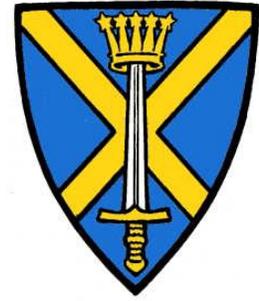


The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

When people see all of the art that I produce one of the first things they ask is how I am able to find the time to do it, especially considering the fact that I have a full time job, a family, a house, and other responsibilities. The answer is simple. Over the years I have learned to carefully order my time so I can get as many things done as possible. Lately I've come to realize that one of the things that has helped me in terms of ordering my time and life is the regular use of the Book of Common Prayer. There is something about praying through the Scriptures in an orderly, systematic routine, organized by the times and seasons of the year according to the Christian Year, that helps exorcise "the spirit of confusion" from one's life. The rites contained in the Prayer Book, such as Morning and Evening Prayer, and Holy Communion, have a strong movement about them. Certain passages of a particular length are scheduled to be read at certain times. Everything is prescribed so that the liturgy is done "decently and in order." The beautiful simplicity and clarity of the Prayer Book provides a devotional and spiritual framework for the rest of our lives. An amazing thing happens as we absorb it over the months, years, and decades of our lives. It begins to rub off on us. Obviously, and most important, we grow spiritually... because when we pray and read the scriptures each day God will inevitably *do* something amazing in our lives. But collaterally other parts of our lives will become more orderly as well... at least if what I have experienced is typical. The devil thrives off of bedlam and havoc. When everything is a big out of order mess the devil is there. Note how in the book of Genesis when God created the world he brought order out of chaos and confusion. But later when sin entered the world God's beautiful creation dissolved into pandemonium, with murder, polygamy, and other ills rearing their ugly heads. All of which finally prompted God to destroy the world by the flood. In the New Testament the demons that possess the different characters in the Gospels are seen shouting out of turn, casting the possessed into fires, cutting the possessed, terrorizing people, foaming at the mouth, and the like. All of this illustrates how Satan, the father of lies, is also the father of turmoil and disruption. Order on the other hand is of God. The regular use of the Book of Common Prayer, especially when used in the context of a larger "rule of life", helps us order our devotional lives, which in turn draws us closer to God, and drives the devil far away. I would encourage each of us during this busy holiday season to ratchet down on our spiritual lives and in the midst of the chaos and confusion to take time to pray, and meditate upon the sublime mysteries of our faith in Christ. Use the Book of Common Prayer to help you with this. You will find it a tremendous aid.

Faithfully, your priest,

J. Gordon Anderson

December 2017

IN THIS ISSUE:

Christ and Culture, p. 2

The Rise of Paganism

The Christian Year, p. 3

Advent and Christmas

Parish News & Updates, p. 4

Important News and Other Items

UPCOMING SERVICES:

Dec. 1st - Feria

Healing Eucharist at 10:00 a.m.

Dec. 8th - The Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Holy Eucharist at 10:00 a.m.

Dec. 15th - Feria

Requiem Eucharist at 10:00 a.m.

Dec. 20th - Ember Wednesday

Holy Eucharist at 10:00 a.m.

Dec. 21st - St. Thomas' Day

Holy Eucharist at 10:00 a.m.

Dec. 22nd - Ember Friday

Holy Eucharist at 10:00 a.m.

Dec. 23rd - Ember Saturday

Holy Eucharist at 10:00 a.m.

Dec. 25th - Christmas Day

Holy Eucharist at 10:00 a.m.

Dec. 26th - St. Stephen's Day

Holy Eucharist at 10:00 a.m.

Dec. 27th - St. John's Day

Holy Eucharist at 10:00 a.m.

Dec. 28th - The Holy Innocents

Holy Eucharist at 10:00 a.m.

