



The St. Thomas Episcopal Church

Evangel

A Publication of
St. Thomas
Episcopal Church,
Isle of Hope, Georgia

December 16, 2008—January 2009

Deadline for the next issue: January 27, 2009

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INSERTS: Calendar & Nomination Form for Bishop

A STRANGE AND MARVELOUS MYSTERY

I behold a strange and marvelous mystery:
the cave is heaven;
the Virgin, a cherubic throne;
the manger, a room in which Christ our God,
who is boundless, was placed,
whom we magnify in praise.

You've noticed it: there is so much about the 'Christmas celebration' that is not about Christmas. One of my favorite holiday movies is "White Christmas". Yet in that favorite movie there is no mention of Jesus' birth. For years there were TV programs and movies advocating that the true spirit of Christmas is about being generous and getting together with family. Lately, as with so many things, our culture has become coarse, cynical and sarcastic. While Chevy Chase's "Christmas Vacation" and Tim Allen's "The Santa Clause" had some fun about them, movies like "Christmas With The Kranks" and "Four Christmases" are simply awful. The "message" of such fiascoes is obvious: human beings are jerks and the holidays are occasions for everyone's jerkiness to reach new lows.

The meaning of Christmas is not about our jerkiness or even our sinfulness. Christmas is about the *strange and marvelous mystery* that God wants to unite us to Godself in such a way that all our sins and jerkiness will be less than dust. It has been expressed in various ways: at Christmas God came down to lift us up; God took human form to bring us divine life. Or, as the great defender of the Nicene Creed, St. Athanasius, wrote: God became Man, so Man might become God; that is, God's desire is to enfold us in His own divine Being through all eternity.

The verse at the beginning of this article comes from a Morning Service in the Orthodox tradition for the Feast of St. Nicholas (December 6th). For me, it testifies to the truth of Christmas: Christ became what we are, so we might become what He is; and this 'becoming' changes everything. The Christmas story is so very simple; it can be told in a minute or two. Yet Scripture and the Church testify that this was no ordinary birth; God was radically present in a blushing intimate manner – for us and for our salvation. God becomes what we are, and thereby the humble animal barn becomes the place of God's revealed presence; the Virgin is the resting place from whom the King goes forth to His people; the little feed trough in which He is laid becomes as huge as the vast universe, for it cradles the One through whom and for whom the universe is made.

And what of us? We *magnify in praise* which is a very old and poetic way of saying that we live this Truth at the center our lives; this Truth defines us because we are now part of the story, and the story continues as real reality in our lives: the heavenly animal barn, the Virgin-throne and the limitless manger are not bits of Christmas decoration. They are expressions of and windows into the *strange and marvelous mystery* of the Word made flesh.

I pray you all Christmas joy, and that such joy at the wonder of God's love for you and for all may know no end.

Fr. Richard

Clergy and Staff Comings-N-Goings

Fr Richard will be away January 12th through 16th, enjoying a personal retreat at Mepkin Abbey (a Trappist Monastery), in South Carolina.

**December Vestry Meeting is
December 15th, 6:30pm, in the Library.**

In January, Vestry meets on January 19th.

First Saturday Community Praise and Worship Service

Due to the proximity to the New Year's holiday we will *not* have a 1st Saturday service on January 3rd. First Saturday Praise and Worship resumes on February 7th.

Diocesan Convention

The clergy and lay delegates will attend Convention on February 5th-7th in Albany. According to parish by-laws, at their November meeting the Vestry elected three delegates to represent us: Dede Roberts, Tracy Edgar and Ron Crawford. Please pray for our Diocese, Convention and our delegates.

Fr. Richard's Wednesday Evening Book Study

In January we will discuss the last two sections of "The Meaning of Jesus" on Wednesday, January 7 (6:45pm) and on January 21 (6:45pm). The book study will not meet on January 14th.

