

aim usa

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Mary
Queen
of
Peace

grant
peace
in our
world

السلام

مريم ملكة



Mary, Queen of Peace

Mary is at the center of the Christmas story. She holds many titles for us as reflected in monasteries around the world. We have asked monasteries to offer reflections on Mary. Articles have been edited by AIM USA staff with the permission of the authors.

Santa Maria of the Church Monastery



Fiat, let it be done, yes. It is the response to God's plan, to the invitation that the human being receives from God.

Mary accepts the invitation to be the Mother of God, a promise that surpasses every human being, a divine invitation that involves each one of us and calls us to accept it personally.

Mary, from her conception to the foot of the cross, assumes her maternity as Mother of Jesus, but there, Jesus himself makes her widen her womb to become Mother of humanity and of all those who, through faith, will accept to be part of the great family of God. In imitation of Mary, Jesus also calls us to welcome all those whom he places on the path of life with a heart of mercy and love as a mother does with her children.

In Mary Most Holy, Mother of the Church, as proclaimed by Pope Paul VI (November 21, 1964 at the Second Vatican Council), our community has received its mission by being named with this title. Today, Mary, as she once told the disciples, repeats to us: "Do whatever he tells you".

In this time of the Church and of history, the Lord urges us, following in Mary's footsteps, to welcome into the manger of this world all the little ones; to be attentive to the needs of our neighbors like Mary at the wedding feast of Cana; to remain standing with her by the cross of so many who have not discovered the redemptive action of suffering; to be persevering in prayer with Mary and the whole praying Church, awaiting the definitive manifestation of our Savior.

Entrusting our way to the Lord, trusting in Him, knowing that He will do His work, we want to say with the Prophet: "Today you will know that the Lord is coming and tomorrow you will see His glory". Amen.

Sister Maria Beatriz La Porta Espino osb
Monasterio Santa Maria de la Iglesia
Canelones, Uruguay

Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey

The Christmas Seed

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux famously said that, when it comes to the mystery and reality of Mary, the Blessed Virginal Mother of



Christ, one can never say enough, *de Maria numquam satis*. Our monastery being consecrated under the patronage of Our Lady's Annunciation, we contemplate her in a special way under that mystery. In a real way, Christmas begins with the event of the Annunciation, nine months before the Nativity, as a very small and hidden thing.

The seed that was planted, beneath the shadow and through the agency of the Holy Spirit in the secret-most depths of the maternal love of Mary, was at first tinier even than a mustard seed, but would grow above ground beginning at Christmas, to become a great tree, attaining such heights as to fill the entire universe with branches, where both angels and humans might perch, like so many spiritual birds.

Soaring upward from the immaculate and virginal soil, this tree of life would also take on the aspect of the Cross, sheltering the mystery of our Redemption accomplished on Mount Calvary and in the Holy Tomb. In addition to its celestial height, this same plant would spread outward to embrace all the earth, having a horizontal, missionary dimension in complement to its hierarchical structure. It is the tree of the complete Christ, both God and human.

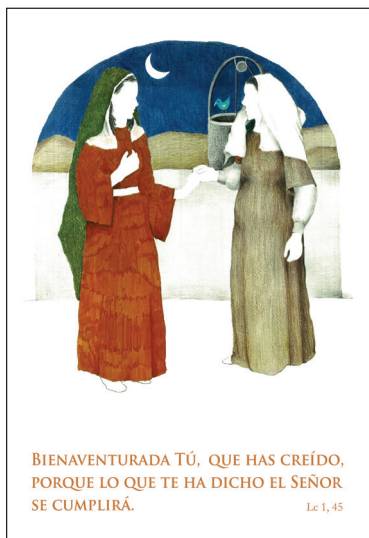
A monastery is a place where this tree thrives, that is to say where those living in its branches are called to a special manner of life that is holy, prophetic, angelic--apostolic even. For some religious, this involves an active apostolate for the good of the Church. We monks belong to the institutes dedicated entirely to the contemplative life, but it is all part of one great Catholic family.