CHRIST AND CULTURE: The Rise in Paganism Among America's Youth

Last month in an article entitled “More students, young Americans turn to paganism” the news website “The College Fix” reported on the rise of paganism among America’s youth. It says, “*As millennials continue to leave traditional Christian religions, interest in Wiccan and pagan practices have seen increased interest in recent years, a trend also spotted among young people and on college campuses.*” (Ed. note: Wicca is a modern day form of witchcraft, and is strongly pantheistic.) The author notes that more and more pagan and Wiccan groups are being formed on college campuses. Some schools, including some Roman Catholic institutions, have even hired pagan “chaplains” and built pagan/spiritualist places of worship. Along with all of this there is an increase in spell-casting, tarot card reading, astrology, meditation and trance, herbalism, etc. among the so-called “millennials.”

While from a Christian perspective it is very dangerous to dabble in such dark arts, from a contemporary secular perspective it is outright absurd. This is because we are taught very early on that there is a materialistic, naturalistic, scientific explanation for everything. So one has to wonder just what sort of internet-assembled philosophy allows for a belief in atheistic evolution and a totally random, meaningless universe, and the exaltation of technology, *while also at the same time* allowing for a belief in such non-scientific phenomena as fortune telling, ambiguous notions such as “energy” fields, spells and magic, and the like.

Perhaps post-modern man is not as atheistic and materialistic as he thinks. Indeed the rise of this situation confirms what the Church has always said about man. Namely, that he is a *spiritual* being with not just a body but also a soul, who cannot help but be drawn towards his maker. These spiritualist practices are just another misguided way of seeking the divine.

But what does that have to do with the Church? Why should the Church be *losing* members if all of that is the case with man? If people are, as they have always been, thirsting for the spiritual and the divine shouldn't the Church be *growing* instead of shrinking, as this article suggests? Why, in other words, don't young people looking for a transcendent spiritual experience consider the Church instead of paganism? Why in fact do they even leave it?

The answer is because the Church has become largely secular and desacralized. This is true of conservative and liberal churches and denominations. These days far too many churches talk more about politics, “social justice”, self-help and pop psychology, and social events than they do about Jesus Christ and the Christian religion. Average

people therefore think that going to church is only about becoming a “better” person, or about donating money and other items to help those in need.

Now, none of that is really bad in and of itself. The Church does touch on those matters from time to time, and engage in those practices (e.g. charity) as part of her overall mission. The problem arises when all of that becomes her *focus* and *main reason for being*, as it did in many churches and denominations beginning in the 1960's (or even a bit earlier in some cases). People can read about politics anywhere, explore techniques for self-improvement, and give money to charity in any number of ways. They do not have to go to church to do all of that!

Beginning in the 1960's many churches began to downplay the divine *transcendence* of God—that he is the high and mighty ruler of the universe—and focused instead on his *immanence*—that he is here among us in his Spirit—instead. In worship this was expressed in the suppression of older devotions and traditions. Gothic architecture gave way to ugly modernism. King James English and Ecclesiastical Latin were supplanted by banal common, almost corporate language. Chancels and sanctuaries were radically reworked, with large marble altars being replaced by plain simple “communion tables” that faced the congregation. Incense, bells, chant, hymns, and organ were replaced with hand clapping and tawdry acoustic guitar music that was supposedly “more relevant” and “easier to relate to.”

Well, the desacralization, this-worldliness, and social Gospel/justice stance adopted decades ago by the mainline churches and the Roman Catholic Church has finally borne its fruit, and we are seeing it today. The chickens have come home to roost. Kids are looking for the transcendent and divine elsewhere, other than church, because the church stopped talking about it and became focused on sirupy legalism instead.

