

END-OF-THE-YEAR NEWSLETTER 2023

By Michael Galovic

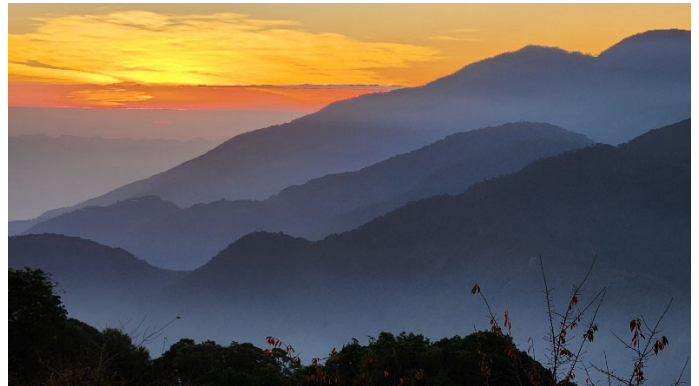
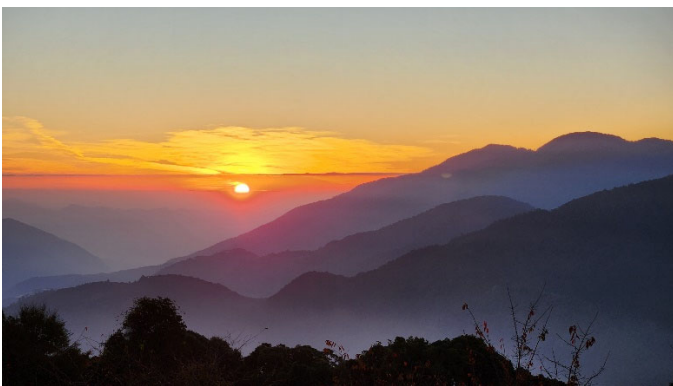
Dear All

Yet another end of the year that has crept in on us! I hope this finds you all well and keen to see this year behind us but not before celebrating it first.

This is my last newsletter for the 2023. I have just returned from a wonderful holiday overseas, in Okinawa and in Taiwan, both places on my mind to visit for a very long time. Japan holds a very special place in my heart and I plan to go there back next year again, and Okinawa is so very specific within the Nippon universe, being Japanese and yet not a typical one.

As for Formosa (“beautiful” in the Portuguese language), I did not know what to think of, my information was skimpy, yet I was made to believe it is a place well worth visiting. The tour around this wonderful island with a population of around 23 million proved to be the best way to have a decent idea of the place. With its many mountains and staggering number of tunnels, with its garbage trucks singing melodies much like the ice cream trucks, with forests and trees a thousand years old, with excellent cuisine and interesting specialities such as 100 years old egg or stinky tofu as well as improbably tasty ice cream, this island has so much to offer that one visit could not do it justice.

With a wonderful tour guide and most unusual driver, who is a philosophy graduate with special emphasis on the great Lao Tse, a former conductor of the military band for years and player of saxophone and another wind instrument and who has been doing this job of a driver to gain yet another life experience, our little group has experienced so much of Taiwan. Most of all, I would like to emphasise, it was meetings with good people all the time that matter. This was yet another reminder how despite all cultural differences and superficial outlook, we are all essentially the same people. I am so enriched by the visit to both those places and glad my year finishes with the trip very much echoing in my mind and heart.



In May I was in France and visited the Benedictine monastery in Brignoles. This early Romanesque monastery stemming from the time of Templars is being renovated and I was to make an icon of St Benedict for them. It felt good having to make yet another icon of such an important saint for the West in one of the many Benedictine monasteries throughout the world.

Through the unexpected and serendipitous turn of events, the abbot of the monastery came to Australia in November. I promised to make the icon which he could take back to France with him. And it happened that way, now the icon already being part of the monastery.

Saint Benedict, the most recent icon by Michael Galovic, 2023

Michael has created a number of works featuring Saint Benedict with each highlighting a different aspect or context.

In one of these earlier works, Saint Benedict is shown looking towards Heaven. The background painted in a vivid red, with the framing done in gold.

In another, Saint Benedict is looking downwards, with the background and framing in gold.

Each work depicts the saint holding a scroll relating to the Good Shepherd, with the background colours of red and gold respectively; the red symbolising love, charity and sacrifice and gold being the symbol of Divine Light.

In contrast to these two earlier two works, in Michael's most recent Icon of St Benedict, the saint's gaze is focused directly at the viewer and the tonsure given him by the monk Romanus is shown. St Benedict is holding a scroll that depicts the beginning of the Prologue of the Rule of St. Benedict:

'Ausculta, o fili, praecepta...'

'Listen, my son, to the Master's instructions'

The portrayal is evocative of earlier Icons, such as the 6th Christ Pantocrator in the Monastery of Saint Catherine, in its gaze, hand gesture and the holding of a text outlining a religion-focused way of life and, in its stillness, creating a sense of peace.