"**Parents Morning Out**" is scheduled for 9am-1pm, Monday and Tuesday, December 22 and 23. Tracy Edgar and Deacon Geri will be hosting a fun time and breakfast for children of all ages those two mornings so that parent may spend some much needed time shopping, preparing or just resting up for the holidays! The DEADLINE to register your child(ren) is Wednesday, December 15th. Please call the church office at 355-3110.

First Sunday Breakfast: There are no Sunday morning classes for children or adults during the First Sunday Breakfasts at 9am each month! This is our intergenerational time for folks from both services to gather together and get to know each other better.

Please Join Us For Prayer—at 5:30pm in the chapel on the second Thursday of each month. Several of us gather to pray for the safety and evangelism of the Central India Christian Ministry teams.

The Search Process for the 10th Bishop of the Diocese of Georgia is well on its way and we are now receiving nominations for candidates. Please take a few minutes to go to the search process website at: georgiabishopsearch.org, read the diocesan profile, and submit your nomination for our next bishop!

Deacon Geri

May I Introduce.....

Columba, a stern and strong monk from Ireland, founded three monasteries which served as inns, orphanages and centers of learning during the violent Dark Ages in Northern Europe. Columba founded monasteries in Derry and Durrow on his native island, and Iona on the coast of Scotland. We are told that Columba led many to Christianity by his "preaching and example".

He was much admired for his physical as well as spiritual prowess. He was a vigorous ascetic and was still quite active when he died at nearly eighty years old! The memory of Columba lives on in Scotland, especially Iona—today a protestant religious community much visited by people from all over the world.

**Deadline for the February-March
edition of our Evangel Newsletter is
January 27th.**

Alternatives to a Secularized Christmas

Advent - The time of preparation and waiting in Joyful Hope!

Self

Quiet Time

Daily Office

Advent Study/Meditation Series

Attend a midweek Service; Sunday School

Clean out cupboards - donate clothing/books/appliances

Bake (if you enjoy cooking!)

Visit shut-ins/elderly

Write all those letters / Christmas cards

Decide on personalized, home made gifts rather than expensive store bought ones

If you must shop, be organized and know what you are looking for. The mall is not the place to spend Advent!

Family

Spend time together in prayer, light Advent candles

Encourage quiet time with children (take a prayer break)

*Put up a Jesse tree (make ornaments and learn about symbolism of each)

*Tell the story of St. Nicholas - recreate the Christian Myth of St. Nicholas from whom Santa Claus originated. The legend of the real saint is by far more exciting, heroic and engaging

*Tell the story of St. Francis of Assisi and the first crèche

Start putting up the crèche (or making one)

put just the animals in their stalls at first

add the figures around the room: the shepherds in their field; the magi in their respective countries; Mary & Joseph in Nazareth; move them, in their turn, closer to the stable

In the crèche, have no straw in the manger at first. Every time a family member does something to be commended, let him/her add some straw. The more straw the more comfortable the Christ Child's bed will be! (Polish custom)

Make a ceremony of placing the baby Jesus in the Manger on Christmas Day

Have every family member clean out their cupboards (toys, tools, clothes, kitchen) and donate to those less fortunate

Choose non-profit charitable groups' Christmas cards & gifts

Discuss Christmas giving - put a limit on number of gifts and amount of money to be spent. Agree on a charity

to which to give a % or an equal amount of that which you spend on yourselves. PLEASE, NO WAR TOYS!

Teenagers: girls - write own Magnificat; boys - respond to Mary's pregnancy. Let this be a springboard to openly discuss sex, morality, AIDS with your teenagers

Pick out your tree (but wait, wait, to decorate it!). If you choose a "live" tree, consider donating the same amount of money to "Save the Rain Forests", or plant a tree yourselves. Or consider using a living tree

If you use an Advent calendar, choose one that depicts the story of Christmas, rather than a winter scene.