One of the most important things the Church needs to do these days is recover her ancient traditions: her devotions, liturgy, and catechesis. We thirst for the divine because we are hardwired for that. God created us for himself, and, as Saint Augustine of Hippo wrote so many centuries ago, “Our hearts are restless until we rest in God.” Here at Saint Alban's we prize the hallowed traditions of the Church. We recognize the power they have to bring us into the realm of the numinous, into the very presence of God himself. Ours is a parish where people can find God and truly experience him in the sacred liturgy and in the lives of his people. May we embrace and always cherish our time-honored traditions because in we enter into God and he into us. ✠

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR: History and Reflections on Advent and Christmas

The season of Advent runs for four Sundays, and is a time of quiet expectation and preparation for the feast of the Holy Nativity, popularly known as Christmas. The Sunday nearest to Saint Andrew's Day (November 30th) is always the First Sunday in Advent.

According to one author Advent (which means "coming") was instituted by the Church in Spain and France sometime around the fourth century. Originally it was a forty day penitential season of preparation akin to Lent for people who would be baptized on the Epiphany. Thus it was sometimes referred to as "St. Martin's Lent" because it began on St. Martin's Day (Nov. 11th) and ended at Epiphany (Sundays excluded).

Rome began observing Advent in the sixth century, not as a penitential season but as a liturgical preparation for Christmas. Although Advent did then, just as it does today, retain elements of penitence (such as the *Gloria in Excelsis* not being sung), when it was adopted by Rome it had with it certain festal features that are definitely not found in pre-Lent and Lent, such as the singing of the *Alleluia*. Rome also shortened the Advent season to four weeks. Eventually, by the eighth century, Advent came to be regarded as the beginning of the ecclesiastical year.

In our tradition this wonderful season is subdued and anticipatory. We switch to a simple plainsong setting of the Mass, we wear liturgical colors of penitence (purple or blue), there is no *Gloria*, and there are no flowers on the altar.

But despite the restrained quality of the season the Collect for the Sunday next before Advent (known as "Stir Up Sunday") indicates that Advent is also a season where we should be "stirred up". (The Collect reads, "STIR up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people; that they, plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works, may by thee be plenteously rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord.") Stirred up for what? We ask God to stir up our souls in preparation for the coming of Jesus.

The theme of the "coming of the Lord" — remembering his first coming, looking forward to his second coming— is quite evident in the Advent hymnody (e.g. "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" and "Lo, He Comes With Clouds Descending"). We also see it in the daily lectionary readings for Morning and Evening Prayer, where we read large parts of the prophet Isaiah, which talks about his first coming, and then where we read the Revelation of Saint John the Divine, where the theme is Christ's second coming. The propers for the Holy Eucharist likewise remind that Christ has come, and that

he is going to come again. (e.g. Advent 1, Collect; Advent 2, Gospel; Advent 4, Collect, etc.)

Advent is a season of profound theological importance. It is a shame that our nominally Christian society ruins the character of the season for so many people by confusing it with Christmas. It is impossible these days to have a quiet Advent observance and preparation for Christmas unless we lock ourselves in our homes for the month of December. Indeed when Christmas does finally arrive on December 25th the world thinks that it has just ended! No. It has only just begun.

Christmas —sometimes referred to as "Christmastide" — is, as the old song suggests, a season of twelve days. The theme of Christmas is the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... his "Holy Nativity." Christmas is not the feast of the incarnation —when the "Word became flesh and dwelt among us." That feast is the Annunciation on March 25th. The Holy Nativity is when the Word which was made flesh was born.

The word "Christmas" means "Christ Mass." So the liturgical celebration for the day is the celebration of Holy Communion —the *Mass*. In the English tradition other feasts of the Christian Year are also combined with the word "Mass." (e.g. "Michaelmas", the feast of St. Michael and All Angels, and "Candlemas", the Purification of St. Mary the Virgin.)

We often hear, "Put the CHRIST back in Christmas." That is a good saying because as Christians we do not want Christmas to become a secular event. But the saying also works the other way: "Put the MASS back in Christmas." Perhaps the best way to keep Christmas from being completely secularized is to assiduously observe the liturgical obligations of our religion! One of the ways we do this at Saint Alban's is by having Mass on Christmas Day itself while others are busy ripping open presents at home.

