



LOGOS

The Newsletter for St. John's Episcopal Church, Arlington

"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it." John 1:5

From the Rector: Gifts of Christmas

When I was a girl, my dad used to take the four of us kids out Christmas tree shopping. We always had to look at three or four lots before we finally selected a tree, even though we might have found a perfectly good one in the first lot. We wanted this fun activity to last as long as possible. Once purchased, the tree went up the weekend before Christmas. Dad put on the lights, we decorated and hung tinsel, and mom set up the Santa Claus collection on the mantel. The tree came down on New Year's Day. Every year. Without fail. On Christmas Eve after we came home from dinner at my cousins', we all got our pajamas on and mom would read "The Night Before Christmas" to all of us. Then it was off to bed. We found comfort in these familiar customs; it was part of what made Christmas Christmas.

We all have Christmas traditions that our families observe which give meaning to the holiday season. They may have to do with what we eat, how we decorate, who we spend time with or a host of other things.

In the church the Christmas season also has familiar traditions. The Advent wreath with its purple and pink candles reminds us that Christmas is coming. We hear the familiar stories of John the Baptist crying in the wilderness and of the angel Gabriel coming to Mary and asking her if she would bear God's son.

There are familiar things in Mary and Joseph's story, too. Since the Jews were an oppressed people, the idea that they would have to go to Bethlehem for a census at the emperor's decree would be normal. They weren't in charge of their own time; the empire was. It was also familiar for a young woman to be pregnant. With no birth control, pregnancy was common. Surely Mary was not the only pregnant woman on her way to Bethlehem. With all those descendants of David around, there were certainly other women in her condition. Another familiar piece of the Christmas story would be the shepherds in the hills keeping watch over their flocks. This occurred everywhere in Israel and was therefore totally unremarkable. Even the day was familiar to Mary and Joseph. The birth of their son was special for them certainly, but they did not expect anything extraordinary to happen. They would give birth in Bethlehem and take their infant son home.

Christmas gives us the gift of the familiar to remind us that Jesus was born as a human child, just as each of us was born, that he lived a human life and died a death full of human suffering. Jesus talked and listened, laughed and cried, ate and slept, just as we do and his humanity—his familiarity with our ordinariness—is what makes him Savior and Lord.

Christmas also gives us the gift of surprise. The wrapping paper and gift tags and tape and scissors come out of the closet or the attic. Bags and boxes come into the house and are quickly swept from sight. Young children make gifts at school for their parents, and older children use their allowance to buy gifts for even their peskiest siblings. Gifts bring surprises. I was never a child that looked in corners and closets because I liked being surprised. I always knew I was getting a book, but never what book. My other gifts were always surprises. I always knew there would be an orange in the toe of my stocking, but the other gifts hung there were exciting and marvelous to behold.

Another thing we are surprised by is what can happen in our hearts when we help those who are less fortunate than we are. Programs like Coats for Kids and Toys for Tots make us feel good that we can help. It warms our hearts to give almost as much, if not more, than does our receiving. At St. John's, we participate in the Salvation Army's Angel Tree project and those angels fly off the tree really fast. Our delight in giving comes out especially during the Christmas season.

For Mary and Joseph, their surprises began when they could not find a place to stay. Finally, one innkeeper told them they could bed down in the stable—a good thing since Mary was in labor. So they had their child and took care of him the best they could and figured that was it. But they were surprised again. Shepherds came running from the fields to tell about the angels they had seen heralding this baby's birth. They were telling everyone the good news about the coming of this baby to be the Messiah, the Lord. Everyone was amazed at the news.

Christmas brings us the gift of surprise—the Savior and Lord born as a vulnerable child, not coming into the world as an exalted king.

Christmas also brings us the gift of light. The lights on our trees, the candles in our windows, the lights on houses and in major public spaces all symbolize the light of Christ coming into our darkness and bringing us salvation. Mary and Joseph didn't see any light, unless Jesus really had a halo around his head, but there was light to be had. The glory of the Lord shone around the angels and terrified the shepherds. And there was the star—that strange star that traveled in a path all its own, leading the wise men to Bethlehem,

stopping in Jerusalem for the magi to get directions to Bethlehem and stopping again over the place where Jesus lay.

Whether it is a million bulbs in a display of Santa's reindeer flying through the air, or the glory of the Lord or the Star in the East, the light of Christmas is a gift. It reminds us that Jesus is the light that shines in our darkness, bringing salvation to all who will receive it.

The last gift of Christmas brings our world together with the world of Mary and Joseph. It is the gift of risk. We are invited to hear the angels, to follow the Star, to believe in a God that would enter our lives as intimately as God did in the form of a tiny baby. We are invited to risk believing that what the story says is true—that the Word that was in the beginning with God and was God has become flesh and dwells among us full of grace and truth. We are invited to risk letting go of control and putting our lives in the hands of this God. We are invited to walk with this God, to believe what he says and do what he does, even when it is hard to do so. And we are invited to give our lives to living into God's vision for the world. We are invited into intimacy and relationship with a God who touches our hearts. Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, the wise men, and we are invited to risk taking an unknown path, supported by the familiar, encouraged by surprise and led by the light.

