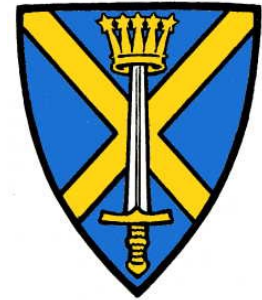


# The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

We are now officially in the “holiday season.” While this is a time of great mirth for most people, a sizable minority of folk who struggle with depression find their suffering magnified during this time of year. The shorter, colder winter days, often make it even worse. (Years ago a friend of mine used to host a “Season Affective Disorder” party every January which was crowded with morbid, artsy-type people, and other angst-ridden folk, all gathered together to be miserable as a big group... though in retrospect I must say that I usually found the parties to be rather fun, but I digress.) This holiday season, in the midst of a pandemic, there will probably be a lot more people suffering from depression than usual. One of the things that we can do is try to reach out to the lonely and sorrowful that we know and be friendly and encouraging to them, and share with them the love of Christ, as best we can, in word and deed. It could be as simple as making a dessert and dropping it off to their house, or calling them on the phone to check in on them, or even mailing a thoughtful card. Maybe it's a neighbor, or even a family member who is right under our nose! There are a lot of people —more than we think— all around us who “suffer in silence” and never let on that they are sad and lonely. Jesus Christ came into the world to give us the fullness of life. As he said in John 10:10, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” God does not want people to wallow in perpetual loneliness and sorrow. John 3:16 tells us that God LOVES the world, and that he loved it so much he took human flesh to come and save it. If God loves the world that much —the lost people, the morally and spiritually adrift— shouldn't we too, who are members of the Mystical Body of Jesus? Make it point to reach out to people this holiday season and let them know that God loves them.

Our Christmas services will be at their usual times this year —5:00 p.m. on Christmas Eve and 10:00 a.m. on Christmas Day. Only the Christmas Eve service will be put online. Decorations in the church will be kept to a minimum as I do not have the usual army of helpers to set everything up. But fear not! There will indeed be some pretty decorations as always. Sadly, we will not be able to have our annual Christmas party, but hopefully we can do so next year. The regular Prayer Book Holy Day services will be held at the usual time of 10:00 a.m., except that of St. John the Evangelist, which happens to fall on a Sunday this year. Once the twelve days of Christmas are over we have a very short Epiphany season (only two Sundays) and then we go right into pre-Lent (Shrovetide) at the very end of January. My O my, how time flies! Buckle up. It's going to be an interesting year! But rest assured that God will be with us every step of the way. Merry Christmas to you all!

Faithfully, your priest,

*J. Gordon Anderson*

## December 2020

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### UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

#### **Dec 8th - Conception of Our Lady**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

#### **Dec. 16th, 18th, 19th - Ember Days**

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 28th - Holy Innocents**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

#### **Jan 1st - Circumcision**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

#### **Jan 6th - Epiphany**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

#### **Jan 25th - Conversion of St. Paul**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

LITURGY & WORSHIP: *The History and Theology of the Exhortations*

Every year on the First Sunday in Advent we hear the beautiful liturgical prose of the Exhortation. (page 85 in the Book of Common Prayer) The rubric directs that it also be read on the First Sunday in Lent, and on Trinity Sunday. Composed in 1548 by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer—the architect of the Book of Common Prayer—the Exhortations (there are three of them in our Prayer Book) are firm but gentle “encouragements” (which is what “exhort” means), as it were, for God’s people to make sure they are in a proper spiritual state to receive the Holy Communion, and that they duly make their communions.

In our Prayer Book they are at the end of the Holy Communion service, almost as an appendix. But historically in England they were moved around in the service a few times until finally they ended up immediately after the Prayer for the Church, which is where our Prayer Book directs them to be read. The difference is that whereas they are kind of like an appendix to the service in our book, they are smack dab in the middle of the communion service in the traditional English Prayer Book (1662). Another difference is that the 1662 Prayer Book directs the First Exhortation to be read at *every* service of Holy Communion, whereas we are required to read it only thrice per annum.

The First Exhortation is the one we always hear at Saint Alban’s. (In fact I have never used the other two, though I came close to using the third once when I had a captive audience at an Evening Prayer service many years ago. It is worth noting that the Exhortations can be read *outside* of the communion service... more on that later.) Based on Saint Paul’s warnings to the Church in Corinth (see 1 Corinthians 11:17-34), the First Exhortation is meant to encourage us to examine ourselves before we presume to make our Communion. Paul warns the Christians in Corinth that their bad behavior, and receiving the Body and Blood of Christ unworthily, makes a mockery of the Lord’s Supper and the Church, and is the reason for their bodily and spiritual sickness. Cranmer is urging us to think along the same lines, and take the Blessed Apostle Paul’s words to heart.

The Second Exhortation (bottom of page 86) is basically an expanded version of the first, with additional directives concerning quieting our consciences found in the last paragraph (see the top of page 88). This is one of only two references to private auricular confession found in the American Prayer

Book (the other place being the office of the Visitation of the Sick on page 313).

