

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1987

Rabbi Cohen leads dialogue at St. Pius X Church

By Perilla Wilson

"Hear O Israel, the Lord is Our God, the Lord alone" (Deut. 6. 5)

A crowded Sarto Center at St. Pius X Church sang these words together in English and Hebrew, led by Rabbi Perry Cohen, at the presentation of a program on Mary sponsored by the Mobile Jewish/Christian Dialogue. Joining Rabbi Cohen was Ann Johnson, distinguished author, lecturer and scholar. "Miryam of Judah: Woman, Mother of Jesus, Faithful Jew," was the title of the program. Both speakers feel strongly that one must learn to praise God with song and dance, even as Mary would have done as a faithful Jew.

Rabbi Cohen called prayer a self-clarification wherein we turn to God, proclaiming His holiness. "To affirm life, we must be inspired with God's very essence," according to the Rabbi. He cited the Jewish practice of repentance, reminding all that "prayer and repentance culminate in righteous deeds."

Johnson pointed out that there are many sources of information about Mary in ancient Hebrew writings and a search of the Torah, the Hebrew sacred scripture will provide many

insights into the type of life Mary lived. Some of the things we know about Mary are that she spoke three languages, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. We know that she could read and was a teacher of the apostles after her Son's death and Ascension. According to Johnson, when Jesus gave Mary into John's keeping at the foot of the cross, He also "gave the community of apostles to Mary to continue teaching because around the table holiness is learned and lived."

Rabbi Cohen and Johnson presented a program for the fifth through eighth grades at Holy Family School, Mobile, demonstrating the way a faithful Jewish man and a rabbi wrap themselves with Torah scrolls and prayer shawls, and leading the children in prayer and song. Johnson diagrammed Mary's house and explained the use of the shawl by saying, "When you have a shawl over your head, you understand what it's like to have God's palm over your head."

They led the children in lighting the Sabbath candles and dancing to accompany their song. By the end of the service, all felt "covered with warmth and friendship," such is the effect of shared song and dance in prayer wrapped in the love of God.