Abbot Philip Anderson, OCSO
Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey, Hulbert, OK, USA



Monastery of the Assumption of Santa Maria

Mary, the Mother of Pilgrims, we praise and glorify the Lord with you



The Gospel of The Visitation in the Mass on the day of the Assumption (August 15th) shows us the path that Mary walked from the moment she agreed to be the Mother of the Savior until she entered the house of Elizabeth in the hill country with haste, into a city of Judah.

Mary's decision to go with haste reveals her mission within the life of the Church. She stepped out of her comfort zone and put herself at the service of those in need. Once she accepted the mission

given by the Angel, she went out of herself to share her joy.

But is there any relationship between The Visitation and The Assumption? The Preface prays "For today the Virgin Mother of God was assumed into heaven as the beginning and image of your Church's coming to perfection and a sign of sure hope and comfort to your pilgrim people..." Mary points out the goal at which all humankind is aimed, and she is enjoying in advance by the power of the Resurrection of Her Son.

We may conclude that the Virgin Mother of God was assumed by her Son to be by His side, and it was not something she did herself. He did it all by Himself. This suggests that we, as nuns living in a community, should be eager to listen to God's Word. May the Holy Spirit come upon us, and the power of the Highest overshadow us, making us go in haste to live a life of praise and charity, serving the Church.

H. Amparo Latorres
Monasterio de la Asunción de Santa Maria
Rengo, Chile



Our Lady of the Desert Monastery

The Monastery of our Lady of the Desert was founded in 1990 with the help of the Abbot of Christ in the Desert. Both monasteries are located on the high desert of New Mexico. We are an international community, with sisters from the USA, Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Vietnam, Zambia, & Kenya.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph knew the desert well, because they had to flee from Bethlehem to Egypt across a very long desert. From 4 to 6 years, according to the "Mystical City of God," they lived and ministered to the people around them in the deserts of Egypt.

Our monastery was founded to reflect the feminine expression of desert monasticism; living a simple life of silence and solitude, seeking God by observing the Rule of St. Benedict. The title of our monastery emphasizes, our devotion to our Lady who is prefigured in Revelations 'as the woman who fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God.' (Rev. 12:6)

Mary represents to us a true model of humility, silence, obedience, and discipleship. We try to imitate her in her most loving relationship to her Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The silence and solitude of the desert are amazing; there is a sense of freedom and openness, and one's eyes with-in, can see the horizon of self-awareness coming into understanding and hear the melodious love of healing and wholeness coming into one's heart. This is our Mother Mary's gift to us.

Sister Mary Fisher, OSB
Monastery of Our Lady of the Desert
Blanco, NM, USA

Cover

The icon, "Mary Queen of Peace," was written because all Christians and Muslims, especially in the Middle East, venerate Mary (*Maryām*), the mother of Jesus. She is considered one of the most righteous and greatest women in the **Islamic** religion. She is the only woman mentioned by name in the Quran, and her names appear more often in the **Quran** than in the **New Testament**.

The title, written in Arabic, comes from the Litany of Our Lady of Loretto but the icon depicts Mary as a Middle Eastern woman. Instead of a crown on her head she wears a row of gold disks; a gold halo encircles her head. In her hands are the traditional symbols of peace: a dove with an olive branch in its beak. In the violence and turmoil that today affects all the peoples of the Middle East, Mary's intercession is asked for peace and stability in that troubled region.

Credits: *Mary Queen of Peace Icon and text written by Father Richard G. Cannuli, OSA*

Mary, Queen of Peace

Valley of Our Lady Monastery

“Behold Your Mother”

She looks for and finds Him everywhere,
In everything, in everyone...
and yet she continually holds in her heart
the memory of His gaze upon her...

What for others in the daily routine of life and
duty seems difficult or wearisome,
Is not noticed by her because
She has lost herself in the One she loves, and
her whole life gently sings of Him.

She embraces life with that quiet faith and
gentle enthusiasm that tells of the one who
has found her life's Treasure.

Evil and sinfulness imprint on her heart the pain of
true human suffering. But for the sinner and
evil-doer-for these truly “poor ones”, there is
from her, not judgement and condemnation,
but only compassion.

