



# Seton Home



# Study School

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December 2003

## Christmas

With Christmas almost here, the children in our homeschooling families are spending time anticipating gifts and decorating the house to prepare for the celebration of the coming of the Savior. However, let our celebration of the birth of our Lord always include reflection on the real conditions in which Jesus was born. Let our manger scenes remind us that his birth was a time of hardship with little in the way of material comfort. Mary and Joseph had no home, and even when they found a place to lie down, it was on a stable floor. A small wooden manger filled with straw was the rough resting place for the Holy Baby.

Pope John Paul II recently spoke to a meeting of 600 medical experts to analyze the problem of 340 million people in the world who suffer from depression, a condition which can lead to serious illness and sometimes even death. Depression is worst during the Christmas season. The Holy Father blames the materialist society and the media because of the constant message of the importance of owning things, of having immediate satisfaction of desires, and the competitive race for comforts comparable to those shown on television. Unfortunately, the secular season of Christmas in our society accentuates the already pervasive myth that happiness is possessions, status, and immediate pleasure, instead of Christian generosity, solidarity, and joy.

In contradiction to society's myth is the message of Christ, a message that "speaks" in His deeds as well as in His words. He lived with others, visited them, and traveled with His apostles without concern for more than the essentials of

life. The concern that Jesus showed was for the sufferings of others. Most of His miracles were cures for the sick in body, and for those sick in their souls. "Go and sin no more" was His command which offered them spiritual health and everlasting life and happiness.

As we prepare our homeschooling family to celebrate Christmas, let us read the lives and words of the saints to see how they celebrated or reflected on the birth of our Lord. Such stories can help our children to reflect on the true meaning of the most incredible event in human history.

The family members, as they say the Rosary together each night, can ask the Blessed Mother to help them to come to a deeper love and understanding of the real Gift of Christmas that is suggested by the very word, "Christmas": The Real Presence of Jesus, the "Christ," in his eternal Sacrifice at "Mass."

In the Mass, God the Father has given us His only-begotten Son who became Man so that He could suffer and die for us. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, entered into the world in order to make it possible for all of us to enter into eternal happiness in Heaven.

A renewed understanding of the Mass as a way of understanding the Gift of Christmas can lead to new resolutions for the family to attend Mass daily. It can also lead the family to make their confessions regularly and frequently in order to be better prepared for Mass, the highest act of worship since it is an anticipation of heaven.

"Today," the Divine Liturgy prayers read, "the Virgin is on her way to the cave [or stable] where she will give birth in a

manner beyond understanding to the Word Who is, in all eternity. Rejoice, therefore, Universe, when you hear it heralded; with the angels and the shepherds, glorify Him Who chose to be seen as a new-born Babe while remaining God in all eternity." (Catholic Byzantine Liturgy of December 24)

The Vespers on Christmas Day offer us several prayers to recite with our children in the Christmas season:

"He has come down to us from a Mother all-pure, and yet He has remained unchanged. He has remained true God as He was before, and has taken on Himself what He had not been, becoming Man out of His love for man. Wherefore, let us raise our voices in hymns and sing: 'O God, Who were born of the Virgin Mary, O God, have mercy on us. ...'

"O Christ our God, Your kingdom is eternal and your dominion from generation to generation. You have become incarnate of the Holy Spirit, being made Man through the ever-virgin Mary. Your coming, O Christ, has shed upon us a great light, O You Light of Light and Radiance of the Father! You have illumined the whole creation! Wherefore everything that breathes sings to you a hymn of praise, O Image of the Father's glory, eternal God, existing before all ages, Who shone forth from the Virgin! O Lord, glory be to You."

-MKC

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## *Questions We Are Asked*

*by Dr. Mary Kay Clark*  
*Director, Seton Home Study School*

**There are so many things going on in my life, I don't know how I will ever be able to focus on teaching my children every day.**

It is important to realize that your children are your first responsibility. As much as you might like to help out with relatives and friends, or help with the local support group, or help at the parish or the crisis pregnancy center, your first responsibility is to raise your children and help them attain eternal happiness in heaven.

It's great for the kids to have activities outside the home, but these activities must come after day to day obligations. If a child cannot complete his schoolwork because he has so many soccer practices every week, then a choice has to be made.

If necessary, cut out everything except the children's education and spiritual formation, at least for a time. Taking a break from outside activities for a few months can be a great respite for overwrought parents, and it gives the children a chance to find out what activities they truly want to continue.