Learn about another country's customs at Christmas

Do some community work together

* These stories & resources can be found at our parish website www.stthomasioh.org

Community/Parish

As in Lent, have extra Offices

Have a "Live Market Fair", have people "purchase" farm animals to be sent overseas by Heifer Project International.

Have a clean-up day in the parish/church

Have a baking day / sewing day and make items for the homeless

Schedule more Mother's Morning Out

Offer to do some volunteer office work to ease the load

Christmas - Begins on December 25 and lasts until Epiphany (January 6) - TWELVE DAYS!!!

Celebrate - but always to the glory of God and in moderation

This is the time to entertain, play Christmas carols, but remember also the martyrdom of St. Stephen, the slaughter of the Holy Innocents. This is a good time to focus on and pray for peace. Remember countries at war, the children caught in the crossfire, refugees. Think about getting involved in programs to relieve suffering.

Move the shepherd to the crèche. Start moving the magi.

If traditionally you have had many gifts under the tree. Think about giving (inexpensive, personal) gifts during Christmastide -- one for each of the twelve days.

Choose a present you received (and like) and give it to a less fortunate person

New Year's Eve - Consider having a party that focuses on the gift of a new year and the blessings of the old, rather than on alcohol. Remember our Lord is first found as an adult at a party - oh, wouldn't it be wonderful to have a dancing Jesus stained glass window!

Jacqueline Belcher 10/21/89 Rev. 11/92; 11/08

Check

www.stthomasioh.org

for the parish calendar of events

Unseen Guest

How wonderful the spirit of Christmas is! To all of those who provided turkey and ham for holiday meals we are most grateful. Preparing beautiful meals for our sick and needy "guests" is such a joy to the volunteers. (I'm not sure it is a joy to the office staff when they get the cooking aromas and no samples!)

In spite of food prices and the loss of assistance from the Wilson Ministries we are managing to meet our usual quotas. Shopping has become a real challenge. Walmart by 7:00am, Sam's by 8:15, Kroger on Wednesdays by 10:00 (that's senior discount day, you know).

In Walmart the produce lady remarks, "I figured you'd come today" as she help me weigh 35 pounds of sweet potatoes at .25 per pound. She declined my invitation to help peel them! Then there is our friend the butcher who marks the meat selected with "Reduced for quick sale." God guides us to friends in the right places.

And let's not forget the marvelous Thrift Store who keep on depositing funds to our budget. Without them we would not exist. Thanks to each volunteer who makes this possible.

The guests we serve through My Brothaz H.O.M.E. send their thanks to all who make the ministry possible. May you have a blessed Christmas and a New Year filled with all things wonderful. Please consider working with the Unseen Guest Ministry in 2009. Try it! You'll like it! We need YOU!

An Early Christmas!

Christmas came early to the Thrift Store as the Holiday sale on December 6 brought in more than \$1200. Your generous donations and the tireless work of the volunteers were the keys to this outcome. Thanks be to God and to all who participated in the event!

The Thrift Store Ministry will continue to assist many local charitable organizations, youth groups and needy individuals who are referred to the shop by a social service agency. With the economic recession, the mortgage crisis and high unemployment there will be many more people in Chatham County requiring help to meet their basic needs.

Please keep the Thrift Store in mind during the Christmas season and new year. Try to invent new ways to recycle. One of the volunteers at the shop made the decision to "tith" her clothing and other personal possessions to the Thrift Store. Another gives one item to the shop for every new purchase. Both practices are good ways to cut down on the clutter in your home while recycling and supporting the Thrift Store Ministry.

The Board and volunteers of the shop pray that every parishioner at St. Thomas will have a blessed Christmas and a New Year filled with good health, peace of mind and the joy of having a personal relationship Jesus.

