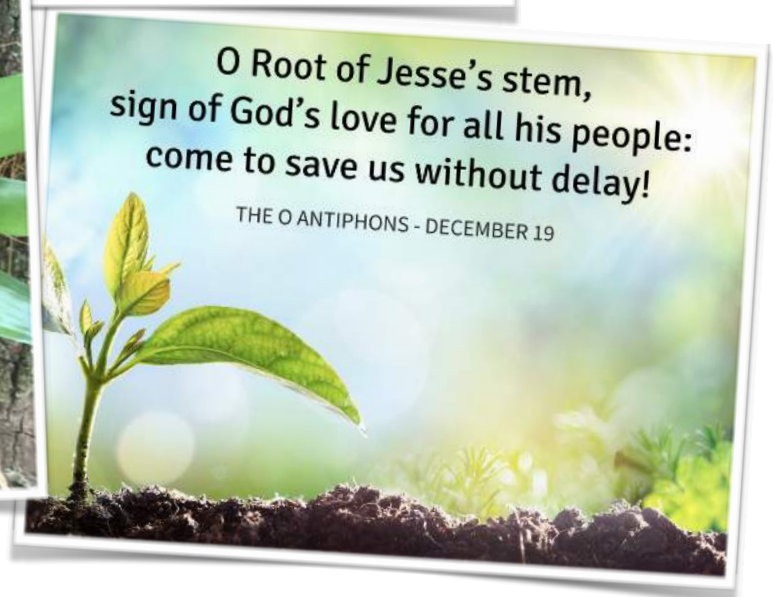
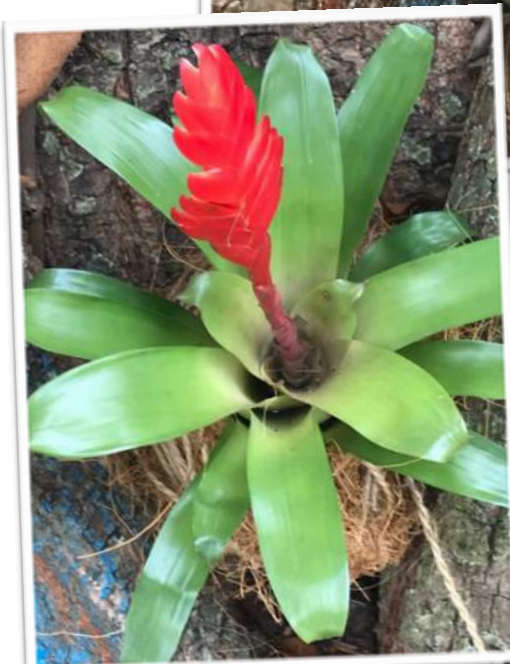


# A Shoot Shall Sprout

*“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.” (Isaiah 11:1-3)*



**Flaming sword bromeliad  
(Vriesea splendens) @ CSC**



# Finding God in the Garden

St. Ignatius of Loyola tells us that God can be found in all things. St. Teresa of Avila uses the garden as a metaphor for our own lives. She writes that we must “cultivate a garden on very barren soil full of weeds” and that we “must take pains to water [the seeds] so they don’t wither but bud and flower.” George Bernard Shaw writes, “The best place to find God is in a garden. You can dig for Him there.”

We too can find God in the gardens. With great joy, I have seen butterflies, wasps, ladybugs, bumble bees, and other insects happily feasting and dancing among the flowers and plants at CSC. They too find great pleasure. And in all of them, we also find God.

Some of us may be labelled as “brown thumb”, just like me, lacking of skill at growing plants; something possessed by a poor gardener. However, during this Covid-19 pandemic, growing plants and sprucing up CSC proved to be ‘fruitful’, flowers bloom and grow. With some gardening research, we opted for hardy plants known as the flaming sword bromeliad (*Vriesea splendens*, photo above). Known for its inflorescence, or long flower head that rises well above the foliage has bright red bracts, shaped kind like a sword and flat. Adapted both for indoor and outdoor. We planted it outdoor and they survived and thrived beautifully around CSC. Many other ferns and flora too.

Isaiah 11 begins with a striking prophecy of Jesus Christ. He prophesied that a “shoot” would spring up from the “stump” of Jesse. As Christmas time draws near, we look to the prophecies such as this one which speaks of anticipating the Messiah. Jesus is the shoot coming out of the stump. He is the one of whom the Spirit of the Lord uniquely rests and who shakes the whole world with His words. But this shoot from the branch of Jesse, even though the world tried to kill it, could not be kept down. Jesus will always be alive, constantly sprouting a new shoot of love and life into our hearts. We should water it and care for it, but even if we fail, nothing will stop the love of God from living on.

## Paradoxes of Advent

One of the most striking paradoxes of Advent is the clash between the serenity of the songs of the season and the blare of what has become known as “pre-Christmas hype.” Advertisers are in an orgy of activity – alluring, bombarding, compelling the customer. How sad it is that the come-on is so frequently accompanied by hymns that won’t be validly sung until late 24 December. What angels have heard on high is not a new stereo set. What shepherds come to adore is not a new blender. It is natural to seek respite from this crass display, to search out a place of peaceful communion with Christ who is the same today, yesterday and forever.