The unshakeable faith that comes to her from
her Beloved enables her to give of herself
with a generosity unknown to mere effort;
Freely she spends herself for Him and for others-
seeking with her own gift of self, to match His!

In her presence we are all “at home”...
impoverished and little, we find in her that
we are no longer so, because
here is one who sees the greatness
of the Creator wherever she looks ...she
loves us into being great-the greatness that
is ours as children of God!

No need for her to “be
someone”... to prove
herself.

She knows He loves her.
He is her enough!
Her one desire is that of
making Him the
center of life...
everyone's life!

She knows what it is to
be afraid;
She has tasted suffering;
She is acquainted with
misunderstanding and
loneliness...

But where she is present,
despair and sadness give way
to hope and joy. Her faith shatters the darkest night..
Death dies and life is born because...

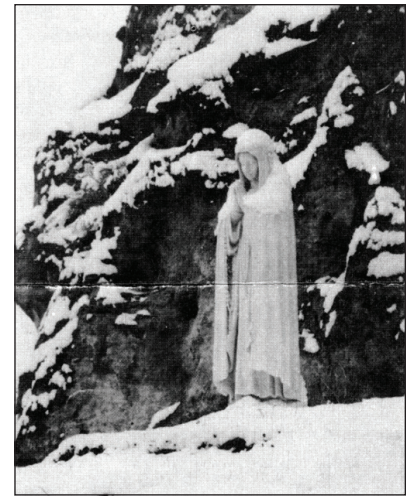
The love of her Beloved is a healing ointment and a
power stronger than death.
Filled with His peace, she stands beneath the Cross-
Both His and ours with quiet courage and forgiving
love...

His Mother!

Our Mother!

Receiving each one and bearing us all up to
the Eternal Father.

Sister Anne Marie Jorger, Ocist.
Valley of Our Lady Monastery
Prairie du Sac, WI, USA



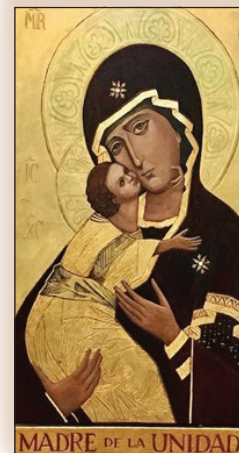
Mother of Unity Monastery

This Marian invocation has its origin in who was the foundress of the Benedictine Monastery Mater Unitatis. We refer to Mother Giovanna Dore, who, encouraged by Mother Pia Gullini, wrote the first biography of the future Blessed Maria Gabriella Sagheddu. While writing the aforementioned biography, she felt a strong invitation from the Holy Spirit to start a New Monastic Family, structured according to the Rule of St. Benedict and having as its specific charism the unceasing supplication to the Father: “that all may be one so that the world may believe”.

Thus, on October 29, 1940, she founded the Mater Unitatis Monastery in Olzai, Italy, placing its foundation under the protection of Mary, Mother of Unity. And in this way to serve through prayer for Christian unification, after the example of Mary Mother of Christ and of the Church, who served tacitly, explicitly to the redemption. In the spirit of Mary who goes to meet Elizabeth to make of herself a hidden march towards Unity.

H. Maria Mechtildis Figueroa, OSB
Monasterio de Madre de la Unidad, Argentina

To the Mother of Unity

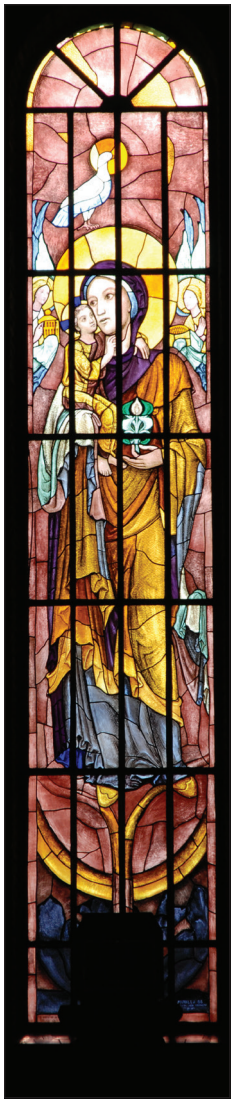


Sweet look, Virgin Mary
tender embrace Jesus gives you.
For your beauty all sing to you
Pious Mother of Unity.