THE MCCASLIN CHRISTIAN LIFE
CONFERENCE SERIES
PRESENTS
*TRUTH, GOODNESS AND
BEAUTY
IN THE WRITINGS OF C.S. LEWIS*

**MCCASLIN
CHRISTIAN LIFE CONFERENCE**

FRIDAY, FEB. 20 - SUNDAY, FEB. 22, 2009

*TRUTH, GOODNESS AND BEAUTY IN THE
WRITINGS OF C.S. LEWIS*

From *Narnia* to his *Space Trilogy*, C.S. Lewis' books are filled with unforgettable, rich imagery, and we are delighted that Dr. Louis Markos returns to St. Thomas for the 2009 McCaslin Christian Life Conference to talk about the rehabilitating beauty in Lewis' fiction.

Dr. Markos, the keynoter at our inaugural McCaslin Conference, is a professor of English at Houston Baptist University. The author of numerous books, Dr. Markos is a well-sought-after speaker on C.S. Lewis across the US, and we are honored that he has agreed to be our speaker once again.

One 2006 MCL Conference attendee says, "I'm excited that Dr. Markos is coming back! Can't wait to hear more about C.S. Lewis." Others have called his talks, "*unforgettable*" and "*riveting*."

So mark your calendars and invite your friends! Who doesn't need more beauty in their lives?

Friday, February 20, 2009 – 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Rehabilitating Beauty: The Good, the True and the Beautiful in C.S. Lewis fiction (I)

Saturday, February 21, 2009 – 10:00 – 12:00

Rehabilitating Beauty: The Good, the True and the Beautiful in C.S. Lewis fiction (II)

12:00 - LUNCH provided at St. Thomas

1:00 – 3:00

Screwtape's Millennial Toast

Sunday, February 22, 2009 – 10:00 Service

C.S. Lewis Apologetics

11:30 – The Chronicles of Narnia

Prince Caspian

The nominal charge of \$10 per participant will help defray cost of food and incidentals.

Future Organists of St. Thomas!



EYC Ski Trip

EYC Ski trip to Lake Junaluska, NC, Feb. 13th-16th. The cost of this trip is \$250.00 per person, or \$158.00 for non-skiers. The price includes lodging, meals, programming and two days of ski. Ski packages are for groups of 10 or more, so I need a commitment in the form of a \$50.00 deposit by January 5th. For more information log onto: www.LakeJunaluska.com/THAW.APX.

January Youth Gatherings

January 7th JAM'ers 4-5:00pm

January 11th EYC 4:30pm leave from church to go to Savannah Convocation Youth Celebration at St. Francis

January 18th JAM'ers 4:-5:30pm

January 25th Kindergarten-2nd Grade, 4:-5:30pm
EYC, 6:-7:30pm

From the Parish Register

Birthdays: December 15-31

- 16) Raiford Ennis, Jane Shuman, Carole Tutan
- 17) Sandra Calver, Salli Eve
- 18) Amanda Groves
- 19) Mark Case, Eli Irvin
- 20) Hobart Manley
- 21) Thomas Martin
- 24) Grace Downie
- 25) Matthew Ochsner, Frances Rogers
- 26) Marilyn Manley
- 27) Bryce Quattlebaum, Drayton Quattlebaum, Corey Summerell
- 28) Margaret Jenkins, LeaAnne Wallace
- 29) Kathryn Clark, Angela Oliver
- 30) Bucky Johnson

Birthdays: January

- 1) Gail Knopf, Bob Outlaw
- 2) Mitch Green
- 4) Bobby Minis, Jackie Timms
- 6) Connor Rovolis
- 8) Bill Friend
- 9) Andy Giles, John Kurinij
- 12) Megan Moreau, George Quaille
- 13) Harry Shore V
- 14) Andrea Epting, James Thompson
- 16) Gayle Crawford, Sarah Howerter
- 18) Sarah Quante, Harry Shore IV
- 19) Hart Williford
- 20) Dorothy Green
- 21) Clive Benting
- 22) Trey Buckingham
- 24) Barrett Benton, Molly Conner
- 27) Pattie Wainright
- 28) Patrick Calver, Jane Werth
- 30) Tracy Edgar
- 31) Chris Roberts