May you not just notice, but enjoy and take advantage of these gifts, not just at Christmas, but every day. A joyous Christmas to you and a blessed new year.

Ann†

A Caroling We Will Go

Mark your calendar for December 20, when the members of St. John's will gather at 5 p.m. and walk through the Glencarlyn neighborhood singing traditional Christmas carols. This is a St. John's tradition and requires only:

- Christmas spirit
- An enjoyment for singing Christmas Carols
- A warm coat

Following the caroling we will warm up again with hot chocolate and cookies in the undercroft. Join us for this fun Christmas caroling event.

Shrine Mont Weekend a Big Success

“Small is Beautiful” was the theme of our 2009 retreat at Shrine Mont. Those who joined us, amid the brilliant fall colors of Orkney Springs, ranged in age from eight to eighty. We all came together on Friday evening for the first of six fabulous Shrine Mont meals in the lovely old hotel.

Under the gentle tutelage of our leader, the Reverend Grace Cangialosi of Ruckersville, Virginia, we gathered for a weekend of rest, relaxation, community, and spiritual growth. We chose the theme, “Small Is Beautiful” to emphasize what is good about our small church and to use it as a basis for a discussion about growth. Rev. Grace led us in Art Hall for three sessions which focused not only on growth, but also on this: “Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words.”

The adults spent the first of three sessions together, while our children went off with Norka Antelo and Valeria Guzman to prepare songs and a skit for the rest of us...and to do a lot of running around! We talked about what we value most about St. John’s and made lists of our assets: Our people all know each other; each of knows we are needed; we are there for each other; we know what each of us, and our church, needs; we are flexible and responsive; we are friendly, tolerant, diverse—and we welcome children.

In the next session, we made lists of the gifts of St. John’s congregation: our willingness, generosity, creativity. We also listed as gifts those dedicated members of our congregation who are our leaders, ushers, readers, musicians, educators, chalice bearers; those who comprise our altar guild, card ministry, prayer ministry and fellowship sponsors. These small groups of people are dedicated to St. John’s and make us a special place to worship and enjoy community. Reverend Grace was very generous with her time: she also taught us centering prayer and how to make Anglican prayer beads.

In our final session, we explored how we would like to expand: Small groups to meet on an informal basis to socialize in fellowship; reaching out further in evangelism; and prioritizing specific ministries (we cannot do it all). We also talked about finding a project in which we could all participate and which could include the community and the congregation of Cristo Rey. The children wrapped up our final session

with several wonderful songs and a play whose theme was “Christ was Cool!”

Sunday morning, the rain and the cold drove us into Art Hall for the last time. Reverend Grace ended our retreat by encouraging all of us to focus less on “growing” and more on “living” and “sharing” the Gospel within the context of all our gifts and talents.

We all had a blessed time and we look forward to having even more of our St. John’s children with us next year. Save the date: October 15-17, 2010.

A Weekend at Shrine Mont from a Kid’s Eye View

The kids from St. John’s had a great time at the Shrine Mont retreat. We stayed in a great, big, white house with an upstairs and downstairs with about seven rooms upstairs and two downstairs. Downstairs there was a big living room where all of the kids hung out.

When we got to Shrine Mont it was cold and rainy. Even though the weather wasn’t great, we still found ways to spend a lot of time outside. During the summer the trees were all green and it was really hot, but to be one place in a different season it feels like a new place. The trees were colorful like a painting across the sky.

Many things seemed different, but one thing that stayed the same was the food! Just like at summer camp, the food was delicious! We all ate so much that the people who worked at Shrine Mont had to keep bringing us more and more food! We all couldn’t wait until the bell rang for the next meal.

What reminded us of being at Shrine Mont for summer camp was when we got to perform a song for everyone on Saturday night. We sang one of the songs we had learned at camp. We also got to perform a skit that Norka and Valeria helped us put together. It seemed that everyone enjoyed listening to and watching us.

On Sunday before we left we had a very nice church service that the kids went to also. Rev. Grace led a fantastic service that was different from being in church. We appreciated Rev. Grace’s helpfulness at the retreat.

Luckily we didn’t have a block schedule. We could do what we wanted when we wanted. We got to spend time just relaxing. It was a free weekend for the kids and we love Shrine Mont.

Vestry Notes

This month we begin a new feature in LOGOS, “Vestry Notes”, which provides a summary of the monthly vestry meeting. The purpose of this column is to share with the congregation information on issues before the vestry and actions taken by the vestry. Vestry meetings are normally held at 7:00 on the second Tuesday of each month. This means the vestry meeting is usually only a few days before the LOGOS deadline, so the summary is current news. It also means the vestry register, Bill Schenck, has a short deadline for preparing the notes. We kick off this column with notes from the October and November meetings.