Sweet look, happy Mother,
To whom you look, you give
your love;
And to those arms you entrust
to live in Unity.

We all ask, lead us all, Mother
to the great embrace with the Lord.
Until He returns, your light
guides us
to that great day of Unity.

Our Lady of the Angels Abbey



When the community of Azul, Argentina was founded in 1958, the founders followed the ancient Cistercian tradition of dedicating the monastery to the Virgin Mary, linking it to the geographical location. “Los Angeles” is the place where the monastery is located.

The image is a recreation of a 12th century miniature, placed at the beginning of St. Jerome’s Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, kept in the Abbey of Cîteaux, France. In it, the prophet, pointing with his right hand, holds in his arms a part of the scroll of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah with two of its messianic texts: Is 11:1-2; 7:14 “A branch shall come forth from the stem of Jesse, and a flower shall spring from its root. The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon it... The Virgin will conceive and bear a Son. (Mt. 1:23)

Jesse, father of David, ancestor of Christ, appears asleep and as if rising in astonishment. He holds a rod that divides into two branches and ends in Mary, the Mother of God, holding in her left hand a stylized fleur-de-lis, flaming at its upper end - the fiery czar of her perpetual virginity - and in her right hand the fruit of her womb: Jesus; who embraces her tenderly, rests his cheek against hers, and caresses her throat, for it was from her that the Word received the voice to proclaim the Good News of his Life, Death and Resurrection to the People of the Old Covenant (Jesse) and the New Covenant (Mary); for he has made Jews and Gentiles one People, one new Man, one Body: Eph. 2:14-17.

Mary is the support of the Trinity: The angels indicate the divine sphere that contemplate the face of the Father (Mt 18:10) and present in their hands the Colosseum and the Heavenly Jerusalem: the martyrs and the glorious Church. Jesus is the Son; and the Holy Spirit, sent to the Church and the world, rests on the virginal nimbus. Her position is not hieratic, but absorbed and moving, she walks towards the Trinity whom she contemplates. She reminds the monks of the purpose of their lives, while at the same time she “makes her way” to lead them to her.

The large stained- glass window, located in the central nave of the church, was made by the Argentinean artist Ernesto Murillo in 1988.

P. Edward Gowland, OCSO
Nuestra Señora de los Angeles
Azul-Buenos Aires
Argentina

Our Lady of Light Monastery

The first time our Foundress, the late Mother Mary Garson visited our home in Bangalore was in 1988. The house was formerly known as “Sneha Jyothi,” which is Sanskrit for “charity of light.” At the entrance, she observed the hand-painted mural of Our Lady that was encircled by lamplights. She immediately referred to this home as “**Our Lady of Light**” and gave it that name.

In this message of Christmas for 2023, it would be most suitable to represent Our Lady as Our Lady of Light, who presented the light of God into our feeble human life. It was your Spirit who touched Mary’s heart to say, “Yes, let it be done” (Lk 1:38). She only needed to be silent to sing your praises. We are asked to consider Mary’s flawless submission to God’s will as well as to imitate her. After all, it is you, Lord, who guided her heart. Her “fiat” is immediate and complete. It involves more than merely answering God’s invitation at the Annunciation. It is a call to submit to God’s will for the rest of her life and to approach everything from God’s perspective. Mary is Jesus’ first and most dedicated follower.

Sing of a young woman surrounded by a circle of love, with flames in her heart and twelve stars of light surrounding her head and body. A young woman with eternal youth had love in her heart, joy in her eyes, and knowledge in her head. All people would hear stories throughout history about the child that Mother would have.

O Mary! When God chose you to bring His Son, a new creation made in you, to give joy to the earth. When he was born on Christmas night, the music made the world ring, the stars were dancing with delight, and all the men and women, old and young, and children were singing. One winter’s night, a heap of straw becomes a place where ages meet, and Magi come kneeling at her feet.

