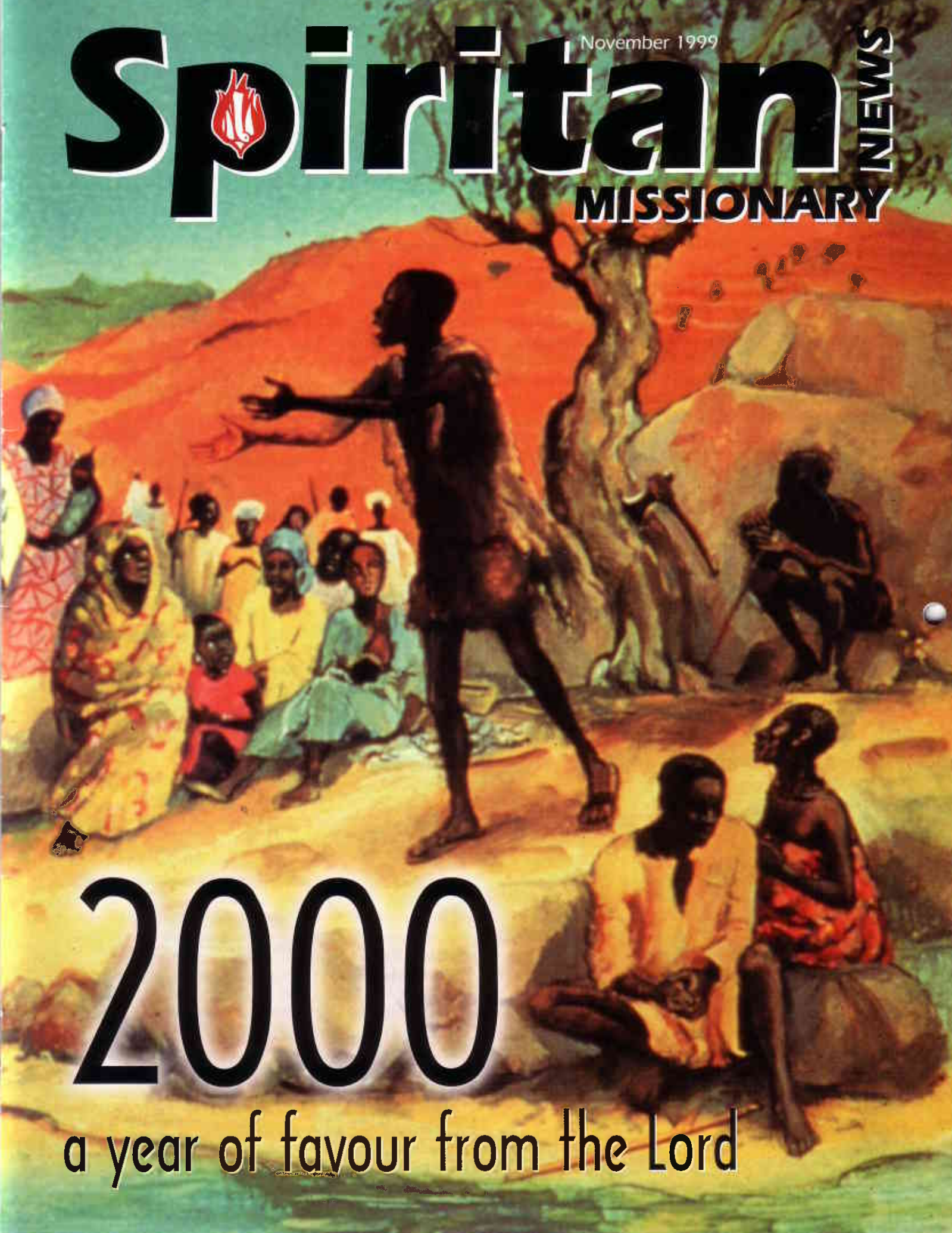


November 1999

Spirititan

SMEMN
MISSIONARY



2000

a year of favour from the Lord

One of Us

Two thousand years ago northern Europeans celebrated the winter solstice as the victory of light over darkness: evergreens and wheels of fire outside, good cheer, wassail within.

Then gradually a story spread through Europe from the Middle East. On the road, away from home, away from family, a child was born to Miriam of Nazareth in Bethlehem, the "house of bread." Voices in the midnight air told shepherds in the fields that they would find the newborn in a manger, a feeding trough for animals. Strangers from away, guided by a star, came to the capital city of the tiny land looking for the newborn. They too were told to go to Bethlehem.

