

Mystics around the Manger
Advent Reflections on the Nativity of the Lord
at
Glenstal Abbey.

Sundays of Advent, 4.30-5.30 pm, Glenstal Abbey Library

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The Nativity of Christ touches every Christian in profound but different ways. This series of Advent lectures explores the manner in which four outstanding figures of the Christian tradition have explored the mystery of Christ's Incarnation and what their explorations have to say to Christians today.

Sunday, 2nd December

St. Hildegard's theology of the Feminine, the Incarnation and the senses

Dr Noirín Ní Riain

Hildegard of Bingen - composer, scientist, poet, visionary, ecologist, prophet, preacher and teacher- is a unique twelfth century female mystic yet her visionary writings provide a remarkable compendium of contemporary theology which ranges over such diverse themes as creation, the Trinity, the church and its sacraments and the centrality of the Incarnation. This overview of her life and work will explore her musical, scientific and doctrinal oeuvre and will feature some striking illuminated slides from her first celebrated book *Scito vias Domini (Know the ways of the Lord)*.

Dr Ní Riain is an internationally acclaimed spiritual singer who has performed worldwide. RTE has recently completed a major documentary on her life and work, including her Hildegard interest, to be broadcast in March 2008. She has played the title role, *Anima*, in Hildegard's work, the *Ordo Virtutum* (the Order of the Virtues), and has made numerous recordings of the saint's music over the years.

Sunday 9th December

The spirit of anonymity in the contemplations of the author of the Cloud of Unknowing

Dr Eric Graff

The author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* and six other Middle English treatises has become an authority in Christian contemplation despite his carefully maintained anonymity. His works have been celebrated by monastic figures from the early seventeenth century, such as Augustine Baker, to the late twentieth, such as Thomas Merton. This lecture will select from his works a series of images of the soul in contemplation, showing each one as an illustration of the conception and fruition of the human person as a gift. A short meditation on the fact of the incarnation will relate the works of the medieval author to the model of Christ's nativity. No prior experience with the *Cloud*-author will be expected, as the intent is to show the surprising durability of this medieval text within a modern religious context.

Eric Graff is a medievalist at the National University of Ireland, Galway. His doctoral dissertation at the University of Toronto was on the works of the *Cloud*-author. He has also studied the English mystic Richard Rolle, and produced an edition of the life and miracles of this Yorkshire writer. Dr. Graff has been in Ireland since 2002 researching the Irish scientific texts in Latin during the early Middle Ages.

Sunday, 16th December

St Teresa of Avila and the Humanity of Christ

Professor Terence O'Reilly

This lecture will trace the development of St Teresa's experience of prayer and her introduction to contemplation through meditation on the life of Christ. It will focus on the difficulties in prayer that she faced, and the deep insight she gained thereby into the mystery of the Incarnation.

Terence O'Reilly is Associate Professor of Spanish in University College Cork. He has published widely on the Spanish and Carmelite mystical traditions.

Sunday, 23rd December

Meister Eckhart on the Eternal Birth—Now.

Fr Philip McShane OP

Around 1305 Meister Eckhart, the German Dominican mystic, preached a cycle of four Christmas sermons. He began: “Here, in time, we are celebrating the eternal birth which God the Father bore and bears unceasingly in eternity, because this same birth is now born in time, in human nature.” And he goes on to quote Augustine, “What does it avail me that this birth is always happening, if it does not happen in me? That it should happen in me is what matters.” Here, in a few sentences, we have great Eckhart themes: the eternal... present, born in time... and not just historically, but here and now... in me: that is what matters. This talk will pause with Eckhart, to dwell in the timeless moment at the heart of everything as we stand on the threshold of Christmas.

Philip McShane OP is a Dominican and is Master of Novices for the Irish Dominican Province. He also lectures for the Priory Institute, St. Mary's Priory, Tallaght Village, Dublin 24.