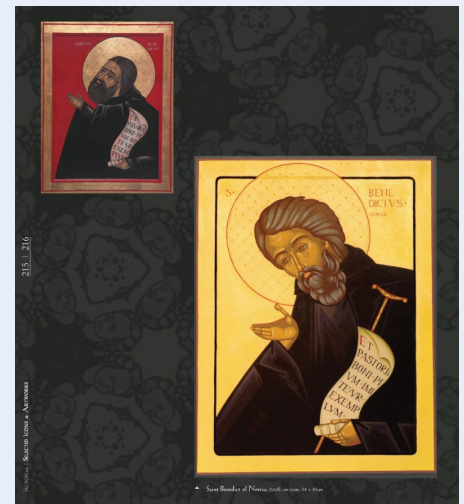
However, in contrast to the earlier icons, the halo, the arms and scroll flow into the frame – in a further expansion, the scroll and the arm of the hand holding it are not confined within the bounds of the work - in their incompleteness, they become part of the world of the viewer, creating a sense of liminality.

The delicateness and subtlety of the egg tempera throughout the work and the contrast between the darkness of the robe and the lightness of the rest of the work create an ethereal effect.

The halo is a particularly interesting feature. The dual colours of green and red represent Christ's dual nature as divine and human. The halo also highlights St Benedict's sanctity through the melding of three of the colours used in the liturgical year, with red being the symbol of Love, Charity, sacrifice and martyrdom, green being linked to nature and the renewal of vegetation, hence symbolising hope in the Resurrection, the foundation of Christian faith, and the golden yellow, symbolic of divine light.

The icon has given a visual form to the sanctity of St Benedict – it is a truly numinous work!

Kerrie Magee, 2023



Meanwhile, the work on Saint George and the Dragon continues. In Japan and in Taiwan, I was duly reminded how dragons have an entirely different if not opposite meaning and significance there. This has been underlined by me visiting an extraordinary show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Taipei, by a local artist, showcasing some 30 years of his work in painting, in sculpture and in installation. It was marvellous and gratifying seeing the life's work of a fellow artist which I came to admire.

This exhibition of St George v Dragon should coincide with the book launch, at least that is the idea at the moment.

In my previous newsletter you would have seen my painting The Flight into Egypt, 150x80cm for a primary school in Sydney's suburb of Rosebery.

The Rosebery Parish has used the image for a Christmas card, herewith attached, to reiterate my best wishes for you all for the Yuletide, end of the year 2023, and for the smooth transition into the 2024.

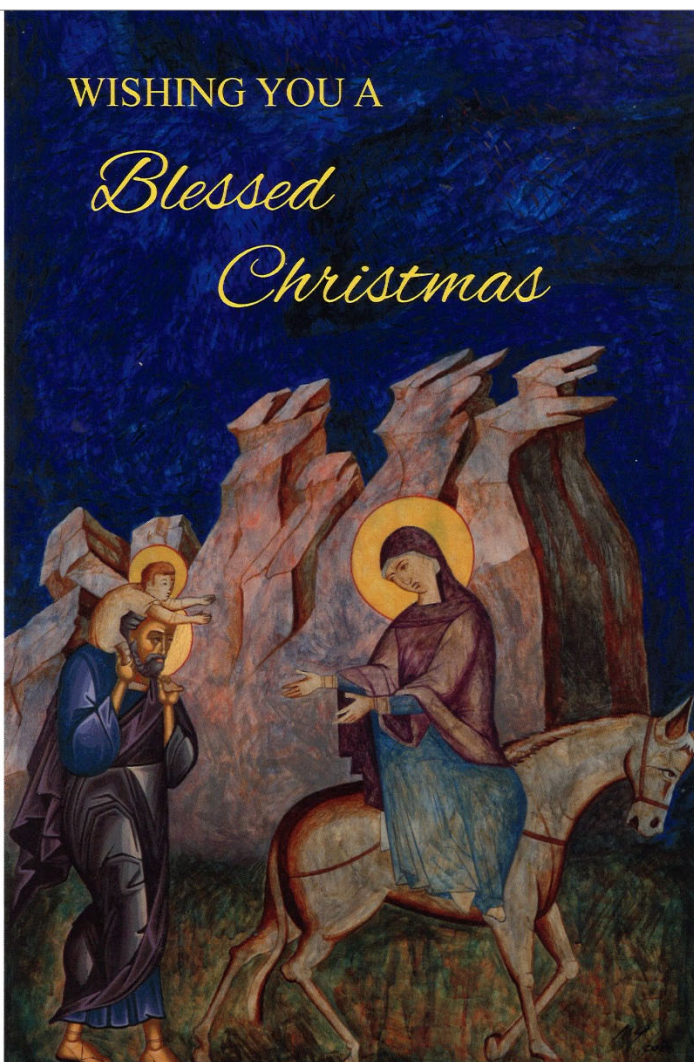
The Flight Into Egypt depiction is seldom seen on panel icons but more on medieval frescoes. In this version Saint Joseph is carrying the Christ child on his shoulders. The Child wants to be united with His mother, His arms are outstretched towards her who is riding a donkey and has her own arms pointing to the Child. This is a scene of empathy, family love, togetherness, all in the midst of an uncertain road framed with an ultramarine desert sky which envelopes the protagonists.

In traditional icons everything is detailed and highlighted as it is the Divine Light which permeates and infuses all things. In Michael's rendition, he chose to make St Joseph stand out by painting the rest of the scene in a washy, almost monochromatic way giving him the primacy in this rendition.

There is an uncanny parallel of this scene with the exodus and refugee crisis of our times. In these uncertain, unsettling times the unity and togetherness of the family comes to the fore and shows its value and importance.



Icon by Michael Galovic 2023



May you all be well and happy!

Michael Galovic

December 2023