October

Stewardship: Those attending the meeting after church on October 4 provided helpful suggestions regarding goals for next year. These have been prepared and distributed. There will be an open meeting on November 22 to discuss the financial situation.

Rector’s Letter of Agreement: Senior Warden Bill Thomson presented a draft which updates the agreement between St. John’s and The Rev. Ann Barker. The original letter of agreement dates to her hiring in 2001; this updates pertinent information and specifies vacation, salary, etc. After discussion and changes, the Vestry approved the letter.

New Vestry Members: Bill Thomson’s, Jan Hull’s, and Marshall Adair’s terms expire in January; the Vestry discussed several potential nominees.

Highlights of the Rector’s Report: Ann reported with information from Trinity Episcopal, which had a booth at the Arlington County Fair, on the cost (\$360), uncertainty (notification comes about one month before the fair) and the need for giveaways. The Vestry felt that the time and money would be better spent on advertising in local media.

Thanksgiving Service: The Vestry supported Ann’s recommendation that instead of a Thanksgiving Eve service, we celebrate, as we did last year, at the preceding Sunday service and hold a pot-luck following the 10:00 service.

Prayer Books and Hymnals: Ann will purchase replacement books with funds donated by Michael and Stephanie Beavin, with appropriate bookplates in each book.

Junior Warden’s Report: A church-wide clean-up date will be on Saturday, November 21. Brian Cavey will compile a list of tasks and a sign-up sheet.

Other Items:

The Vestry approved a suggestion by Brian and Beth Cavey, who run the card ministry, to have the Vestry sign and send Christmas cards to members. The Cavey’s will cover the expenses.

Arlington County has a new policy of accepting only gift cards for the Secret Santa program so in order for parishioners to actually purchase gifts, St. John’s will participate in the Salvation Army’s “Angel Tree” program.

November

Shrine Mont: Faye Pritchard presented a summary of the discussions from the Shrine Mont weekend. The theme was “Small is Beautiful” and the results of the discussion focused on the benefits of being a small church and emphasis on our members spreading the Gospel through example.

Stewardship: About \$120,000 has been pledged, although a few possible pledges are still not in. The Finance Committee will be making its recommendations for the 2010 budget, but it appears to be a lean budget year.

Volunteers: Getting people to volunteer for projects is always difficult; the consensus was that members of the vestry should not take up the slack and that if it is a small project, Ann should ask individuals and call for volunteers for larger projects.

Donations: St. John’s is fortunate to get the occasional financial donation. The vestry thought it a good idea to publicize the donations in LOGOS.

Senior Warden’s Role: Bill Thomson asked for clarification of the role of the senior warden and church committees. It is unclear if the senior warden serves on the Finance Committee and the Building and Grounds Committee. The vestry solved this by making the senior warden an ex-officio member of all committees—he (or she) can attend and participate but doesn’t have a vote.

Landscaping: Ann said that Brad White had donated \$1,000 for landscaping the front of the church, reading a moving letter from Brad. The son of Liz White, Brad grew up at St. John’s and as Boy Scout and Eagle Scout helped to landscape the church’s front. Now, twenty-two years later, Brad (who lives in Atlanta) believed that this earlier landscaping probably needed replacing.

Youth To Present Christmas Pageant

In the middle of all their other activities (coffee project, bagged lunch program, Jesus as a steward of creation and hospitality), the youth of the parish will present a Christmas pageant on Sunday, December 20 following the 10:00 a.m. service. The service will be shortened and the pageant added at the end. We'll all have the opportunity to see the youth perform and sing Christmas carols almost a week before Christmas. Mark your calendars.

Christmas Flowers

A beautifully flowered altar at Christmas is a St. John's tradition. Look for the insert in the bulletin December 6, 13, and 20 for your opportunity to donate to this St. John's tradition.

Adult Education Focuses on Celtic Spirituality, Bible Study

In December and January, the Sunday 9:00 a.m. adult education class will wrap up its sessions on Celtic spirituality and begin a Bible study (book as yet unchosen). In the spring we will also hear about the differences in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) from Bill Schenck. Everyone is invited to join us.

Book Club Selections

St. John's Book Club meets the first Tuesday of each month for a lively and informative discussion of its selection. It is never too late to join the book club. All selections are available through local libraries or book stores. In coming months the book club will be reading:

March by Geraldine Brooks (December 2009)

44 Scotland Street by Alexander McCall Smith (January 2010)

The Bridge at San Luis Rey by Thornton Wilder (February 2010)

The Battle for God by Karen Armstrong (March 2010)

For More Information . . .

Every Sunday there is a series of announcements in the service bulletin—who donated the flowers on the altar, UTO Sunday is coming, parish cleanup scheduled. Many of these brief announcements conclude

with the phrase “for more information see” one of the bulletin boards in the undercroft. There a number of bulletin boards in the undercroft, all dedicated to important information about church events. When was the last time you looked at these bulletin boards?

When you come down the stairs from the fifth street side of the church there is a large bulletin board on your left. This displays the church calendar for the year. When is something scheduled? Look at the calendar—there is the answer. To the right side of the stairs is the Opportunities board which shows upcoming events around the area.

