

# The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

I hope you are all enjoying this beautiful spring as much as I am! From the gorgeous tulips, daffodils, and hyacinth, to the pretty buds and blossoms of the dogwood trees, forsythia, and azalea, spring is truly a delightful time of the year. Each Sunday during the *Sanctus* we are reminded that "Heaven and earth are full of [God's] glory." (BCP p. 77) The awesome beauty and mystery of the creation reflects the infinite beauty and mystery of its creator, God. So when we take in that fresh spring air, and behold the fair beauty of the world, it is my prayer that our hearts may be directed upward in worship and thanksgiving to God, who created the world and "all that therein is." (Psalm 24) There is a prayer on page 596 that expresses perfectly what I mean. It reads: "O HEAVENLY Father, who hast filled the world with beauty; Open, we beseech thee, our eyes to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works; that rejoicing in thy whole creation, we may learn to serve thee with gladness; for the sake of him by whom all things were made, thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." As Christians we should strive to be good stewards of God's creation. It is not *ours* to do with as we please, or to ruin and destroy for selfish gain. It is *God's*. Psalm 95 reads, "The sea is his, and he made it; and his hands prepared the dry land." God created man and woman as the pinnacle of his creation to tend the rest of his creation. This is symbolized by Adam and Eve being placed in the Garden of Eden to take care of it. There, all of creation was in complete and perfect harmony with God and the divine, and it was all pronounced "good." But when man sinned that perfect harmony and fellowship was ruined. Adam and Eve fell from grace, and with them fell *all* of the creation, which now suffers from the sins of man. But thankfully, by the incarnation of Jesus Christ, all of creation will one day be renewed and restored. For just as Christ, the new Adam, came to redeem and restore fallen man, so he also came to renew and restore all of creation. (see Romans 8:19-23) *Our job as Christians is to bring the Kingdom of God into greater realization in the world. And one of the many, many ways that we can do that is by being good stewards of the creation.* God by his grace mercy, will at the end of human history bring this re-creation to completion, not only in us by resurrecting us and giving us new bodies, but by creating a new heaven and earth! This *resurrection and restoration* of all of creation in Christ is the Christian hope. A few years ago my wife and I took our moms to the DuPont estate known as Longwood Gardens for Mother's Day. As we walked through the stunning gardens I told my mother that that was how I imagine heaven and salvation to be: a beautiful, sublime garden, where man is in complete harmony with himself, others, nature, and God. May God help us to see in the beauty of nature him, who is truth, beauty, and goodness itself.

Affectionately, your Friend and Pastor,

J. Gordon Anderson

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UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

**May 1st - Ss. Philip and James**

Holy Communion @ 1:30 p.m.

**May 6th - 8th - Rogation Days**

See website for times...

**May 9th - Ascension Day**

Holy Communion @ 7:00 p.m.

**May 20th-21st - Monday and Tuesday in Whitsun Week**

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

**June 11th - St. Barnabas**

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

**June 24th - St. John Baptist**

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

**June 27th - St. Peter (Trans)**

Holy Communion @ 10:00 a.m.

*Prayer Book Holy Day Masses last a little over half an hour and, when celebrated in the morning, always include the office of Morning Prayer. Please make time to come out for these important days as you are able!*

LITURGY AND WORSHIP: *Spending money for the worship and liturgy of the Church*

Someone recently told me that one of the problems with Anglicans is that we have our priorities all mixed up when it comes to spending money. Why do we Anglicans insist on beautifying the house of God and ornamenting our worship at such great expense, especially in these tight financial times? Instead, shouldn't we take what little money we have or can raise and funnel it entirely into benevolence ministries, or to giving staff members raises? The answer to this question is simple. While God has *always* commanded his people to take care of the weak and the poor (e.g. Gal. 2:10), and while God has *always* required those who preach the gospel to live by that work (e.g. 1 Cor. 9:14), God has also revealed that we are to worship him (Psalm 95:1-6). More specifically, we are to worship him sacrificially, and "*in the beauty of holiness.*" (Psalm 96:9).

The worship of God quite obviously requires certain supplies and items, such as eucharistic vessels, bowls, containers, books, stands, furniture, etc. Because these appointments are for the worship of almighty God it is fitting that they be of the highest possible quality, and designed and manufactured by skilled artisans who understand the nature and purpose of the various items.