**I would prefer to teach my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade girl with my 4<sup>th</sup> grade boy. He is slower in his studies and she is quicker, and I know they could work at the same 4<sup>th</sup> grade level. But I am afraid my son would be resentful.**

This is a difficult problem, especially when you have an older boy and a younger girl. Your son may feel that he is in competition with your daughter, and if he feels she is better at schoolwork than he is, it could cause resentments. On the other hand, you are not holding him back, you are simply moving your daughter up a grade level.

You and your husband both need to talk with him and focus on the fact that it is difficult for you to teach two grade levels. It would be doing you a favor if he could agree to help you in this matter.

It might be a good idea for your husband to talk with him alone. Sometimes a boy wants to feel he is being talked to by Dad, the head of the family, and asked to be a man, to do the right thing as a man in the family.

Be sure that as you teach them both, one is not made to feel better than the other. What may happen is that she will be better in some subjects, and he will be better in others. This is an opportunity to teach about God's gifts, that while everyone is given special talents from God, they are often different talents. God expects us to use our talents to the best of our ability. Your children can learn that while you are at home and teaching, and Dad is out working to provide for the family, both of you have important jobs even though they are different jobs.

Your children can learn to appreciate each other's skills or talents. They can share their talents with each other. They can work together and help each other. If your children are friends as they grow up together, they will be lifelong friends. It is very rewarding to see that your children care about each other.

**You often write about the importance of going to Mass every day, but it seems to interfere with the homeschooling day. How can I manage both and be effective in my teaching?**

It is something mysterious, but when you attend Mass every day, especially with your children, your life changes. The graces from Mass for you and your children help you to deal better with the daily situations, with homeschooling,

and with problems. At first, it might seem to "interfere," but as you see the change in yourself and in your children, you realize that other things need to change so that going to Mass becomes the essential part of your day.

There is also the practical side of going to Mass, especially in the morning. For some families, it is hard to get going in the morning. The children have a tough time getting up, and then they are slow to eat breakfast and get started on their schoolwork. Attending Mass every morning starts the day off with some structure and gets everyone going on time. This sets a good tone for the homeschooling day.

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The graces will help you to teach and to be patient, and help you to be more efficient with your time. The graces will help your children to learn faster and better. Most of all, the graces will help your children to grow spiritually. They will begin to understand and to appreciate their homeschooling as well as what they are learning about their Catholic Faith and how to live it according to God's wishes.

**With the holidays starting soon, I am worried about keeping to a schedule and doing all the extra things which need to be done at Christmas time.**

It may seem frightening to see all the work ahead of you, but consider that some of your children may be able to help you. Older children, even children of ten years old, for instance, could listen to a younger child read, or help a younger

child with math or phonics.

Children can help with preparation for Christmas. In fact, most children love Christmas and love to help with preparations. They can run down to the basement and bring up the tree decorations or look for the tree stand. Try to think of yourself like a manager and teach your children to help carry out some of the jobs which need to be done.

Encourage your children to finish their work by a certain time of the day, and tell them that if they do (assuming you are being realistic), they can help with making cookies or wrapping presents.

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*When your children grow up and have their own families, their families will be functional if they grew up learning how to do things around the house.*

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Consider asking your mother or your sister or a close friend to help out once or twice during the season, so you can go on necessary errands. Or ask them to pick up something for you at the store. Others recognize and respect you for taking on the homeschooling responsibility, and they may be willing to help.

A high school or college student may be able to come and help with the homeschooling, with cleaning around the house, with running errands, with shopping, or whatever else you need. Usually you can hire students for very little money, and you can get substantial help from an energetic college student.

Plan on taking two weeks off from your regular home schooling schedule. You may still want to have the children do some work in some areas, so they don't forget what they have learned.

Keeping them reading, even for fun and even if the books are easy reading, will keep them in practice. If possible, you might want to review English and Math for a few minutes a day so the children don't forget too much.

**My six children range in age from a six-month baby to a 12 year old. They keep me busy all day long. Though my husband is home most evenings, he does not help too much because he is tired, and I feel overburdened.**

As with any difficulty, it is important to keep praying and ask the Blessed Mother to help you. Secondly, your older children can help in so many different ways. You need to realize that you are not the only person who can get things done in your house. Your children need to help, not only because you need the help, but also because they should grow up realizing that each member of the family has responsibilities in the home to keep the household stable and functioning properly. When your children grow up and have their own families, their families will be functional if they grew up learning how to do things around the house.