Century upon century the story made its way through Europe. Jews and Gentiles, Romans and barbarians passed it on generation to generation by word of mouth and works of art. The grandeur of Byzantine art stressed his divinity, the homeliness of Western art underlined his humanity. The story of this man's life became more influential than all other stories. The winter solstice celebrations gave way to Christmas, as people came to believe that in him light achieved its ultimate victory over darkness, in him life conquered death.

One thousand years ago the Europeans had domesticated him. In art and sculpture, pageantry and poetry, stained glass and towering cathedrals he now belonged to this one continent. The Middle Eastern man, born of a Jewish mother, raised in a Jewish family, whose native language was Aramaic, had now become a white European. Wherever Europeans sailed he was on board.

Not quite everywhere. In Canada Jean de Brebeuf retold the story of his birth to Huron Indians: "She gave birth to a son, bound him up and had to place him inside a dugout canoe. For those who had come to be counted had taken all the spaces in every longhouse." From the same Jesuit missionary comes the best loved of Canadian carols: "Within a lodge of broken bark/ The tender babe was found. A ragged robe of rabbit skin/ enwrapped his beauty round." The Hurons knew nothing of mangers.

In our own day William Kurelek, Ukrainian Canadian artist, painted a Northern Nativity wherein Christ's birth occurs in typically Canadian settings. In the introduction to his Christmas art he asks two provocative questions: "If it happened then, why not now? If it happened there, why not here?" Then and there was two thousand years ago in Bethlehem. Now and here is 2000 A.D. wherever you and I are found. If it happened only then and there it is a once upon a time event. If it happens now and here it is ongoing.

Handel had his Messiah. The children of Regent Park, Toronto's inner city, have their oratorio each Christmas wherein a woman of no fixed address gives birth in a stairwell: "Who would think that in this part of town/ A miracle could happen: Look with your heart at each one you meet/ 'Cause its possible to see God on the street." We recall that Rembrandt painted himself as one of the people handing Christ down from the cross.

The artists in our Jubilee 2000 Calendar come from Cameroon, West Africa. We see Jesus through their eyes, in their familiar setting. He is one of them. They enlarge our imagination and prompt us to ask if we see him in our lives. Maybe they were the people Pope John Paul II was thinking of when he said, "Christ, in the members of his body, is himself African." Not a stranger or a foreigner. One of them. One of us. God with us seeking manger space.

Patrick Fitzpatrick CSSP

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The God of Beauty

Kathy Murtha begins a series of Gospel Reflections for the Millennium year. Kathy has served as a V.I.C.S. volunteer in Papua New Guinea and brings to this undertaking the insights she has gained experiencing the gospel through the eyes of another culture, and through her retreat work with high school students in Canada.

Early one glorious summer's day a friend called me into her garden to witness a rare sight — the blossoming of a tigridia flower. Being reluctant to leave my work, I didn't understand what the big deal was. My friend explained that not many people have ever seen a delicate tigridia flower which lasts only a few hours in the morning and then immediately begins to die. I had to admit that it was exquisite, but I couldn't help thinking — what's the point? My friend was baffled by my complacency and I was eventually forced to take a closer look at my attitude to life.

The passion of Jesus begins with one of the most beautiful and sensual stories of the Bible (John 12:1-8). While Jesus was dining at the house of a friend a woman came to him with a jar of the most expensive ointment. She proceeded to pour it on his head. The disciples were outraged at such a waste and insisted that "This could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." Jesus asked the disciples to not upset the woman for "She has done a beautiful thing to me". In the context of the passion story it becomes clear that her prophetic action of anointing was a true recognition of the sacred beauty and meaning of Jesus's life. It was something that others, even those who were close to him, failed to grasp.

Jesus was so touched by the woman's beautiful gesture that he declared "wherever in all the world this Good News is proclaimed, what she has done will be told also, in remembrance of her." Unfortunately, the woman's name has been forgotten, while the name of the betrayer is remembered by all. In our consumer society, which values only that which is useful in terms of the accumulation of profit, we fail to recognize the sacred power of beauty.

What strikes me about Jesus is his capacity to receive something of beauty — the cold refreshing water from a well, the few loaves and fishes of people gathered for nourishment, the gift of friendship, the wisdom of the lilies of the field. His busy earthly ministry began when the skies broke open with a declaration of his sacred beauty. And as his journey takes him to Calvary he is once

again reminded and sustained by a sense of his beautiful dignity.