In Exodus chapters 25-30 God himself reveals to Moses how the various items for the divine worship of the Israelites were to be designed and crafted. Even a cursory overview of these chapters shows that no expense was to be

spared for the worship of almighty God. The finest precious metals, textiles, and gems were to be used to construct the Ark of the Covenant, the candle stands, vestments, altar, and other objects to be used for the worship of God. In Exodus chapter 31 we read that highly skilled craftsmen, under the leadership of man called Bezaleel, was to design and craft everything according to God's plan that he revealed to Moses. All of this, mind you, was for the portable Tabernacle that was used by the Israelites while they were wandering in the wilderness. By the time King Solomon comes along and begins building the great Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 5 ff.) we see, once again, and on an even grander scale, that no expense is spared when it comes to the worship of almighty God. The lesson in all of this clear. Worship means giving God the best that we possibly can because he is our creator, and "the high and mighty ruler of the universe." (BCP p. 17)

This reverence for the proper and fitting worship of God was carried into the ancient and medieval Church, and from there into the Anglican tradition. In the sixteenth century the great Anglican divine, Richard Hooker, in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, found himself contending with Protestant radicals known as "Puritans" who not only had zero interest in adorning churches with beautiful objects but, in some quarters, maintained that the great cathedrals and churches of England should be razed! Book 5 chapters XII-XVII of *Ecclesiastical Polity* is a sound defense the time-

honored practice of building and adorning churches for the glory and worship of God. At one point he writes, "*Touching God himself, hath he any where revealed that it is his delight to dwell beggarly? And that he taketh no pleasure to be worshipped saving only in poor cottages?*" (Eccl. Pol., 5:xv)

While no one is suggesting that the church go overboard and recklessly spend or borrow money to purchase all sorts of opulent and ostentatious appointments that are beyond her means, what *is* being suggested is that the church should not shy away from spending money on needed accouterments or appointments as necessary for divine worship. God wants the best to be given and used for divine worship. And he wants us to offer sacrifices of ourselves and all that we have to this end.

There is a very interesting section of St. John's Gospel (John 12:1-8) where a woman anoints Jesus with a large amount of costly perfume. Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed Jesus, said, "*Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?*" But Jesus replied, "*Let her alone: against the day of my burying has she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.*" That the Church has a ministry to the poor and needy, and many temporal concerns relative to the cost of doing business to take of is a given. But let us remind our brethren from other traditions that the Church *also* has an obligation to spend money on her ultimate purpose: the divine worship of almighty God. ✠

WORLD RELIGIONS: *Pantheism makes most eastern religions incompatible with Christianity*

Recently in a couple sessions of our Tuesday evening “Confirmation for the Confirmed” class (or, if you are new, our “Inquirer’s Class”) we got onto the topic of eastern religion and what some of the major differences are between them and orthodox Christianity.

One of the most critical differences that we discussed is that eastern religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, are essentially *pantheistic* while Christianity is *monotheistic*. The word *pantheism* comes from the two Greek words: “all” (pan) and “god” (theos). So *pantheism* is the belief that God is everything and everything is God. The word *monotheism* also comes from the Greek. It means “one” (mono) “god” (theos). Thus, Christianity, as well as Judaism and Islam, believe that there is one God who is separate and distinct from the world.

Far from being abstract and unimportant, this difference of understanding concerning the nature of God has far-reaching implications in terms of how we understand ourselves and the world.

While pantheism may sound good on the surface, what this notion that “god is everything and everything is god” actually implies is unreasonable notion that the material world is illusory and evil. Matter is “illusory” because the only thing that is real is the impersonal, universal “one” (“god” or “Brahman” in classical Indian thought). Matter is “evil” because the realm of the finite represents a separation from the ultimate, unchanging reality of which everything is a part. Thus, in eastern thought, if there was a “fall” of man it consists in his creation and his material aspect, whereas “salvation” consists in escaping from the material world and ultimately, after many reincarnations, being completely absorbed into the universal one of which all are a part. Indeed, the Dalai Lama himself in various places writes of a “Primordial Buddha” in which all phenomena (things), pure and impure are dissolved and eventually reborn, as being an empty, impersonal space.