Back in the forties and fifties, before television, computer games, videos, and soccer teams for all kids from 2 to 20, family members stayed home and took care of the family and the house. Many ironed every day, swept and vacuumed every day, did laundry, washed dishes by hand, made meals the old-fashioned way "from scratch," and so on. Family members worked together and did not have time or money for a second car (or any car) to go anywhere.

Many of the modern wonders can and should be used for time-savers, but should not be used on such a regular basis that no one is "keeping the home fires burning," no one is at home to keep an efficient, functional loving Catholic home. So teach your children to be responsible for helping with everything around the house.

One mother we know became very ill and the doctor said she was dying. With several children and the oldest only 13, and Dad needing to go to work every day, this mother started teaching her

children to manage the house and to learn to help each other. She sent her oldest to a cooking school. A maid service came in and taught the children how to clean the house. They taught how to make sure it was really clean not just surface clean, and how to maintain cleanliness day by day.

Our lesson plans are written to be student-friendly. Certainly children sixth grade and up can do many of the lessons themselves, although you definitely want to have discussions about the readings. However, many lessons, such as answering questions at the end of the chapter, or filling in words in the phonics book, can often be done by the student without mother sitting next to the child.

Keep in mind that homeschooling is the best method of raising your children Catholic in this current society, so God and His mother will help you to accomplish the job. You can count on it.

**My husband is disabled and I need to work. Do you think that we can home school with two children in grade 2 and grade 5?**

Actually, we have many families with mothers who need to work and fathers who stay at home for one reason or another and teach the children. It does work. One thing we have noticed is that fathers, natural leaders and disciplinarians, are good at keeping on schedule and making sure the kids get their assignments done on time. They don't stand for arguments and long discussions. Their strong voices seem to make the kids hop to it, so to speak.

All mothers will find that when Dads are involved in the homeschooling, home schooling goes better. Some Dads check on the work when they come home in the evening, or they help out with a subject on the weekend or in the evenings. Even if Dad helps with the books and bookcases, works on a classroom or helps organize the room, children see that Dad thinks that homeschooling is important. We encourage moms to phone their husbands during the day if the kids are being difficult. Often a stern or commanding word from Dad on the phone makes a child obedient.

## Essentials of Home Management, #3

by Ginny Seuffert

Homeschooling Moms who have been following this series are hopefully getting some ideas to make the upcoming holy days less stressful and more of a family religious celebration. Essential #1 encouraged you to get rid of unnecessary clutter in your homes. Essential #2 extended the meaning of clutter to include those activities which distract us from our primary focus of raising our children in the Faith. By getting rid of things, and simplifying our lives, we take a huge step in the direction of having orderly and cheerful households. This column will relate those ideas to this holy season and talk about how we create stress for ourselves by setting unrealistic goals during Advent and Christmas.

Do not surrender the victory you won over all the “stuff” you tossed out, by replacing it with more unnecessary Christmas gifts. Naturally all parents wish to be generous during this joyous season, but choosing gifts carefully will help to prevent us from drowning in a flood of material things. First, if dressers and closets are already filled to overflowing, do not buy any clothing presents. If a family member is claiming to have “nothing to wear,” then his or her dresser should be empty, not spilling over! Second, if your children rarely play with the toys they have now, why purchase any more? In both instances, strongly hint that unused clothes or toys would have to be donated, and out of the house, before St. Nick could be persuaded to leave new ones.

Consider Christmas gifts that add to family togetherness and fun, rather than to household clutter. Purchase tickets for shows and plays, holiday performances or exhibitions. For older children, give gift certificates for a beauty salon or a favorite restaurant. Pay for a ticket for your loved one to visit a close friend or relative. If you want something that can be wrapped and placed under the tree, choose board games the children will play as a group and enjoy with others. Try to avoid

expensive electronic games that take up space and isolate an individual child from other family members.

When it comes to holiday entertaining and other activities, do not forget to keep it simple. Sit-down dinners and buffets involve huge amounts of preparation, so consider some less stressful alternatives. You might invite family and friends to a Sunday after-Mass brunch and serve purchased bagels and muffins, some fancy cream cheeses, coffee and tea.

Parents of large families are often overwhelmed by holiday preparations, but would welcome a social event after the first of the year. You might wish to host an Epiphany Party after the gift-wrap has been thrown out, but the Christmas decorations are still up. Nothing is easier for adults than a wine and cheese party, with a bowl of fresh fruit on the side. If your children want to invite their homeschool buddies, let them plan their own menu and activities. Guests best remember parties where the hosts are gracious and welcoming, and the conversation is lively. Neither of these requires any work or cost!