Beauty dignifies our human life and heals and nourishes our souls. In the face of beauty we become disarmed and child-like. We are emptied of our need to possess, dominate and exploit. We enter into communion with others and the earth itself.

As I prepare myself for the Jubilee Year I seek to open my eyes and heart to beauty. Given the power of beauty to unfold us in the love of God and to lead us into the boundless joy of our Creator, I wish to expand my capacity to receive and delight in the beauty the Divine Artist lavishes upon His creation. And next year when I am invited into a garden of rare delights I think I will sit awhile. ☪

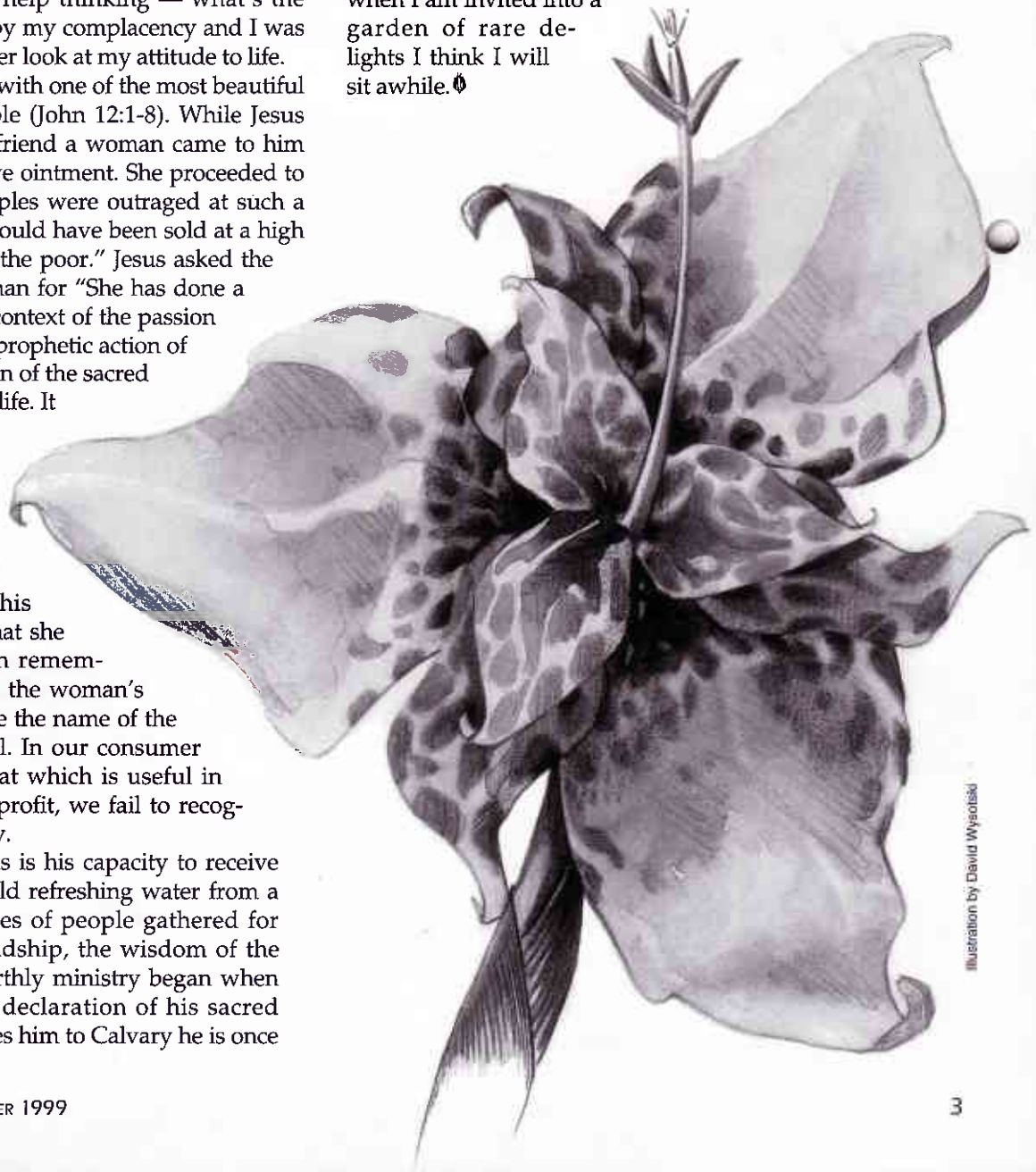
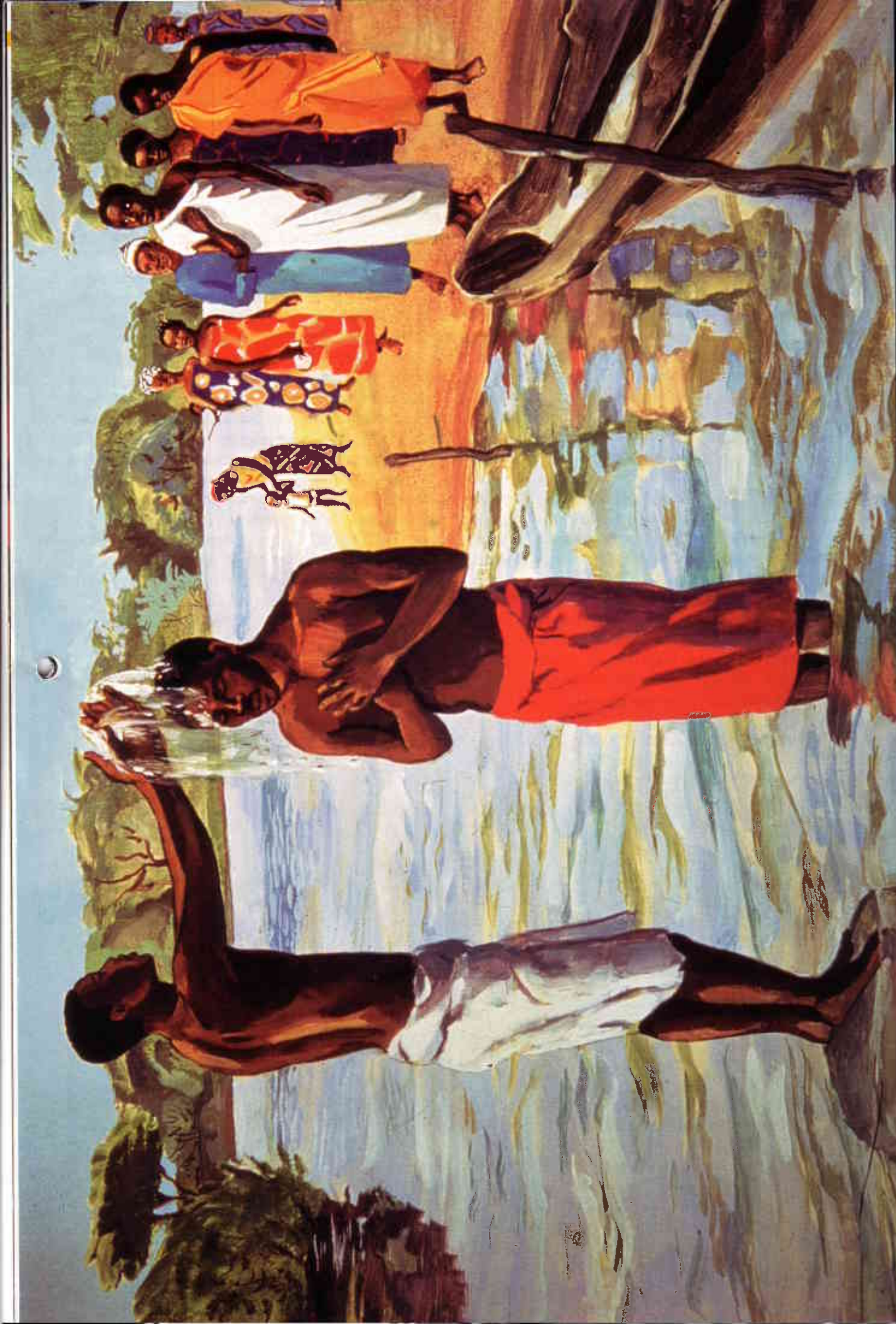


Illustration by David Wysotski



"You are my Son, the Beloved"

SUNDAY		MONDAY		TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	
December 1999 S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31		February S M T W T F S 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29							1 New Year's Day
2	Epiphany of the Lord	3		4 St. Elizabeth Seton	5	6 Bl. André Bessette	7 Eastern Catholic / Orthodox Christmas	8	
9	Baptism of the Lord	10		11	12 St. Marguerite Bourgeoys	13	14	15	
16		17		18 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins	19	20	21	22	
23	2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time	24		25	26	27	28 St. Agnes	29	
30	3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time	31		Conversion of St. Paul					
	4th Sunday in Ordinary Time				St. Timothy, St. Titus	St. Angela Merici	St. Thomas Aquinas		

January 2000

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