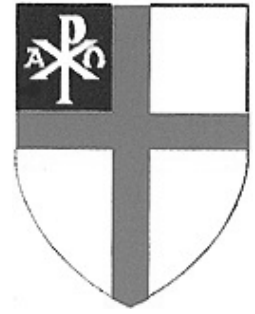


# The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

By the time you receive this we will be celebrating a new year! A new *church* year, that is. For as we should all know by now the ecclesiastical year always begins on the first Sunday in Advent. Concerning the Christian year one author has written, *"We do not live merely through winter, spring, summer and fall – an endless cycle of time. We live through Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost and Trinity – an annual cycle that points backwards to God's saving acts and forward to their fulfillment at the Second Coming of Jesus. Our corporate observances and the prayers, lessons and themes of daily prayer cause us to experience time in terms of our redemption. Our personal life stories are transformed by our connection with God's story. Our minds are transformed and renewed by constantly remembering and experiencing again the drama of our redemption."*

It has been an exciting couple of weeks at St. Alban's. We had three baptisms in as many months, our bishop came for his visitation and for confirmations, and we had our annual meeting. Turnout at the meeting was much better than in recent years. I want to thank everyone for coming out for it and for your active participation. We have a lot of work to do in this new year to help us grow and prosper, especially with regard to remodeling parts of our building, and we will need the support of everyone in the church to make it happen. Please continue to support the work of the church with your time, talent, and treasure. With regard to the last of these, please remember to get your 2014 pledge cards back to the church as soon as possible, and no later than 12/16. Please give generously and sacrificially to the work of the Gospel. Remember that the church can't survive on \$5-\$10 tip each week. We do not have massive endowment funds and are entirely self-supported.

In the secular new year it is customary to make a resolution. Why don't we do that at the beginning of a new church year? Resolve to renew your commitment to Jesus Christ, and to grow into a deeper relationship with him by taking concrete action in your life. Make coming to church every Sunday a priority, not an option. Come out to Bible study and to the Holy Day and other weekday services. Devote a portion of each day to worship, prayer, and spiritual growth. When we see the difference all this makes in our life we'll be glad we did them!

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

*J. Gordon Anderson*

December 2013

IN THIS ISSUE:

**Theology, p. 2**

*A Reflection on the Christmas Collect by the Rt. Rev'd. J.W.C. Wand*

**The Christian Year, p. 3**

*The Season of Advent and the Four Last Things*

**Parish News, p. 4**

*Mark your calendar for these important upcoming events.*

UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

**December 18th & 20th Ember Days**

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

**December 21st - St. Thomas**

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

**December 24th - Christmas Eve**

Holy Communion @ 6:30 p.m., 8:30 p.m.

**December 25th - Christmas Day**

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

**December 26th - St. Stephen**

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

**December 27th - St. John**

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

**December 28th - The Holy Innocents**

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

THEOLOGY: "Sons of God" by J.W.C. Wand, Bishop of London 1945-1955

Collect for Christmas (BCP p. 96)

*Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin: Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end.*

The passage from Advent to Christmas always creates a certain revulsion of feeling. We have been anticipating the Second Coming of Christ in all the trappings of majesty and glory. We have nerved ourselves in imagination to face the sea and the waves roaring and the portents in the skies, with the heavens rolled up like a scroll and the stars falling from their allotted places. And at the end of the contemplation of such startling events we are faced, with what? A Babe lying in a manger.

Perhaps it helps to symbolize this change that now the urgent note dies out of the collects. Our very prayer is quieter, gentler, calmer. The actual structure of the collect fits the new mood. Hitherto it has been sharp, abrupt; there has seemed no time to put in the usual adjectival clause after the address. But here for the first time we have it, in a prayer composed for the 1549 Book on the old classical model. 'Almighty God, who hast sent to us thy only-begotten Son.' It is on this clause that the subsequent petitions are based. And it is this clause that gives us the whole basis of the Christmas festival.

The Son of God took our nature upon him and, as at this time, was born of a pure virgin. The word 'incarnation' means literally being made flesh, but God's descent among men was something more than that. He took our whole nature upon him, our total manhood, not our body only but our mind, our intellect, our will, our affections. He would reveal the

Father perfectly but only so far as he could do so through human nature. 'Cur Deus homo?' asked Anselm - Why did God become man? But Athanasius had already given the answer: 'God became man in order that we might become God.'

