

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

Advent and Christmastide greetings to all! As we wind down another exciting year here at Saint Alban's and look forward to the next my heart is filled with gratitude and joy for each of you and for what Almighty God has done in our lives. A number of parishioners have been through great trials and tribulations in terms of health this past year. It has been fantastic to see how God has used each of us to minister to our fellow parishioners and support them in their time of need. Special thanks goes out to the Daughters of the King for coordinating the prayer list and assisting with visitation and encouragement for the sick. Also, please remember to inform me when you are sick and in need of pastoral care and Holy Communion, and I will be there in an instant! One of the big advantages membership in a small parish like ours confers is good pastoral care. You will not get lost in the shuffle and forgotten about at St. Alban's. We had a wonderful annual meeting in November where we elected new vestrymen, approved our 2020 budget, recognized volunteers, and learned about our building plans. Phase one of these plans is to expand our parking lot, update our old concrete handicap ramp, and installing storm water management facilities. As mentioned at the meeting, it is necessary for us to do all of those things so we can then expand the interior of our facility and add more seating in the nave. Please do have a look at the plans drawn up for this first phase by Thompson & Associates that are on display in the parish hall, and prayerfully consider how you might be able to give to help us get this done. By now you might have noticed our new Advent wreath. If it looks new but also sort of familiar that is because it is. Last year we purchased a gorgeous new paschal candle stand that was much needed using funds from the Memorial Fund. One of the great things about the new stand is that the top can be taken off and replaced with an Advent wreath top. So they vestry authorized the purchase of this too, and now, behold! We finally have an absolutely stunning Advent wreath in the church. It really adds to the beauty and solemnity of our worship. There are other items that the church stands in need of for her worship that may be donated in memory of loved ones. If you are interested in donating one of these please see me and I will let you know what they are and how much they cost. Thank you for a great year, and may God give us many more together for his glory.

Faithfully, your priest, *J. Gordon Anderson*

December 2019

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Updates from the Church

UPCOMING SERVICES:

Dec 18th - Ember Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Dec 20th - Ember Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Dec 21st - St. Thomas

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Dec 24th - Christmas Eve

Holy Communion at 5:00 p.m.

Dec 25th - Christmas Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Dec 26th - St. Stephen

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Dec 27th - St. John

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Dec 28th - Holy Innocents

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jan 1st - Circumcision

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Dec 25th - Christmas Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR: *Christmas — The Feast of the Holy Nativity*

Each year we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ on December 25th. We do not know that was the actual day of his birth. The Church essentially “assigned” the 25th of December to be his birthday in order to counteract a popular pagan feast. The date of his birth is inconsequential. What is important is that he was truly born.

It is an amazing thing to think about the Holy Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. How could this little baby be at once both human and divine? Consideration of this truly staggers the imagination! If Jesus was 100% human and 100% God then it means that, as a human, he grew in knowledge of himself and the unique vocation given to him by God the Father. In other words, he was a normal child, with a normal childhood, who had to learn and grow. The scriptures allude to this in Luke 2:51-52, *“Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”*

But of course Jesus is also fully God. The famous Prologue of Saint John’s Gospel (John 1:1-14), which is the principal Gospel for Christmas, clearly proclaims Jesus as God the Father in human flesh. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”* (emphasis added) Many false religions have sprung up in succeeding centuries that downplayed the full divinity of Jesus Christ. Religions such as Mormonism, Islam, Ba’hai, Jehovah’s Witness, and others have, in a misguided attempt to teach monotheism (i.e. the doctrine that there is only one God, as we say in the Creeds) have ended up saying that Jesus was someone or something less than God.

In the ancient world the heresy known as Arianism, among other heresies, taught this error. Arians and their ilk might have called Jesus the Son of God, or said that he was a great and mighty prophet. But their bottom line was that Jesus was just another being created by God the Father. Unfortunately for the Arians of yesterday and today, this false teaching sharply contradicts the scriptures as well as the decrees of the Ecumenical Councils of the undivided Church.

What may seem stranger to us, however, is that also in the ancient world were those who denied the full humanity of Jesus. With the exception of a few fringe “new age” groups this heresy does not seem to pop up very much these days, perhaps due to our overwhelmingly positivistic and secular worldview. But in the ancient world it was quite prevalent. One finds evidence of this belief—often called “gnosticism”—even in the New Testament itself. Saint John, in his first epistle, chapter one verses one through four, talks about how he and his companions saw, heard, and touched the Lord Jesus Christ. What he appears to be doing is challenging those those with gnostic tendencies who believe Jesus to have been more “spiritual” than human.

There were a variety of reasons as to why some people refused to believe in the true humanity of Jesus. Some people thought it inadmissible that God should suffer, so what happened to Jesus in his passion and death was “illusory.” Other people thought that the flesh was evil and fallen *of its own very nature* and so there would be no way that God would take on human flesh... even if it were *not* tainted with sin!

This idea, too, did not square with the scriptures and Church tradition. The ecumenical councils condemned the gnostic, overly spiritual view of Jesus as much as they condemned the Arian heresy. Heresies that downplayed the true humanity of our Lord include Apollinarianism and Eutychianism (also known as Monophysitism).