Anniversaries: December 15-31

- 17) Dennis & Austin Hall
- 20) Stetson & Linda Kelly Fleming
- 22) Thomas & Sue Tengg

Anniversaries: January

- 2) Steve & Deborah Carpenter
- 3) Charles & Suzanne Waller
- 11) Jack & Betty Davenport
- 17) Ken & Frances Conner

Baptisms:

November 2: Robert Walker Groves IV, son of Billy and Amanda Groves

November 9: Reese Kathryn Bailey, daughter of Brian and Katie Bailey; Molly McLin Conner, daughter of Jeff and Michelle Conner

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2009 Gratitude Attitude...

...Give us grateful hearts

THE CLERGY & STAFF

BISHOP THE RT. REV. HENRY I. LOUTTIT, JR.
RECTOR THE REV. RICHARD NELSON
MINISTER OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION—
THE REV. DEACON GERI NELSON
DEACON THE REV. DEACON KIRK DUFFY
YOUTH MINISTER TRACY EDGAR
ORGANIST/CHOIRMASTER PAM MCCASLIN
PARISH ADMINISTRATOR FRANCES CONNER
SEXTON NICOLE KING

THE VESTRY

MELINDA BAILEY, SR. WARDEN
JIM CHAMBERS JR. WARDEN
MITCH GREEN, TREASURER
MARIANNE CHAMBERS, CLERK

BARRETT BENTON MARK GOMPELS
JACK KINZIE HUGH PAPY
JAY MCCASLIN MITCH GREEN
DON FOWLER DEDE ROBERTS
BECKY MILMINE BRUCE NICHOLS
ARTHUR PEAGLER PAM SMITH
JUDY OCHSNER BILL FRIEND

MINISTRY GROUP CONTACTS

ALTAR GUILD PHYLLIS POSEY
CHOIR PAM MCCASLIN
COUNTERS FRAN CONNER
DAUGHTERS OF THE KING -
LAURA KINZIE
EPISCOPAL CHURCH WOMEN
ST. MARY'S GUILD JANE WERTH
ST. MARTHA'S GUILD DEDE ROBERTS
JAM'ERS, EYC TRACY EDGAR
FLOWER GUILD JUDY OCHSNER,
LIESL TANNER
GREETERS FLORENCE SLATINSKY
LAY MINISTERS BILL FRIEND
MEN'S CLUB HUGH PAPY
UNSEEN GUEST SELINA JOHNSON
USHERS DON FOWLER
THRIFT STORE
SUE TENGG/ DEDE ROBERTS

ADULT CHOIR

STETSON FLEMING, KEVIN FLEMING,
ELAINE HODGKINS, PHIL HODGKINS,
EMORY HEIDT, JACK KINZIE, LAURA KIN-
ZIE, RITA LEWIS, KATHY MCCURRY, ANNA
MULLINGS, JOLYNN BENNETT, MIKE MULL-
INGS, DEBORAH BOWEN, PHIL HOPE,
LAURA LAWTON, PAULETTE FIGUERIDO,
BARRETT BENTON, PAM BENTON, DEIDRE
DORN LINDA SOUTHERLAND, WAYNE
WELCH, DEBBIE FRIEND, BILL FRIEND,
STEWART MARSHALL, MARION STAPP,
FRANK STAPP, SANDY CHAMPION, CRYST-
AL SIMPSON, CHRISTINE BURTON, ELI
IRVIN, NICK BUCHANAN, DEBILYN FRIEND

HANDBELL RINGERS

DEBORAH BOWEN, EMORY HEIDT, PHIL
HODGKINS, ELAINE HODGKINS, KATHY
MCCURRY, ANNA MULLINGS, MIKE MULL-
INGS

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**DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE:
JANUARY 27, 2009.**