Between the doors to the kitchen are two bulletin boards—the St. John's board and one beside it for Youth News. These have pictures of events, thank you notes from people touched by St. John's programs, parish and diocesan news and surprises. On the wall near the piano is the Outreach Opportunities board, highlighting various ways to get involved in outreach.

To the left of the kitchen over in the corner is the international bulletin board, with information on outreach projects that go beyond the borders of our country and reach around the world, and also listed are local volunteer agencies.

Beside the counter where coffee is served on Sunday mornings is a board called “Where We Live” that shows where we physically live on a map of the area as well as where we live spiritually—St. John's mission and vision statements.

And then there are the tables—one in front of the St. John's board with more information and one near the table with name tags that has lots of worthwhile information on avoiding the flu—both the seasonal flu and H1N1 flu.

Do you read the bulletin boards or does your eye glance past them expecting familiarity? Like the Christmas season, the bulletin boards may have the familiar, but they also have gifts and surprises.

LOGOS

The LOGOS is published nine times a year

Dave Dunlap, LOGOS Editor

Email Dave at dave_dunlap@yahoo.com

The next deadline is Thursday, January 21 at 10:00 am.

Parish News

Thank you

To Don Hess and Brian Cavey for replacing lights around the church

To Del Hunt for his coordination of the bagged lunch program during 2009

To the youth for taking on coordination of the bagged lunch program for 2010

To Jan Hull for delivering the food we collect for the Arlington Food Assistance Center (AFAC)

To Kay Wells, for her help with the November LOGOS and the volunteer list

To Dave Dunlap for serving as stewardship chair

To Del Hunt, Marshall Adair and Liz White for beginning the re-landscaping of the front slope

To Dave Dunlap for another year of editing the LOGOS

To Jane Edwards for another year of dedicated service as webmaster and page layout editor of LOGOS

We appreciate gifts from

The Beavin family, for new prayer books

Brad White, for re-landscaping front slope and grounds

December and January Birthdays

December 5	Barbara Hill
December 5	Lindsey Miller
December 5	Laura Wallace
December 6	The Rev. Catherine Campbell
December 6	Del Hunt
December 7	Galen Henderson
December 11	Madeline "Maddie" Harbin
December 14	Angela Swarr
December 16	Lori Held
December 19	Angie Rollet
December 24	Roger Henderson
December 24	Vernon Martin
December 27	Eileen Flynn
December 27	Camron Tallent
December 31	Emily Lodsun
December 31	Emily Tyson
January 1	Patricia Broida
January 2	Janet Spence
January 4	Keelyn Del Gallo
January 5	Don Hess

January 5	Chris Tyson
January 14	Tony Kollath
January 19	Paul Stenger
January 20	Greg Hall
January 26	Ariel Hall

December and January Anniversaries

December 13	Dave & Carol Dunlap
December 31	Klaus & Lori Held
December 31	Don & Penny Hess
January 11	Robert L. Rawls, III & Harriet Sheehan Rawls
January 22	Greg & Laurie Hall
January 24	Anna & David Scherer

This Printer Needs a Home

There is an Epson Ultra Hi-Definition R-280 Photo Printer available for adoption. This has been donated to St. John's by someone who can not use it, and can be adopted for a donation to the church. Call the church office for more information.

Get Your LOGOS by Email

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December / January Issue

This is the December / January issue of the LOGOS. Expect the next issue near the beginning of February.

St. John's Mission Statement

To discover and share the transforming love of Christ

St. John's Vision Statement

St. John's is dedicated to making disciples for Jesus through

- attracting and welcoming newcomers;
- sharing faith-deepening worship, education, outreach, and pastoral care; and
- together carrying God's vision of the kingdom into the world around us.

Gospel Lessons for December and January

December 6, Second Sunday of Advent Luke 3:1-6

As did classical Greek authors, Luke places an event (John's ministry) in the context of rulers, here both secular and religious. (V. 1a gives the most precise dating of the start of Jesus' ministry in the gospels, i.e. 26-29 AD.) "Herod" here is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. "Caiaphas" (v. 2), Annas' son, is now high priest but his father retains his prestige (and power). The Greek translated "the word of God came" (v. 2) is the same as in Jeremiah: Luke sees John as continuing Jeremiah's role of announcing judgment at the end of the era and a new pact with God, available to all. John travels throughout the Jordan Valley, preaching return to God's ways and being ethically and spiritually renewed, here (vv. 4-6) expressed through metaphor. (These verses are from Isaiah 40:3-5.) Luke makes one change in the quotation: "his" (v. 4) emphasizes that it is Jesus for whom he prepares the way. To Luke, "all flesh" (v. 6), all people, not only Jews, will have the opportunity to be rescued from sin.