On that assumption we make two requests. First that we ourselves may be re-born in Jesus and become God's children by adoption and grace. In other words we pray that we may ourselves receive the full benefit of the Christmas gift, won for us by that wonderful birth.

No doubt the form in which the petition is framed owes itself partly to the conversation of our Lord with Nicodemus. It was then that Jesus laid such emphasis on the need to be born again. Just as everyone is born of natural parents, so, if he wishes, to be reckoned a Son of God, he must be born again in spiritual fashion, by water and the Spirit, that is, by baptism, through which, as we share his Spirit, his essential life, we are joined with him.

How this can be done is explained under another figure in the remainder of the clause. We are made God's children by adoption and grace. The Word is the Son of God by an eternal generation. He is, so to speak, the natural Son of God. We may become sons by adoption. It is

true that all men are God's sons in the sense that he is the creator and father of all. But we have the privilege of being adopted into this special family of his children in the Church by a special reception.

This is done by his grace; it is a special favor. We must not for this reason accuse God of favoritism. He is just, and no doubt he makes up in the long run any handicap from which any section of his created children may suffer. But we cannot deny our privileges. Anyone who looks around him is bound to recognize the many inequalities in the society of his day. (Continued on the bottom of page 4)



THE CHRISTIAN YEAR: *The Season of Advent and the Four Last Things*

This time of year we begin to hear upbeat holiday songs on the radio and in stores, we go to holiday parties, and we set up all sorts of pretty lights and decorations both inside and outside the house. We shop till we drop, visit Santa, watch holiday movies, bake cookies, and more. Welcome to the Advent season as observed by postmodern America... a time of unbridled joy and festivity!

While the more theologically informed among us know that Advent is really a quasi-penitential season of quiet expectation where we await the coming of Our Lord at Christmas, we might nonetheless be surprised, and even a bit scandalized, to learn that one of the traditional themes for theological reflection during this time of year is the “Four Last Things” - death, judgement, heaven, and hell (Though one might indeed believe that he is experiencing death, judgement, and hell after hearing “Last Christmas” by Wham! play over the loudspeakers at the department store for the umpteenth time.)

Why is it customary to mediate on these themes during the Advent season?

The answer is because we look forward to the *second coming* of Jesus during this season. And as we see in the liturgy and the Scriptures, death, judgement, heaven, and hell are clearly related to the second coming of Jesus. In the Creed, for example, we declare that Jesus will come again in glory to judge both the quick (living)

and the dead. And in the *Te Deum laudamus* we say “...we believe that thou shalt come to be our judge.”

Furthermore, and most convincingly, we read through the book of Revelation during this time of year in the daily Prayer Book lectionary at Evening Prayer. This book, also known as the *Apocalypse*, details in mystical and symbolic language the end of the world and the second coming of Jesus. Within its fascinating pages we read of the new heavens and new earth. We read of the death and judgement of all of creation, followed by the resurrection of the just and the new creation. We see Satan and his minions condemned to hell, and much, much more. So it is in part because we meditate on the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ that these notions of death, judgement, heaven, and hell.

For the person who trusts in Jesus Christ there is no need to be afraid of these things, or view them as a great mystery. Yes, we will one day die. But in Christ we shall rise again. Yes, we will be judged for our actions, and how we have lived our lives. But in Christ we shall be acquitted. Yes, we might not feel as though we are fit for life with God in heaven. But our sins will finally be done away in Christ, and in him we will be fit for the City of God. Yes, we may fear the idea of hell, but in Christ, and by his grace and mercy, and if we love him, we know that we are not going to end up there.

The reality is that we live with these “Four Last Things” every day of our Christian life. Jesus calls us

to die to ourselves, and to take up our cross and follow him. And St. Paul reminds us that our old self, the life without Christ, has been crucified. In terms of judgement the Holy Spirit indwells each and every believer, and one of his functions is to guide us and convict us of sin. The person who strives to live a godly life will no doubt feel his conscience pricked from time to time by the Holy Spirit when he begins to stray from the things of God. So we live with judgement.