## Start Advent Now!

The Church's new liturgical year has begun. The peace of Advent is upon us. So much of the world begins with frenzy despite the pandemic still existing in the preparation for Christmas. Check out the newspaper ads or social media – the business of December accelerates. Each day, each week brings us closer to being too late. Advent has become manic!

The peace which the season of Advent should bring to hearts can be as deep as faith will permit it. To seek peace without a foundation of faith in the Lord is to chase the elusive butterfly. Today, survey the characteristic of our faith. If inner peace eludes us, the cause probably lies in our relationship with another person, God, or ourselves. Peace is another word for the satisfaction that is ours in making the Christian message come to life in our daily encounter with the world.

If peace of this season eludes us, look around our home. We will find many things which need to be done, many wrongs to be made right, many people who are hurting, many bruised relationships to be reconciled.

Many Catholics are not into making advent retreats, not into entering a time of solitude and deep prayer. We rather be “Martha” instead of “Mary” who sat at Jesus’ feet, listening to Him and Jesus acknowledged that Mary has chosen the better part.





Father Giles Conacher has been a Benedictine monk of Pluscarden Abbey for nearly fifty years. He spent several years in Ghana, West Africa, in the monastery of Kristo Buase. He is currently responsible for hospitality at Pluscarden, with its retreat houses for men and women. [www.pluscardenabbey.org](http://www.pluscardenabbey.org)



Father Michael Casey entered the Cistercian Abbey of Tarrawarra in 1960. Ordained in 1968, he studied Scripture at Katholieke Universiteit te Leuven 1971-1973, and received his doctorate from Melbourne College of Divinity in 1980, for a thesis on desire for God in the writings of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. Since then he has given retreats and workshops to monastic communities and others in every continent except Antarctica. He has also written many books and articles on spirituality and monastic history. <https://www.cistercian.org.au/>

**Friday 11 Dec, 2pm - 5pm** (Fr Giles Conacher, OSB & Fr Michael Casey, OCSO)

Talk 1: Watching & Waiting

Talk 2: Prayer & Life

Talk 3: What is in the desert?

**Saturday 12 Dec, 2pm - 5pm** (Fr Giles Conacher, OSB & Fr Michael Casey, OCSO)

Talk 4: Moments of Prayer

Talk 5: Hope in God

Talk 6: Hearers of the Word

***\* Both days with Silent Adoration & Contemplation***

**Some of you have joined CSC Advent Online Retreat on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Dec, and continuing on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> December with 'live' exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and contemplation.**

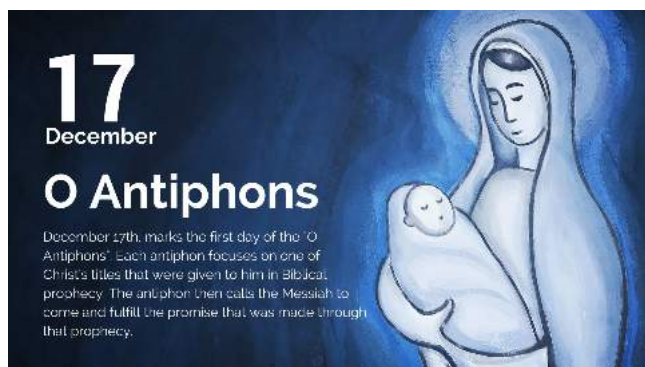
The Advent pilgrim seeks a straight path through the distraction of the season. Seemingly, many are afraid to go into the “desert experience.”

“In the desert prepare the way of the Lord!” We invite you to spend a few hours of solitude – the calm, fruitful emptiness of being alone with the Lord. Unfortunately, most of us are bound to the frenzy world. Conversely, the inability to escape the world is a blessing, for the Prince of Peace was sent not only to a few shepherds and hermits. But also to millions of frazzled commuters and hassled homemakers.

Today, make the effort. Do some rearrangement of our work schedule and priorities. Log down the two dates: Friday 11 Dec and Saturday 12 Dec (2pm-5pm), to attend this Advent Online Retreat and spend solitude time with Jesus and listen to two great teachers (monks) on prayer.

Create our home into a domestic church, a sacred space – A church is the only place where the presence of one person can be called a holy gathering. When we present our whole self – body, mind, heart and soul to the Father, we have gathered with Jesus to honour our common Father of us all. There is no other place and no other time that this gathering takes place.

Reclaim our priorities and invoke the peace today in our homes. We may have to take nearly heroic steps as Christ’s faithful to sit in the quiet of our home away from commercial chaos, we will begin to know, to experience, yes, to feel the love of the Living Lord! Seek the Lord in the garden of our hearts! Come, spend these days of Advent retreat online – the contemplative way. Like Mary who sat at Jesus’ feet. **Would you come and sit at His feet too?**



The Roman Church has been singing the "O" Antiphons since at least the eighth century. They are the antiphons that accompany the *Magnificat* canticle of Evening Prayer from December 17-23. They are a magnificent theology that uses ancient biblical imagery drawn from the messianic hopes of the Old Testament to proclaim the coming Christ as the fulfilment not only of

Old Testament hopes, but present ones as well. Their repeated use of the imperative "Come!" embodies the longing of all for the Divine Messiah.