December 13, Third Sunday of Advent Luke 3:7-18

Luke has told us that "... the word of God came to John ... in the wilderness. He went into all the region ... proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins ..." (vv. 2-3). Now John the Baptist addresses people in general ("crowds", v. 7): he calls them "vipers" (poisonous snakes common in Judea), and accuses them of being baptised with no intention of starting a new, ethical, life. If they think that by being baptised they will evade God's judgment at the end of the era ("wrath to come", v. 7), they are wrong: they must also turn to godliness. Being Jewish, having "Abraham as our ancestor" (v. 8) is no assurance of salvation, for anyone who responds to God's gift of love with appropriate behaviour will be part of the renewed Israel. The people have a choice (v. 9): either respond to God's offer by beginning a new way of living, or face condemnation at the end of time. (Here "fire" symbolizes adverse judgment.) God will fulfil his promises to Abraham in unexpected ways! Luke gives us three examples of behaviour which fit with turning over a new leaf. The "crowds" (v. 10) are probably ordinary people; they should have selfless concern for the disadvantaged. In spite of attempted reforms, "tax collectors" (v. 12) still collected more than prescribed.

The "soldiers" (v. 14) were probably Jews in the service of Herod Antipas; they too were despised. John tells them that they should follow the emperor's guidelines on military conduct. That "What should we do?" is answered here and elsewhere in various ways probably indicates that simply following rules is inadequate: we must ask again and again in openness to God's will. At the time, people expected the Messiah to come at any moment (v. 15): perhaps John would restore Israel's fortunes and God's power would triumph now. John says that the baptism he offers is vastly inferior to Jesus' baptism: for Jesus, he is so unworthy that he cannot even do a slave's task ("untie ...", v. 16). (In Acts 2:3, fire is associated with the Holy Spirit.) V. 17 says, in agricultural language, that the godly ("wheat") will be gathered to Christ but the ungodly ("chaff") will be destroyed. John preached a message of forgiveness of sins and the advent of a new relationship between people and God.

December 20, Fourth Sunday of Advent Luke 1:39-55

An angel has appeared to Zechariah in the Temple, and later the angel Gabriel has come to Mary. Zechariah has been told that his wife Elizabeth will bear a child in her old age; Mary has heard that she will bear a son to be called Jesus and "Son of the Most High" (v. 32), of God. God will make him a king of David's line; he will rule Israel for ever. Now Mary visits her "relative" (v. 36) Elizabeth. A scholar tells us that the Greek words translated "with haste" (v. 39) can be rendered very thoughtfully. In telling us that "the child" (v. 41, John the Baptist) "leaped" in Elizabeth's womb, Luke intends us to understand that John recognizes his Lord, Jesus. Elizabeth's reaction, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is to praise Mary. Luke's first readers would have recalled the liberation brought to Israel militarily by two women called "blessed" (v. 42) in other books: one in Judges, the other in Judith. Elizabeth "exclaimed with a loud cry" (or voice)—the way marvelous prophecies were given in the Old Testament. V. 43 translates a Semitic idiom: today Elizabeth might say: How can I be thought worthy of being visited by the mother of my Lord? V. 45 portrays Mary as the model believer: she trusted that God would keep his promise made through Gabriel, preposterous as it sounded. Mary now thanks God in a poem known as the Magnificat, the first word of its Latin translation. Speaking today, she might

begin: From the depth of my heart, I declare the Lord's greatness and rejoice in God my Saviour. "Servant" (v. 48) can also be rendered slave or handmaid: in v. 38, she has acknowledged that she is a "servant of the Lord", i.e. obedient to him in all things. She will be hailed by people of every age ("generations", v. 48) in the new era of salvation launched by her son. Why? Because of the seemingly impossible "things" (v. 49) God has done for her. Then a reminder (v. 50): God is compassionate to all who hold him in awe throughout time. Vv. 51-53 universalize her experience, to reflect how God deals with all humanity. While the verbs are in the past tense in English, the Greek tense has the sense of:

- how God customarily acts—as he always has and will continue to do—and
- what he is starting to do in the conception of Jesus.

The "proud" (v. 51), the arrogant, are alienated from God by their very "thoughts"; he reverses fortunes, raising up those in need ("lowly", v. 52, "hungry", v. 53) and rejecting the rich, those who think they don't need God. Vv. 54-55 sum up the Magnificat: in his compassion, God has fulfilled and continues to fulfill his promises to the patriarchs.

December 25, Christmas Day Luke 2:1-14,(15-20)

Luke is concerned to place Jesus in the time-line of history, as a real human being. We know of Augustus' attempt to clean up the taxation system: as well as requiring more reasonable practices of tax collectors, he introduced a truly equitable tax: a poll-tax. Every 14 years, a census was held: people were required to present themselves in their ancestral towns, to register for the tax. Records are fragmentary but we do know that a census was held by "Quirinius" (v. 2) of Syria in 6-7 AD. Perhaps Judea was included in a census of 8-7 BC, "the first registration". From Matthew 2:16, we know that Herod the Great sought to kill Jesus by slaughtering all children aged two or less. Because Herod died in 4 BC, Jesus was born no later than 6 BC. The dates agree. Joseph and Mary travel to Bethlehem, the city of David, to "to be registered" (v. 5). Jesus is born in Bethlehem in fulfilment of the prophecy of Micah 5:2-5: a shepherd-king is to be born there. In v. 7, Jesus is treated like any other newborn of the time: he is wrapped in cloths, but there may be a message in his being born in "a manger": animals normally fed from it; Jesus is sustenance for the world.

