bart and the crew come in again and take it all down and store it downstairs for next year.

Thank you to all the volunteers who make the Cathedral so beautiful every year.
The Cathedral Choir performed the annual *Christmas at the Cathedral* Concert on Sunday, December 16 before an overflow crowd. This concert is one of the most popular events sponsored by the Friends of Cathedral Music.

Cathedral Choirs throughout the world have a special responsibility to keep alive the musical patrimony of the Church, serving as musical and liturgical beacons for their dioceses.

Here in Savannah, we take this responsibility very seriously. The choir began preparing for the concert in August, with demanding weekly rehearsals in addition to the regular schedule of Sunday liturgies. The repertoire for the concert was drawn from the entire breadth of Catholic sacred music, from the ninth-century “*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*,” to pieces written in the last ten years. The Cathedral Choir often sings in English, Latin, and German, but the concert included Sergei Rachmaninoff’s setting of “*Ave Maria*” performed in the original Russian.

In addition to a number of traditional a cappella Christmas selections performed in the front of the Cathedral, the choir was joined by the Cathedral Brass and organist Craig Cramer, professor of organ at the University of Notre Dame. The sound of the combined forces of organ, brass, choir, and 1,000 people singing the great carols was thrilling and memorable.

The format of the evening owes much to the celebrated tradition of Lessons and Carols at King’s College, Cambridge, celebrating 100 years in 2018. The choir’s anthems and motets are interspersed with readings of sacred scripture and congregational carols, creating a spoken and musical narrative from the foretelling of the coming of the Savior through the birth of the Christ Child.

One local adaptation was the inclusion of “*Silent Night,*” sung by candlelight by all present.

Fr. Schreck’s prayer at the beginning of the evening encapsulates the meaning and intent of *Christmas at the Cathedral*:

“My friends, in company with people in great cathedrals down through the ages, we keep vigil tonight as we eagerly await the coming of Christ, the dawning of our salvation. Let us join our voices to theirs in prayer and joyful song.”
The holiday tradition continued again this year as members of the CCW and the Christian Service Committee set up Angel Trees in the rear of the Cathedral. Every Sunday the trees were surrounded by many gift bags filled with canned goods or gift cards donated by our generous parishioners.

The CCW solicited hygiene items, Kroger gift cards and candy for the Social Apostolate Annual Christmas party. The hygiene packs of toothbrushes, toothpaste, deodorant and lotion, the most requested items by homeless clients, provide some personal comfort to these disadvantaged souls. And the food store gift cards help buy groceries, gas and pharmacy medications for the working poor families.

The Christian Service Committee collected food for the Social Apostolate. The food helped provide meals and stock the pantry for the homeless population. Many parishioners selected a food item card from the tree and joined in the spirit of giving this Christmas by returning multiple bags of canned goods.

These supplies had to be removed from the Cathedral every Sunday and transported to the Social Apostolate. Sophia Grace Wade, Deborah and Bill’s 7 year old granddaughter, a 2nd grader at St James, helped load the bags and deliver them to the Social Apostolate.

According to Latacia Avila, Director of the Social Apostolate, the generosity of the Cathedral Parish helped us provide Christmas Tree Dinners to 136 households consisting of 306 members which included 130 children, 131 adults and 45 seniors. Below are a few of the families who received dinners:

Rachelle, a single mother of four children, began 2018 living in a homeless shelter. In March, Rachelle found full-time employment, but only earns $8.00/hour. In August, she was also able to obtain permanent housing for herself and her children. Rachelle was thrilled to be able to provide Christmas dinner for her children in their own home.

Ruth, a 59 year old disabled female, who cares for her terminally ill father recently received custody of her two nieces, ages 16 and 1. Ruth’s only source of income is social security. This was the children’s first Christmas without their mother. Ruth said that Christmas is about being together as a family, not about gifts. She feels blessed to have three generations gathered at the table for dinner.

Juan, is an elderly man who obtained senior housing after being homeless for more than one year. Juan said that the best thing about having his own place is preparing his own meals. He got excited when he saw stuffing. He said he makes the best stuffing in town.

Latacia expressed the Social Apostolate’s gratitude to the Cathedral for all it did to help serve the poorest families during the holidays.
Last year Bishop Hartmeyer directed all parishes in the diocese to participate in the Living the Eucharist program. The Cathedral had good representation but we want to improve on our parish numbers this year.

The program is designed to revitalize parish life and to create evangelizing activities through meaningful and transforming encounters with Christ.

The goal of the Living the Eucharist program is to form in members of the Cathedral parish an understanding of the Church’s teaching on the Eucharist. This will allow individuals to foster their belief in the many ways Jesus is truly present in the sacrifice of the Mass.

Pope Benedict XVI’s 2007 apostolic exhortation, The Sacrament of Charity provides the framework for this personal and parish renewal experience.

Some of the topics we will cover this year:
1. Following Christ through the Liturgical year
2. Why do we say the Creed at Mass.
3. The Eucharist, our pathway to holiness

We are hoping that more members of our parish will sign up to experience the second year of the program. If you want to be part of a group there will be a sign up Sunday where you can become involved and be assigned to a group near your home. If you have a few friends that could get together for the six weeks of the program you can sign up as a leader of the group. We will need a few new leaders for this year. The leader is provided a step-by-step instruction guide for each lesson with all the details required to conduct a meaningful and rewarding experience for the group.

Each person in the program will receive a participant’s guide to allow for the study of the weeks lesson before the weekly meeting. The meetings are 90 minutes long. In addition, there will be a daily prayer guide, Exodus to Easter provided along with a prayer card. A critique sheet will be included in order for the parish to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

This program offers all a structured way to familiarize with the fundamental meaning of the Mass. It is designed to improve your worship experience and understanding of the Eucharist.

This program can help adults, families, and teens in the parish grow in holiness and in the Church’s mission.

You can take part in the program by:
1. Joining an adult or teen group.
2. Engaging in the program as a family.
3. Reading the Lenten reflection booklet.

The program is designed to respond to the many challenges to the faith in the areas of declining Mass attendance, increasing number of inactive Catholics, and a growing lack of understanding about the core beliefs of the Catholic faith.

Take the time to become involved --- it’s only one 90-minute session a week for six weeks during lent. It is the perfect preparation to prepare us to greet the risen Christ on Easter Sunday morning.
January 2019

Address Service Requested

The Holy Trinity window, located to the right of the altar in the Sacred Heart Chapel, is the 12th ornament in the Cathedral Series. The 2019 offering depicts Christ the Son receiving the blessings of God the Father as the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove hovers above. They are available on line at savannahcathedral.org (click on Shop) or at the Receptionist desk in the rear of the church. Donation: $20

New Ornament Available.