When you submitted to His will and sent His Son, who was born of you, into a manger, you endured a great deal of suffering. Mary, we beg your favor as we bow before you so that all of your children may enter the abode of our Father.

Be the light for us this Christmas 2023 and in the years to come, O lovely Mother, full of brightness.

Wishing our Benedictine family, as well as all other religious people, laypeople, and all of humankind a beautiful, wonderful, and spiritual Christmas.

Sister Decco Roche, OSB
Our Lady of Light Monastery, Bangalore, India



Mary, Queen of Peace

Thank You Mission Cooperative Program Speakers!

The Mission Cooperative Program, spearheaded by Catholic Dioceses across the USA, offers AIM USA an opportunity to tell the stories of Benedictines and Cistercians in Asia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Eastern Europe.

The dioceses assign AIM USA to parishes where speakers can tell the stories of Benedictines at Masses in parish churches. A request for donations is also made.

Telling the stories, **giving voice to monastics** living in developing countries, offers to us in the US an awareness of mission lands and the impact of Benedictines in their local areas. Benedictines by their stability of presence and prayer and their response to the needs of their neighbors is a witness of welcome and care for the other.

Benedictine speakers in 2023 included:

Sister Philomena Fleck, OSB, St. Walburga Monastery, Elizabeth, NJ

Sister Donald Corcoran, OSB, Cam. Transfiguration Monastery, Windsor, NY

Sister Catherine Martinez, OSB, St. Joseph Monastery, Tulsa, OK

Sister Marian Wehler, OSB, Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, Erie, PA

Sister Ann Hoffman, OSB, Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, Erie, PA

Sister Christine Kosin, OSB, Mount St. Benedict Monastery, Erie, PA

Father Aloysius Serasin, OSB, Saint Anselm Abbey, Manchester, NH

Father Victor Schinstock, OSB, Conception Abbey, Conception, MO

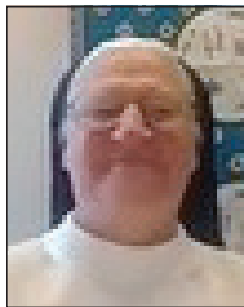
Father John Brahill, OSB, Marmion Abbey, Aurora, IL

Abbot Joel Rippinger, OSB, Marmion Abbey, Aurora, IL

Father Vincent Bataille, OSB, Marmion Abbey, Aurora, IL

Thank You to Board Members

Sister Michael Marie Rottinghaus, OSB and Father Stan Gumula, OCSO have completed their six year terms of office on the AIM USA Board. We are very grateful for their commitment to monastics around the world.



Sister Michael Marie Rottinghaus, OSB from Immaculata Monastery in Norfolk, NE has enriched the Board by her first-hand experience in the mission lands of China and Kenya. She continues to foster relationships and communication in mission lands with sisters from her community. Through her, AIM USA has become more aware of the needs of monasteries in areas around the globe.



Father Stan Gumula, OCSO originally from Mepkin Abbey, Moncks Corner, SC is spending his “retirement” as chaplain for the Sisters from Monasterio Santa Maria de la Esperanza, Esmeraldes, Ecuador. Living within the country Father Stan has a day-to-day eye on the poor conditions of the Sisters and the great needs that prevail.

Both Sister Michael Marie and Father Stan offered a global perspective of different cultures to us. They brought a wisdom coming from years of leadership in their own communities and their strong personal commitment to the missions. We thank them for their generous gift of interest and time to us.

Sister Ann participates in AIM meeting in Italy

The leaders of the major Benedictine and Cistercian congregations and representatives from each region of the world will gather in Subiaco, Italy for the annual AIM Council meeting.

The meeting is an opportunity to share the joys, struggles and concerns of our Benedictine monastic life. Although we live in many cultures and countries, we are bound together by the common life and values prescribed by St. Benedict.

Sr. Ann Hoffman, OSB, Erie, PA, AIM USA Director, Sr. Lynn McKenzie, OSB, Cullman, AL, CIB Moderator, and Fr. William Skudlarek, OSB, Collegeville, MN, DIM-MID moderator will attend the Council from the USA.