In vv. 8-14, we learn the meaning of Jesus' birth. Those who hear the pronouncement by the angel are "shepherds" (v. 8), lowly people. David too was a shepherd; in Luke, Jesus comes to the poor, the lowly. The message of Christ's birth is indeed a joyful one—for all. V. 11 mentions our great claims as to who Jesus is: "Saviour", "Messiah" and "Lord". As "Saviour", he restores us to wholeness, rescues us from sin and alienation from God. In Jesus, God is present with sinners and saves us from destructive self-isolation to union with him, in a nurturing community. As "Messiah", he inaugurates the era of heavenly peace: the end-time has begun. As "Lord", he is God come in human form. The kingdom is for all those whom God has chosen (v. 14b). In vv. 15-20 the shepherds visit Jesus, Mary and Joseph. They tell them and many others the good news the angels have told them.

January 3, The Epiphany Matthew 2:1-12

Matthew, in writing "In the time of King Herod", sets a late date for the birth of Jesus: Herod the Great, puppet king of Judah, died in 4 BC. "Wise men" (Latin: magi) were members of a Persian caste of astrologers and interpreters of dreams. (Astrology was widely accepted then.) A star was associated with each person; the way the star rose told the wise men that a king had been born. If the story of the star is intended to be historically significant, the star may have been a supernova or a comet, or a conjunction of planets. Numbers 24:17-24 prophesies that "... a star shall come out of Jacob, a sceptre shall rise out of Israel", and that this ruler will conquer surrounding nations. Herod's fears are aroused because his dynasty may be ended. He consults the religious experts to find out where the magi should look for the Messiah. They answer with Scripture: they loosely blend Micah 5:2 and 2 Samuel 5:2. (Such license was common at the time.) At David's anointing as king, the elders quote God as saying "he shall be shepherd of my people Israel". The maximum age of the children to be killed per Herod's edict (v. 16) tells us the "exact time" (v. 7) that he learnt from the wise men. V. 8 is classical political duplicity. The star guides them to Bethlehem, where they are "overwhelmed with joy" (v. 10). The gifts are extremely generous; "gold" (v. 11) and "frankincense" are mentioned in v. 6 of today's first reading. We read that Gentile wise men visited Jesus. A later church tradition called the wise men kings, based on v. 10 of today's psalm, and still later the Church said

that there were three of them. The Western church gave them names.

January 10, The Baptism of Our Lord Luke 3:15-17,21-22

People flock to John the Baptist, responding to his urging to start new, ethical lives—as a way of preparing for Jesus (vv. 3-6). John has condemned those who seek his baptism with no intention of reforming their ways (v. 7). He has warned that being Jewish is no assurance of being part of the renewed Israel. Failure to respond to his call to repentance can lead to condemnation at the end of time. V. 15a, in the Revised English Bible, says: “The people were all agog, wondering about John ...” People expected a “Messiah”, an agent of God who would restore Israel and the triumph of God’s power and authority. John tells them that “one who is ... coming” (v. 16) is so great that he is unworthy even to “untie ... his sandals”, a task done by slaves. Baptism purifies, removes sin. The agents the “one” will use are vastly superior to the water John uses. Jesus is also more “powerful”, mightier, as leader of the final struggle against evil. (At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes with tongues of fire.) V. 17 uses the metaphor of harvesting to tell of Christ’s action as judge at the end of time. The wheat was tossed in the air with a “winnowing fork”: the grain fell to the ground but the chaff was carried by the wind to the edge of the “threshing floor”. God will “gather” the godly but will condemn the ungodly (to burn in hell). Jesus is baptised (v. 21) to show his solidarity with John’s proclamation of part of God’s plan for saving all who come to him. Jesus begins and ends (22:46) his ministry with a prayer. In vv. 21c-22, God shows himself to believers: an event beyond human language. The Holy Spirit, always with Jesus, is seen descending on Jesus, marking a milestone in Jesus’ career. People really see the event (“in bodily form”). The Holy Spirit seems “like a dove”—a bird symbolizing the hopes of humans for love, life and union with God—hopes now realized in Jesus. The voice calls on Jesus as God’s “Son” and servant (“well pleased”, v. 22). Jesus is God’s “Beloved”, the one whom he chooses as his agent.