Saint Athanasius said that God could not redeem what he did not assume. Thus, God had to assume a true human nature in order to save mankind from sin. But in order to save man from sin—to live a sinless life and conquer death—he had to be God as well. Thus, Jesus is the God-Man. From the moment of his incarnation at the Annunciation Jesus of Nazareth is God-Man. The little baby in the manger is the God-Man. Likewise the man who died on the cross unjustly accused between two thieves, the one who rose again and ascended into heaven, and who in heaven “ever liveth to make intercession” for us is both God and Man. This Christmas and indeed every Christmas we thank God for the Holy Nativity of the “Word made Flesh.” ✠

PARISH LIFE: *Some Highlights from 2019, by Kristi Sjobolm-Sierchio***In no particular order, here are some random highlights from Saint Alban's Church from 2019...**

St. Alban's Amanda Hichkad Walk team raised approximately \$3,400 for the Cancer LifeNet ("CLN") program at Univ. of MD, Upper Chesapeake, Kaufman Cancer Center ("KCC")

Our 50/50 Yard sale raised \$500 for our building fund and \$500 for CLN as part of the UCH Foundation's Paint the Town Pink campaign for KCC

We installed a Senior Chapter of the Daughters of the King, the first in Harford County and only Anglican Church in the Maryland Diocese. Five Daughters were admitted. Daughters are assisting the rector with prayer requests and sick visits.

Grace, Grit & Thanksgiving offered monthly programs including various studies, an ice cream social, fundraiser for CLN at Uncle's, and drum circle

Donations of food and paper goods were collected for:

Welcome One

Char Hope

Christmas Family

We supported the diocese by our annual pledge of \$3,600 as well as the diocesan seminarian fund and the Bishop's Lenten Appeal.

Members of the parish are making crosses for the helmets of soldiers in a joint ministry effort with Saint Paul's Anglican Church in Crownsville, MD.

Beth Dixon led an effort of making 3 dozen pillows for breast cancer patients. They were donated to the UCH Foundation for CLN. The pillows were made at the Joppatowne Library.

Our seminarian, Mason Waldhauser, was ordained to the diaconate at St. Alban's in the fall.

The parking lot was resealed and all of the lines repainted.

Installed shelf and payment kiosk to take electronic donations
A week-long Vacation Bible School with nine children was held on "water" theme.

Gift/Care packages were sent to college and graduate students.

The Tillinghasts held two superb whiskey tasting fundraisers for our building fund

Our annual picnic hosted by the Dixons was a blast.

We sent Fr. Nana Kwasi Ellis to Accra, Ghana so he could preside at the funeral of his brother. We also saw Fr. Ellis received into our diocese from the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland. His ministry and presence with us for a few months was a special treasure!

A beautiful new ornate brass Paschal Candle Stand and Advent Wreath were purchased.

We had a record number of new members and confirmations, and welcomed a number of new families and individuals to the church.

The plans for our new parking and storm water management facilities were completed by Thompson Engineering. This will pave the way for expanded seating and other expansions to our facility.

Lenten study and fellowship... great food, discussion, and prayer.

A number of great parish meals for important events... including our incredibly tasty, first ever Philippine dinner hosted by Minda Flanders!

Tons of prayer and mutual support for our fellow parishioners and others in need. Thanks be to God for this "small but mighty" parish!! ✠

PARISH NEWS & UPDATES:

Seminarian Update:

Dear Friends,

I am glad I got so much time with you over Thanksgiving break last week. I always enjoy catching up and seeing you all. Fr. Gordon asked me to lead the rector's forum on St. John of the Cross and his teaching on the "dark night of the soul," and it was interesting to hear some different viewpoints on how God can redeem the suffering in our lives. And it's been a really interesting experience leading the first part of the Communion service there at church. It's nice of Fr. Gordon to give me these kinds of opportunities and of you all to be so encouraging.

The school work has been going well lately. I am working on a research paper for my Systematic Theology class on a topic called "Transcendental Thomism." It's about Karl Rahner's solution to the question of how God can be known. We were created for the knowledge of God, and to see him is what life is all about; but if we are finite and God is infinite, then the question is how? How can we have any accurate knowledge of God, since we're finite human beings? Rahner's solution (from what I'm learning) is that in the Holy Spirit, God overcomes our limitations and gives us a knowledge of himself by communicating himself to us: not on the outside, but on the inside. I've found this really encouraging to think about: that God loves us so much as to indwell us so that we might know him.

The only other big project I have left for this semester is a research paper on marriage counseling. I know very little about all that, so we'll see how this goes.

Thanks for the warm welcome back which you all gave me at Thanksgiving. I look forward to seeing you again at Christmastide. Remember, I will be interviewing for a curacy in Denver through Christmas Day, so it won't be until after that when I'll see you next. In the mean time, happy Advent.

Sincerely,

Deacon Mason

Movie

All of you film buffs out there should be sure to check out the movie *Gavagai* directed by award winning filmmaker Rob Tregenza.

www.gavagaifilm.com In addition to being a highly accomplished director and cinematographer, professor of film (at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, which has one of the top five programs in the country), Rob is also a priest in our diocese! He serves as rector of a lovely country church called Mt. Calvary Anglican Church in Lothian, Maryland. This film is the greatest (so far) of his career. It is the story of a widower who travels to Norway to finish translating the poems of a famous Norwegian poet (Tarjei Vesaas, 1897-1970) into Chinese, which had been the life project of his late wife, who was Chinese. He is in a grieving process throughout the film, getting in touch with his feelings of loneliness and loss. As one reviewer put it, "This is a high-minded and carefully composed film about, among other things, the inability of words in any language to satisfactorily communicate states of being." *Gavagai* has been lauded by the NY Times, Washington Post, LA Times, New Yorker, Village Voice, and Rotten Tomatoes among other outlets. It can now be streamed on iTunes, Amazon, and Google Play. Be sure to check out this incredible film written and directed by one of our own clergymen. It is a beautiful and sublime love story that will touch your heart. You will not be disappointed!

Reminders

"The minister is ordered, from time to time, to advise the People, whilst they are still in health, to make Wills arranging for the disposal of their temporal goods, and, when of ability, to leave Bequests for religious and other charitable uses." (BCP, p. 320) ✠