Next month this column will deal with how a desire to perform *perfectly* often has the effect of



*paralyzing* us into not performing at all. Watch out for this during the holidays. Here's an example!

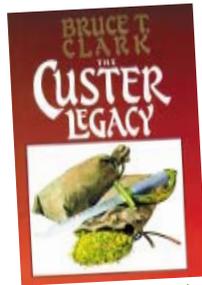
Your Aunt Lottie from Cleveland sends you a thoughtful and generous Christmas gift. A thank you phone call could not possibly convey to Aunt Lottie how truly grateful you are, so you decide to write a note. Looking around, you discover that you are all out of stationery so you postpone writing the note until you can buy some. The stationery at the grocery store is cheap looking, so you postpone your note writing until you can stop at the stationery shop one town over. Of course, you are so busy during the Christmas season that you forget all about the paper. Now you are so embarrassed to have postponed acknowledging such a lovely gift that you feel that you should send Auntie some flowers. A month goes by and you still have not thanked Aunt Lottie!

A prompt and appreciative phone call would have been preferable to no thanks at all. If only a note would suffice, you could have torn a piece of paper out of one of the children's spiral notebooks. "Dearest Auntie, This was the only paper I could find in the house, but I just had to write you and say thank you the moment I opened your generous gift!" *Remember simple is always best.*

It will be easier for us to remain serene during the holidays if we remember that, first and foremost, Christmas and New Year's Day (the feast of Mary, the Mother of God) are *holy days*. The most important decoration in our homes is the Nativity scene, and it takes just minutes to set up. When seasonal anxiety leads to short tempers, I remind my family of one of Blessed Mother Teresa's Christmas meditations. Mother said we must ask ourselves if St. Joseph were looking for safe shelter for the Blessed Mother and the Holy Child, could we offer them our home? Would the Holy Family enter a house of prayer and Christian charity, or would we be ashamed to have them witness our petty squabbles and selfish attitudes? Your entire home should be a living Nativity scene, focused on the Child born in Bethlehem, and alive with hosannas in thanksgiving for the Salvation God has sent His people.

*Materials from Seton Educational Media make great Christmas gifts!  
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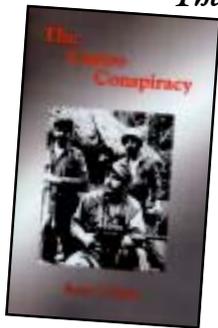
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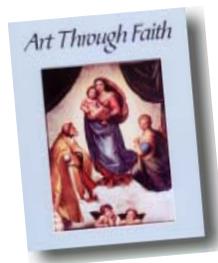
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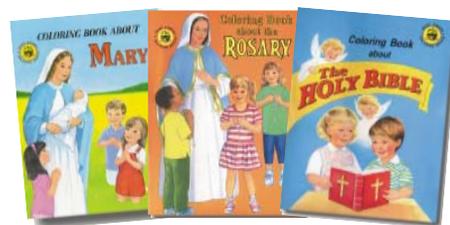
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## *The Beatitudes*

*by Rev. Robert Skeris*

The Gospel of the Eight Beatitudes is surely one of the best beloved passages in all of Holy Writ, and deservedly so. For the fact is that men of all climes and times have regarded the Beatitudes as the ladder, so to speak, or the staircase by which the saints have ever ascended to heaven. And if we desire to be with the saints in heaven, then each of us must also mount these same rungs, patiently and perseveringly, hand in hand with our Divine Master. Let us therefore take each Beatitude in turn, and reflect upon its meaning briefly, asking Almighty God to enlighten our minds and our hearts as we do.

**BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.** They are poor in spirit who, like the apostles, leave all temporal things for Christ's sake and become poor; they who have lost their property by misfortune or injustice, and bear this loss with patience and resignation to the will of God; they who are contented with their poor and lowly station in life, do not strive for greater fortune or a higher position, and would rather suffer want than make themselves rich by unlawful means; they who, though rich, do not love wealth, nor set their hearts upon it, but use their riches to aid the poor; and especially they who are humble, that is, who have no exalted opinion of themselves, but are convinced of their weakness and inward poverty, have a low estimate of themselves and therefore feel always their need, and like poor mendicants, continually implore God's grace and assistance.

**BLESSED ARE THE MEEK, FOR THEY SHALL POSSESS THE LAND.** He is meek who represses every rising impulse of anger, impatience and desire of revenge, and willingly puts up with everything that God, to prove him, decrees or permits to happen to him, or that men inflict upon him. He who thus controls himself is like a calm and tranquil sea, in which the image of the divine Sun is ever reflected.

**BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN, FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED.** The mourners mentioned here are not those who weep and lament over the death of relatives and

friends, or over misfortune or loss of temporal riches, but those who mourn that God is so often offended, so little loved and honored by men, that so many souls, redeemed by the precious Blood of Christ, are lost. Among these mourners are also those who lead a strict and penitential life, and patiently endure distress; for sin is the *only* evil, the *only* thing to be lamented; and those tears only, which are shed on account of sin, are useful tears, and are recompensed by everlasting joy and eternal consolation.

**BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER JUSTICE, FOR THEY SHALL HAVE THEIR FILL.** Hunger and thirst denote the ardent longing for those virtues which constitute Christian perfection. He who seeks such perfection with ardent desire and earnest striving, will be filled, that is, will be adorned by God with the most beautiful virtues, and will be abundantly rewarded in heaven.

**BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL FOR THEY SHALL OBTAIN MERCY.** They are merciful who assist the poor according to their means, who practice every possible spiritual and corporal work of mercy, who as far as they can, patiently endure the faults of others, strive always to excuse them, and willingly forgive the injuries they have received. They especially are truly merciful, who are merciful to their *enemies* and do good to them, as it is written: "Love your enemies, and do good to them that hate you." Well is it for him who is merciful, the greatest rewards are promised him; but a judgment without mercy shall be passed on the unmerciful.

**BLESSED ARE THE CLEAN OF HEART, FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD.** They are clean of heart who carefully preserve the innocence which they received in Baptism, and keep their heart and conscience free not only from all sinful words and deeds; but from all sinful *thoughts* and *desires*, and in all their omissions and commission think only and desire only good. These, while yet on earth, see God in all His works and creatures, because their thoughts are directed always to the Highest Good. And in the other world they will see Him face to face, enjoying in this contemplation a

peculiar pleasure which is reserved for pure souls only; for as the eye that would see well, must be clear; so must those souls be immaculate who are to see God.

**BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD.** Those are peacemakers who guard their improper desires, who are careful to have peace in their consciences and regulated tranquillity in all their actions, who do not quarrel with their neighbors, and are submissive to the will of God. These are called children of God, because they follow God who is a God of peace, and who even gave His only Son to reconcile the world, and bring upon earth that peace which the world does not know and cannot give.

**BLESSED ARE THEY THAT SUFFER PERSECUTION FOR JUSTICE' SAKE, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.** Those suffer persecution for justice' sake who by their words, writings, or by their lives defend the truth, the faith, and Christian virtues; who cling firmly to God, and permit nothing to turn them from the duties of the Christian profession, from the practice of their holy religion; but on its account suffer hatred, contempt, disgrace, injury, and injustice even like the saints, with joy. Then they will become like the saints and like them receive the heavenly crown. And if we wish to be crowned with them, we too must suffer with them; as St. Paul wrote to Timothy, "And all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution."

My dear friends in Christ! The rungs of the ladder formed by the eight Beatitudes can also be described and thought of in terms of the virtues; let us therefore beseech Almighty God, that He grant us all the grace to serve Him in sanctity and justice, in poverty and humility, in meekness and repentance, in the ardent desire for all virtues, by mercy, perfect purity of heart, in peacefulness and patience, following in the footsteps of the Divine Master, His only Son Our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be honor and glory, now and forever, and to the ages of ages. AMEN.

*Rev. Robert A. Skeris is the former Theology Department Chairman at Christendom College.*

## Letter of Thanks

*Editor's Note: Many people do not realize that Seton provides books and curriculums to a number of small schools and educational centers. Here is a letter from one such educational center:*

Greetings in Jesus Christ! Thank you for the prompt and professional attention that you gave [to a parent and student]. Once again Seton Home Study School has given another student a new lease on life and on success. We never hear the nice things that people say about us so I am going to write to you what I think of Seton Home Study School.

The counselors are the best. They are knowledgeable, accurate, and right on target. The receptionist who answers the telephone is polite, courteous, and most helpful. The curriculum is both challenging and religious. I do not think it can be matched. It is thoroughly Catholic and academically equipped to enable the students to make a difference in the world. The teacher aids, lesson plans, tests, and schedules help to make the job of teaching the material easier. This is excellent since most of the teachers are parents. The beauty of the curriculum centers around the Catholic faith and studying the lessons make it easier for the students to see that Religion has a part in every aspect of life.

In essence, here at Sacred Heart Educational Center, we use the program with the students who come to us to be home-schooled. We highly support the

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*Sister Mercedes Cook, SCMC  
Director*

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