January 17, Second Sunday after the Epiphany John 2:1-11

John uses symbolism extensively in his telling of the good news. He says in 20:31: “these [signs] are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you

may have life in his name”. Our reading looks forward to Jesus’ resurrection and glorification (“on the third day”, v. 1), the Last Supper, and the messianic banquet expected at the end of time, when Christ comes again. The “mother of Jesus” appears for the first time in the gospel; the last time is when she stands at the foot of the cross. On both occasions, Jesus addresses her as “Woman” (v. 4), a title roughly equivalent to Madam today: Jesus is guided in his ministry only by the Father’s will (“my hour ...”). Mary’s words in v. 5 suggest that she believes in Jesus, as she does at the foot of the cross. Jesus has the water jars filled completely (“to the brim”, v. 7) with water. In Judaism, the “rites of purification” (v. 6, washing before and after eating) were ceremonial, but in totally transforming water into wine, Jesus replaces the old (Judaism) with the new; wine is a symbol originating in Christ. In Isaiah, marriage between God and his people symbolizes the fulfilment of God’s purpose for his people; here the abundance of good wine symbolizes the joy accompanying the fulfilment (as foretold in several prophetic books). John presents “signs” (v. 11) as aids to people in reaching his objectives (20:31). Jesus shows that God is present in his very nature (“his glory”).

January 24, Third Sunday after the Epiphany Luke 4:14-21

Jesus has been tempted by the devil in the wilderness (vv. 1-13) to misuse his power for his personal benefit, for worldly domination, and for protection from God’s plan fulfilled on the cross. Now he returns to Galilee. Jesus customarily attends synagogue services to worship and present his message; it is there that Luke tells us who Jesus is: he stands in continuity with God’s promises of old. Jesus is a great teacher; he has great authority in telling people about God and his plan. Jesus begins with one part of the scroll, flips to another, and flips back: vv. 18-19 emphasize his mission to those who are “poor” in any way, be it financially, in spirit, in health. In “the year of the Lord’s favour”, the jubilee year, debts were forgiven and slaves were set free. Jesus applies these verses to himself: he performs the works of the Messiah then expected. He then sits to interpret the readings: he says that God’s plan is now being completed (“fulfilled”, v. 21).

January 31, Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany Luke 4:21-30

Jesus attends the synagogue service on the sabbath. He has just read some verses from Isaiah. He now tells

worshippers that he fulfils them: he is the expected messiah; he will rescue all those who are in need; God's promises made to Israel are "fulfilled" in the new age. All are "amazed" (v. 22), they keep wondering: at (as a scholar puts it) Jesus' words of grace, of God's freely given gift of love. An Old Testament usage suggests the "words" are the word of God. Probably vv. 22ff describe a subsequent visit to the synagogue. In v. 23, as often in Luke, Jesus takes the offensive: people want him to perform miraculous deeds to satisfy their curiosity, and for their benefit. In vv. 25-27, Jesus reminds them of instances where God has helped foreigners (both women and men) rather than Israelites. (In 1 Kings 17-18, a "famine", attributed to God cutting off Israel, lasts 3 years; in contemporary books about the end times, the period of persecution and disgrace lasts 3½ years.) The people are "filled with rage" (v. 28) because they begin to realize that Jesus is for others as well as for them. Nazareth, being on a hillside, has steep slopes down which a person might fall to his death. Jesus escapes the lynch mob: they let him go because they think he might just be the messiah. He continues his mission in accord with God's plan.

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A Big Thank You From Arlington Literacy Program

Earlier this fall, Pat Bleicher asked the people of St. John's to help the Adult Literacy Program of Arlington County, which needed paper, pencils, and supplies for the people it serves. The response from the congregation was immediate and generous. Pat shared with us letters from Angela Greene and her class, expressing their thanks for these donations. The originals of these letters are on the St. John's bulletin board.

Letter from Angela Greene

Dear Pat,

Enclosed are some thank you letters from some of my students. As the cycle comes to a close, fewer students still have the energy to commit to four nights a week. Hence these thank fall short of my 28 strong class! Nonetheless they are representative of the student English proficiency.

The writing of these letters was group exercise as a

culmination to a lesson discussing form. We talked about formal vs. casual writing forms. I elicited model language we played with that and the emotions the students experienced at receiving classroom donations from strangers.

We practiced with variety of "dummy" letters, and the students really opened up. They spoke about how they felt and what your organization's generosity meant to them. They talked about hard numbers too (who got what). Then they also inventoried the people who your gifts helped (students, teachers, and admin. staff).

When we sat down to write the final drafts, as always happens, the students' confidence fled them. It happens in ESL class as surely as winter falls fall. They reverted to the model language only conveying the essential message: thanks.

I mention this because I don't want you to see brevity as a lack of appreciation. The students and I appreciate all your help. We thank you and your fiends from the bottom of our hearts.

Angela Greene

Letters from Angie's students: Rony, Flor, and Luis Ethel and Julio, Kim, Ngoc, and Delina

Dear friends:

We would like to thank you for the school supplies: notebooks, pencils, erasers, and binders. We feel happy for your donation. It helps not only 300 level but it also helps all the school.

Dear friends:

We would like to thank you for the school supplies. We appreciate your thinking about us.

You have big heart for help all students with school materials for us.

Dear Pat and friends,

Thank you for thinking about us. We appreciate you organization and your friends for helping us with supplies.