All of this is directly opposed by orthodox Christian teaching. One of the things that the creation narratives in Genesis 1-2 teach is that there is one God who is personal, and who created the

heavens and the earth, which are distinct from him. The Creeds which we recite in the sacred liturgy reiterate this: “I BELIEVE in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” (Nicene Creed) And “I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.” (Apostles’ Creed).

For the Christian, life is real, and a gift from God. Man was created as the pinnacle of a *real* creation, and as a separate and distinct being to be in fellowship and communion with God the Holy Trinity, who is love. Moreover he was created as a material being, with a physical dimension that is an integral part of who he is. Although man has a fallen nature because of sin, material nature itself is in no way evil or illusory. If it were then God himself could not have become flesh, as orthodox churchmen in ancient times proclaimed to certain gnostic heretics. Most important, by the grace of God the fallen world is redeemed and recreated, beginning with man

himself, and continuing with the whole of creation by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Salvation in the Christian religion is new life in the new heavens and earth! Not a “disembodied” absorption into a universal, impersonal “One.”

We do not have to do too much thinking to understand how this basic difference - that the material world is evil and illusory;

or good but fallen and capable of redemption - plays out in different areas of human life. Here is one example: if the material world is evil then we do all that we can to escape from it. Therefore what we do in or with our bodies is of no consequence and of little importance to anything whatsoever. But most westerners - even “armchair Buddhists” - really cannot except accept that view. We believe that our bodies are part of who we are, and, though fallen, are sacred and good. The same is true for others, and so we engage in acts of charity to help alleviate the suffering of others as much as we can and give them a better life in this world. This is the Christian world view, which still underlies (at least at this point) our culture. This world view has given rise to science, philanthropy, medicine, and the alleviation of much suffering across the globe. And all of this is based on some very fundamental differences in how God and the world are viewed. ☩



SACRED SCRIPTURE: *The Image of God*

Human sin is referred to again and again in the Bible, but the Bible authors never completely forgot that man was made, as Genesis 1:26-27 says, "in the image of God." God gave life to all other living things, but man was special, made to be "like" God. This "image" was not physical (since God is a spirit) but a matter of mind, will, emotion - what we normally call "soul" as opposed to existing only to eat, sleep, and reproduce. Man, unlike animals, has a spiritual and moral nature. He can sin - which is exactly what happens in Genesis chapter 3. Sin touches all of human life, but never is the image of God completely erased.

Part of the New Testament message is that relationship with God can be restored and we can be more like God - the whole meaning of "image." Paul urged Christians to "put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24). In Colossians 3:10 he refers to "the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him." ✠

*Quoted from "1,001 Things You Always Wanted to Know About the Bible But Never Thought to Ask" by J. Stephen Lang. (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999)*

RECTOR'S NOTICES: *Please make a note of these important announcements and events!*

**Please be sure to read** all of the e-mails, bulletin announcements, newsletters, website, and other notices that come out from time-to-time! Many times people come to the rector with questions that have already been answered in one of more of these places.

**Diocesan synod** is July 8th - 12th in Annapolis, MD. There are many fun events and services that are held during this time. If you would like to come out for some of the service please see Fr. Anderson or Frannie Flatau, our official parish delegate, for more details. Please pray that we would have a blessed and productive synod.

**Remember our weekday activities:** We have a lot of things being offered for such a small church, including Tuesday Evening Prayer, dinner, and adult forum; Thursday morning Bible Study; 2nd Thursday of the month Intercessory Prayer Meeting; various Prayer Book Holy day services, and more. *We really would like to see more people turn out for these events. Why don't YOU try coming at least once in a while!* ☺

**A Very Insightful Poem:** Check out the following poem which I recently read. Does this apply to us?

**No Time**

I knelt to pray but not for long.  
I had too much to do.  
I had to hurry and get to work  
For bills would soon be due.

So I knelt and said a hurried prayer  
And jumped up off my knees.  
My Christian duty was now done.  
My soul could rest at ease.

Now all day long I had no time  
To spread a word of cheer.  
No time to speak of Christ to friends.  
They'd laugh at me I'd fear.

"No time. No time. Too much to do."  
That was my constant cry.  
No time to give to souls in need.  
At last the time to die.

I went before the Lord, I came,  
I stood with downcast eyes.  
For in his hands God held a book.  
It was the book of life.

God looked into his book and said,  
"Your name I cannot find.  
I once was going to write it down  
But never found the time."