Support The Mission Of AIM USA

Your financial support is greatly appreciated!

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Benedictine/Cistercian Association of Nigeria (BECAN)



BECAN Superior during their Annual deliberations at St. Benedict Monastery Ewu, in April, 2023.

BECAN is the union of Benedictine/Cistercian monasteries in Nigeria. BECAN began in April 1990 with the late Mother Charles Anyanwu of Paschal Abbey, Nike, Nigeria.

The BECAN family comprises of: the BECAN Superiors, which refers to all the Leaders in various BECAN monasteries, the BECAN Formators, which is the union among all the Formators in all the BECAN Monasteries and the BECAN Institute, presently known as the BECAN Center for Monastic Spirituality.

The BECAN Superiors hold an annual meeting as do the BECAN Formators.

Every five years, the formators organize a one-month seminar/workshop for themselves with a number of benefits including sharing with one another and presenting a unified approach to the Church in Nigeria..

At each Superiors' meeting each house reports on the current status of their monastery which includes: the number of members, liturgical life, formation, finances, strengths, problems, joys etc. This practice enables the monks and nuns to learn from each other's experiences.

The purpose of BECAN includes mutual support as each member monastery shares monastic values and ideals, facilitates communication among members concerning visitations(self-evaluations), shared experiences, assisting with resolving problems and difficulties. The process offers insight, mutual encouragement, co-operation, assistance, and advice.

The regions presently represented by BECAN Community are mainly the South-Eastern and Southern-Western parts of (regions of Nigeria). Membership includes Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries in Nigeria. BECAN monasteries are presently fifteen in number, eight male monasteries and seven female monasteries.

The BECAN Centre for Monastic Spirituality is an institute of learning created by the BECAN superiors for the formation of members. It is made up of the BECAN Institute organizers, lecturers and students. It has two coordinators who organize the program, and two superiors who oversee the progress of the institute. Since funding is limited each BECAN monastery is expected to contribute food and the sum of a hundred thousand Naira for each student participating.

BECAN Institute is held at the Madonna University, Elele. The lecturers and organizers at the Institute must have acquired their masters, or doctorate degrees in theology, philosophy, psychology,

monasticism and other disciplines. The courses offered at the BECAN Centre for Monastic Spirituality are comprehensive and include those of a monastic, church and spirituality nature.

As an organizer and lecturer at the Institute my awareness of monastic life and the Church has deepened. The two students from my community that graduated from the Institute, minister in initial and ongoing formation and offer spiritual direction and retreats.

May God bless and reward the Board of AIM USA for their immense contributions to BECAN.. We are very grateful to you for funding us to pay for all the BECAN students last year and for the purchase of a photocopier, printer and laptops. May God bless them abundantly.

Yours in St. Benedict,
Rev. Mother Mary Ruphina Chukwuka OSB
Abbess of St.Scholastica Benedictine Abbey,
Umuoji, Nigeria

Thank You

Dear Sister Ann,

Peace of Christ be with you.

I trust that you are keeping well under God's grace. I am writing to express our heartfelt gratitude for your recent donation to our mission. Your support and generosity means a lot to us. We are not only grateful for your financial assistance but also for the trust that you have bestowed upon us to extend your generosity to those we minister to. We feel honored that you chose to support us. This act serves as a motivation to us and those we help, reminding us the importance of our mission.

With immense gratitude.

Father Joseph, OSB
Prior-Prince of Peace Abbey-Tigoni
Limuru, Kenya

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Benedict saw the entire world in a single ray of light. (Dialogues)

We are grateful for the reflections and icons of each of our writers.

The monastics who wrote the articles share their experience of the richness of their relationship with Mary, Mother of God. They write of the richness of the silence and solitude in their lives. They take time to be still and “Listen”.

In our hectic lives we often fail to stop and slow down. I urge you, during these busy days, to take a few minutes to reflect on the articles and icons. You may be surprised at the inner peace it brings!

Christmas peace,

Sister Ann Hoffman, OSB

Sister Ann Hoffman, OSB, Executive Director, AIM USA
director@aim-usa.org

*Christmas blessings
from the staff of
AIM USA*