

## President's Newsletter, December 2008

Dear Members:

We are fast approaching the end of 2008, and will soon face 2009!! Typically, this is both a festive period and a time for analyzing the balance sheet of the past year and it is true also for the SGI it has been an interesting year: exploring the world more intensely and moving part of its leadership outside of North America.

Many of the world's cultures and religions celebrate this time of year with a major festival:

- A) The Eid (an Arabic word meaning "festivity") is a Muslim holiday which marks the end of Ramadan (the holy month of fasting). It is a celebration occurring at the end of September or Early October, characterized by festive family meals, exchange of gifts and charity, attending a special Eid prayer.
- B) The Kwanza (derived from the Swahili phrase, *matunda ya kwanza*, "first fruits") is a world-wide celebration of life which honors the African heritage. First celebrated in 1967, it lasts from December 26 till begin of January. Each day focuses on a different principle of the African culture and heritage.
- C) The Yule was a Germanic pagan celebration of Winter (from late December to early January). The term is still used in Scandinavian and Scottish dialects.
- D) The Hanukkah or festival of lights is an 8-days Jewish festival celebrated between the end of November and the end of December and dedicated to the temple of Jerusalem (the lighting of the candles in the Menorah, a special celebration, is the main symbol of the festival).



*Francesco di Giorgio Martini 1450, Pala Tancredi, S. Domenico Church, Siena, Italy*

The Renaissance painting shown here depicts the birth of Jesus (Christmas) in a typical format: the adoration of the baby Jesus by his parents (Mary and Joseph), angels, shepherds and their flock, and other animals (cow and donkey). Typical for this period, the painting represents the "stable" with a damaged arch of triumph (symbolizing the end of the Roman Emperor).

From the earliest sketches found in the catacombs, Mary, Joseph and Jesus have been depicted in presence of "Three Wise Men." Later, during the Byzantine-Gothic period, the scene changed, showing Mary in a reclining position, prepared to deliver, with the parturition of Jesus taking place into a cave. With Saint Francis (1223), the manger was introduced ("before the edge" is the etymology of the Latin term "praesepire"), and the term presepio, crèche or crib came to define the nativity scene. During the Medieval period the first sculpture of a nativity scene was done by Arnolfo di Cambio.

The nativity scene gives rise to two different obstetrics considerations:

1. The natural childbirth occurs more frequently during the night. It is well known that spontaneous parturition and delivery have a higher incidence during night. Melatonin, cortisol, and circadian changes are currently suggested, but there is no a clear scientific evidence to explain this phenomenon.
2. The neonatal care is critical: the invention of thermic cribs replaced the animal/human warming up of the newborns. The first description of a crib for premature babies was made by Dr. Joseph B. de Lee in Chicago on 1898 and the first textbook of neonatal care is dated 1922 (printed in USA). But the most famous name in neonatology is Dr. Virginia Apgar, an anaesthesiologist who invented the Apgar score (1952) for evaluating the health of the neonates. Great progress has been made since the first neonate intensive care unit was established in New Haven (CT) in 1965. On 2005 more than 4.100.000 births occurred in USA and more than 500.000 (13%) required a neonatal care!!

Moving from the celebration of festivities to our SGI life the Program Committee and the Interim Council met on last 21-22 November at Miami Beach (Florida). The SGI Program Committee has made a big step forward in preparation of the 2009 Glasgow Meeting: abstracts received from 32 different Countries prompted a record number of presentations. Of the 133 Invited Lectures, (including the Satellites) more than 900 Posters and 150 Oral Presentations have been scheduled for March 18-21, 2009. Great job!!

The Interim Council revised the topics approached in the course of the 2008 and agreed to pursuit for the 2009 on the itinerary of being more visible, more international and more participative. In this direction the SGI International Summit will continue to go on, as well as the SGI Interdisciplinary Forum met already and will meet as working groups during the course of the 2009.

All the members are invited to collaborate: 5 minutes a day from each of us are sufficient to reach all the goals. A direct contribution may be to enrich our SGI website links created by the great effort of the Communication Committee in conjunction with our webmaster Linda Gildersleeve (in particular "Kudos" requesting to post any prize, award or honor received by a SGI member or "Job, Job, Job" for posting professional jobs). During the Interim Council a new link has been proposed and accepted: "Training Opportunities" for graduate and post-graduate opportunities to be posted and it summarizes the major SGI aim: to help the new generation of scientists to pursuit their excitement in research!!

Sincerely Yours and best wishes for all the festivities and for a Wonderful and Happy 2009!!

Felice Petraglia



SGI President