Some families have the tradition of saving presents to open each day throughout Christmastide... almost like Hanukkah. This is a really great idea. Though admittedly it is probably easier to implement when first starting a family rather than trying to do so when your kids are in elementary or middle school and already used to the usual Christmas Day mayhem.

The last day of Christmas is January 5th, as January 6th is always the feast of the Epiphany and the beginning of Epiphanytide, the season of Epiphany.

May God grant each and every one of you a holy and blessed Advent and Christmas! ✠

PARISH NEWS & UPDATES: *Please note these important items!*

December 2017 Update from Seminarian Mason Waldhauser

Dear St. Alban's family,

Hi, church family! It was so wonderful to be with you again the last two Sundays. My time back home was really restful. Things have been good since I've gotten back to campus. Tonight, I went to a friend's ordination to the diaconate, and now I am about to put some finishing touches on a paper. It's about how Christ's beauty is primarily shown in his compassion for us. I have two weeks until the semester ends. Please pray for my finals! I look forward to seeing you again on the other side of them.

Happy Advent, *Mason*

Mr. Mason Waldhauser
Nashotah House Theological Seminary
2777 Mission Road
Nashotah, WI 53058

Outreach Ministries

Don't forget to bring in non-perishable food for Welcome-One Emergency Shelter, paper goods and women's hygiene products for Char-Hope Foundation, and pillow cases for the Emory Church Haitian Outreach. Thank you for your continued help and support with these ministries.

The People Say "Amen" — Not the Celebrant

At the end of most prayers in the Book of Common Prayer is found the italicized word *amen*. That word means essentially, "So be it," or "Yes, I agree with what was just prayed." When a Collect or other prayer is prayed in the liturgy by the presiding minister *he* is not supposed to say "amen" because he just prayed the prayer. Rather, the *people* say "amen" to assert their agreement with the prayer. So please remember to say "amen" when it is printed in italics at the end of the prayers in the Prayer Book and/or service leaflet. (Ed. Note: The only time that "amen" is said by all is when a prayer is said *together*, such as with the Lord's Prayer and the Creeds.)

Advent Lessons and Carols at Saint Alban's Church

Please join us on Sunday, December 17th at 4:00 p.m. for our Advent service of Lessons and Carols here at the church! A light reception with wine and cheese will follow! Invite a friend.

Christmas 2017 Schedule and Notes

This year the Fourth Sunday in Advent falls on Sunday, December 24th, Christmas Eve. We will have our usual Sunday services that morning at 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Our Christmas Eve service will be that evening at 5:00 p.m. (no incense). Christmas Day service will be Monday the 25th at 10:00 a.m. The key thing to remember is that the Fourth Sunday in Advent and Christmas are two entirely different feasts and observances! Attending church that morning does not count as attending church on Christmas. So please plan to be at church for the Advent 4 and Christmas, either later that day or the next morning!

Quote of the Month

"At its root, modernity is anti-sacral, anti-religious, anti-incarnational, and therefore anti-clerical, anti-ritual, anti-liturgical. You can see this from the many philosophers of the Enlightenment who rejected both divine revelation and organized religion. A few centuries later, we moderns who have imbibed all this philosophical baggage have almost no clue what a solemn, formal, objective, public religious ritual is supposed to look like. We are at a total loss about corporate worship in which the individual ego is subsumed into the greater community of the Church across time and space. That is why we must clutch to the traditional liturgy for dear life. It is, for all intents and purposes, pre-modern—so old that it is unaffected by our contemporary shallowness, biases, prejudices. It breathes a realism, a spaciousness, a strength, a chivalry even, that has become foreign to our age and so, for that very reason, is desperately needed by us. Modern man needs nothing so much as to be delivered from the prison of his Promethean modernism. He needs to be challenged with that which is older, deeper, wiser, stronger, lovelier, happier. He needs to be ignored, not coddled; mystified, not lectured to; silenced, not uncorked."

Prof. Peter Kwaśniewski in *The New Liturgical Movement*

Standing Notices:

"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) ☩