Dear friends:

Two months ago Ms. Angie surprised us with school supplies. She told us about you, Ms. Pat, she said you brought the school supplies for us. Now is the great opportunity for say thank you so much for all.

St. John's Calendar

December

- Tue 1 St. John's Book Club, 7:30 p.m.
- Wed 2 Candlelight Prayer Service, 7:30 p.m.
- Thu 3 Morning Guild, 10 a.m.
Choir Practice, 7:30 p.m.
- Sun 6 Second Sunday of Advent
Holy Eucharist Rite I, 8 a.m.
Christian Formation for all ages, 9 a.m.
Holy Eucharist Rite II, 10 a.m.
Education for Ministry, 6 p.m.
- Tue 8 Vestry Meeting, 7 p.m.
- Wed 9 Candlelight Prayer Service, 7:30 p.m.
- Thu 10 Choir Practice, 7:30 p.m.
- Sun 13 Third Sunday of Advent
Holy Eucharist Rite I, 8 a.m.
Christian Formation for all ages, 9 a.m.
Holy Eucharist Rite II, 10 a.m.
Education for Ministry, 6 p.m.
- Wed 16 Candlelight Prayer Service, 7:30 p.m.
- Thu 17 Choir Practice, 7:30 p.m.
- Sat 19 Men's Fellowship, 8 a.m.
- Sun 20 Fourth Sunday of Advent
Holy Eucharist Rite I, 8 a.m.
Christian Formation for all ages, 9 a.m.
Holy Eucharist Rite II, 10 a.m.
Christmas Caroling 5 p.m.
Education for Ministry, 6 p.m.
- Wed 23 Candlelight Prayer Service, 7:30 p.m.
- Thu 24 Christmas Eve
Holy Eucharist for all ages with children's sermon, 5 p.m.
Christmas music and caroling in church 10:40 p.m.
Festival Holy Eucharist, 11 p.m.
- Fri 25 Christmas Day
Holy Eucharist, 10 a.m.
- Sun 27 First Sunday after Christmas
No 8 a.m. service, no Christian formation
Lessons and Carols, 10 a.m.
- Wed 30 Candlelight Prayer Service, 7:30 p.m.

January

- Sun 3 Feast of the Epiphany (observed)
Holy Eucharist Rite I, 8 a.m.
Christian Formation for all ages, 9 a.m.
Holy Eucharist Rite II, 10 a.m.
Education for Ministry, 6 p.m.
- Tue 5 St. John's Book Club, 7:30 p.m.
- Wed 6 Candlelight Prayer Service, 7:30 p.m.
- Thu 7 Morning Guild, 10 a.m.
Choir Practice, 7:30 p.m.
- Sun 10 Baptism of Our Lord
Holy Eucharist Rite I, 8 a.m.
Christian Formation for all ages, 9 a.m.
Holy Eucharist Rite II, 10 a.m.
St. John's Annual Meeting, right after the 10 a.m. service
Education for Ministry, 6 p.m.
- Tue 12 Vestry Meeting, 7 p.m.
- Wed 13 Candlelight Prayer Service, 7:30 p.m.
- Thu 14 Choir Practice, 7:30 p.m.
- Sat 16 Men's fellowship, 8 a.m. in the undercroft
- Sun 17 Second Sunday after the Epiphany
Holy Eucharist Rite I, 8 a.m.
Christian Formation for all ages, 9 a.m.
Holy Eucharist Rite II, 10 a.m.
Education for Ministry, 6 p.m.
- Wed 20 Candlelight Prayer Service, 7:30 p.m.
- Thu 21 LOGOS deadline, 10:00 a.m.
Choir Practice, 7:30 p.m.
- Sun 24 Third Sunday after the Epiphany
Holy Eucharist Rite I, 8 a.m.
Christian Formation for all ages, 9 a.m.
Holy Eucharist Rite II, 10 a.m.
Education for Ministry, 6 p.m.
- Wed 27 Candlelight Prayer Service, 7:30 p.m.
- Thu 28 Choir Practice, 7:30 p.m.
- Sun 31 Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
Holy Eucharist Rite I, 8 a.m.
Christian Formation for all ages, 9 a.m.
Holy Eucharist Rite II, 10 a.m.
Education for Ministry, 6 p.m.

St. John's Episcopal Church
415 South Lexington Street
Arlington VA 22204
703-671-6834
<http://stjohnsarlington.thediocese.net>

Next deadline is Thursday, January 21 at 10:00 a.m.

Time Sensitive Material—Please Deliver Promptly

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Minister of Music: Lynn Robinson
Organist: Carol Dunlap
Parish Administrator: Virginia Pearson
Sexton: Justiniano Garay

Parish Leaders

Jean Harrison, Treasurer
John Restall, Assistant Treasurer
Don Hess, Co-chair, Building and Grounds Committee
John Wilson, Co-chair, Building and Grounds Committee

Vestry

Bill Thomson, Senior Warden
Brian Cavey, Junior Warden
Marshall Adair
Jan Hull
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