And we also live daily in a sense with heaven and hell. Because when we think about it heaven and hell are something that begins in this life. The more Christ-like we are, and the more we strive to draw closer to God, the more heavenly our life becomes. Conversely, the more we stray from God, and absent ourselves from his life and love, the more hellish our life becomes. So our eternal destiny is worked out through our daily actions in this life. The final judgement of God - for heaven or hell - is, when it all boils down, simply a divine ratification of what we have chosen for ourselves. Thus, the Four Last Things that we think about in Advent are actually very close to us throughout the rest of Church year as well.

So this Advent season, amidst the excitement and anticipation of Christmas, let us be mindful of the second coming of Jesus and of these Four Last Things, and let us live our lives aright so that when he comes he will find us faithful, and say to us, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” ✠

PARISH NEWS: *Please note the following items and mark your calendars for these important events!*

**Pledge Cards:** Please be sure to hand your pledge cards in by December 16th! Pledging helps the church manage its budget and do proper financial forecasting. It also helps us stay accountable with our giving.

**Christmas Family:** Once again we are sponsoring a needy family for Christmas through Anna's House. Please see Susan Kelly with questions. Here is a list of what they would like:

ALICIA, mom

- Clothes, size 20 W
- Opaque leggings 20W (black, purple, blue)
- Leather boots, black 9.5 w

AYLA, daughter, age 12 (wheelchair bound)

- Stretch pants – size 16/18 or athletic pants/sweats
- Best Buy card
- Full House dvds
- Make up case for nail polish and lip gloss

- Justin Bieber earrings
- Justin Bieber cd
- Turtlenecks/sweaters
- That's So Raven or I Carly dvd

**Help decorate the church for**

**Christmas:** After the 10:00 a.m. service on the Fourth Sunday in Advent (Dec. 22nd) we will decorate the church for Christmas! Please be sure to stick around and help us for this fun annual tradition.

**Epiphany Service and Gift**

**Exchange - January 6th:** Join us after the twelve days of Christmas are over for the feast of the Epiphany! This is the principal Holy Day where we celebrate the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. We will have an evening service of Holy Communion followed by dinner and our annual white elephant gift exchange. This night is always lots of fun.

**Ministry Opportunity:** Are you interested in helping the elderly? Susan Kelly is president of Senior Express, an organization that provides transportation for elderly shut-ins in Harford County to doctor and other lifestyle-related appointments. They can use help with transportation, administration, and more. Please contact Susan for further information.

**Quote of the month:** "In hell you love yourself and hate yourself. In heaven you forget yourself." Peter Kreeft, *A Turn of the Clock: A Book of Modern Proverbs* (Ignatius Press, 1987)

**Please remember St. Alban's in your estate planning** - "*The Minister is ordered, from time to time, to advise the People, whilst they are in health, to make Wills arranging for the disposal of the their temporal goods, and, when of ability, to leave Bequests for religious and charitable uses.*" (BCP, p. 320) ☩

*(Continued from page 2)*

The special favor bestowed on us through our adoption into this particular family is there for all to see.

Gladly, then, we recognize this privilege. We have been joined to Christ, who is God incarnate, and so we have been born again by our adoption into an entirely new and higher life. St. Paul says we are new creatures, a new creation. We must live up to our privileges. *Noblesse oblige*. If we belong to the family of heaven we must not fail or belie our parentage or our brothers.

But how is this to be done? It is not enough merely to live up to it every day. In a sense we must be born to it afresh every morning. Therefore we ask

that we may be renewed daily by fresh gifts of Christ's Spirit.

We have already said that the Word is the Son of God by an eternal generation. It was not just a birth that happened once for all: it is going on all the time. So we pray that Christ may be born in us afresh every day.

That is the real message of Christmas: he who was born in the stable at Bethlehem may be born afresh in our hearts at every moment. That is the true inwardness of the Christmas message. The heart of Christmas is the Christmas in our hearts. ☩

(From *Reflections on the Collects* by J.W.C. Wand, 1964, Mowbray & Co. Ltd.)