The Third Exhortation is, like the second, hardly ever uttered in church. Clergy should make greater use of it than they do, however, because it addresses a common pastoral problem: people who neglect their duty to come to church. It was composed for the 1552 Prayer Book, mainly because Church authorities saw that despite their best efforts to make the Holy Communion more accessible to people (via a drastic revision of the sacred liturgy) folk were still not coming to church to make their communions. This was residual behavior from late Medieval days more than anything else, as back in those days people only made their communion once a year or so! The old saying applies well here: “Old habits die hard.” So in this exhortation Cranmer—or more likely Peter Martyr Vermigli, Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford at the time—draws upon the famous Gospel parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22) in order to encourage God’s people to not neglect the great gift being offered them in the Holy Sacrament.

Although we only hear the First Exhortation three times a year, and although we never hear the second and third, there is absolutely nothing stopping us from reading these on our own, in our own devotional quiet time with God, every now and then. The Prayer Book is a book of “common” prayer, which means it is for all people in the Church—lay and ordained. Thus, we can use parts of the Book of Common Prayer for our personal devotion at home any time we want, and well we should!

The Exhortations remind us that we ought to take the Holy Communion very seriously. The first two especially remind us of what it is all about, and why it is so important therefore to prepare ourselves before we receive it. The Third Exhortation reminds us that while we might be spiritually disposed to make our communions we have to actually come to church to receive the Holy Sacrament (if we are physically able, and excepting these times of pandemic relative to our health and that of our family).

This winter, acquaint yourselves with, or introduce yourselves for the first time to, the Exhortations found in the Book of Common Prayer (pp. 85-89). Mark the pages however you wish—dog ear, sticky note, etc.—and then make a point of going back to them from time to time to learn from them so they can help you love the Lord more and live more faithful lives for him. ☩

THEOLOGY: *The Nativity of Our Lord*

December 25th begins “Christmastide,” the twelve day season where we commemorate the birth of Jesus. The Book of Common Prayer calls gives December 25th the rather long and elaborate title “The Nativity of our Lord, or the Birthday of Christ, commonly called Christmas Day.” No one of course knows the exact date of Jesus’ birth. December 25th was chosen as the day simply to counteract a popular pagan holiday. But the exact date of his birth does not matter. What matters is the historical fact that he *was* born. What makes his birth so important?

In the prologue of Saint John’s Gospel, which is the first Gospel appointed for Christmas Day (John 1:1-14, BCP pp. 97-98), and which we sometimes say at the end of Mass as “The Last Gospel,” we hear these stirring words: “*And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*” While we believe that the “word was made flesh” at the Annunciation (when Jesus was “conceived by the Holy Ghost”) it really hits home to us that he did so at his Nativity — his birth — when, as John says, “*And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*” Any parent who has witnessed the birth of children can attest to this. Although one knows a baby is growing inside of the mother’s womb it all becomes incredibly more real as it were when the little bundle of joy is born and you can hold him or her.

When Saint John speaks of the “Word” (in Greek “logos”) he is speaking of God. “The Word” is God. “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made.*” So at the end of the passage, when John says “*And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,*” he is saying that Jesus — about whom he writes his Gospel — is this figure; that Jesus is God. (He is also, of course, saying that Jesus is different from God the Father: “*the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” My emphasis. Passages like this laid the groundwork for the definition of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity promulgated a few centuries in the ancient ecumenical councils.)

As perfect God and perfect man, Jesus Christ is the “only mediator and advocate” between God and man. An artist once portrayed Jesus as though he were a bridge between a chasm. On one cliff is God. On the other cliff is man. The chasm represents sin, which separates man from God. Jesus Christ is portrayed as bridging the chasms with his outstretched, cruciform arms, so as to reconcile man and God (which he did on

the cross) and bring him into the communion and fellowship of the divine life. It is an absolutely arresting image that is full of truth. But it only makes sense if Jesus is both God and man, as we confess in the Creeds! During the Arian controversy in the early church St. Athanasius rightly declared that God cannot save what does not assume. Put another way: God can save man because he has assumed his nature in the incarnation, thus he saves man by recreating him in Jesus Christ.

The incarnation leads directly to the cross. St. Athanasius indeed wrote in the same treatise (“De Incarnatione Verbi Dei”) that one without the other — the incarnation without the cross, or cross without the incarnation — would be to no avail to save humanity from sin and death. The vocation of man is to give himself entirely to God, just as God gives himself entirely to us, creating us to bring us into his divine life, which, by virtue of its trinitarian nature, is a life of total love and perfect communion. The problem, as we see in the story of the Fall in the book of Genesis, is that man failed to offer himself to God. Instead he took the creation and said, “This is mine,” and in so doing rejected his humanity in an ill-fated attempt to become God according to his own plan.

St. Athanasius famously says, “God became a man so that we could become God,” meaning because we are drawn into the life of God by grace through faith in Christ — the God-man — we become, as St. Paul writes, the children of God... his heirs in Christ Jesus. Adam and Eve seemed to have enough sense to know about what later theologians called “divinization” (2 Peter 1:3-4... “*that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature*”), but they wanted to accomplish this on their own terms and according to their own plan... not according to God’s plan and purpose! Jesus — the second Adam — accomplishes what the first Adam failed to do: give himself entirely to God the Father in love and obedience. Jesus did this even though it lead to the ultimate offering which is his death on the cross. In that death Jesus suffered the penalty of sin (“*The wages of sin is death.*” Rom. 6:23) which sinful humanity, whom he came to restore, must suffer. But three days later, in his glorious resurrection, Jesus conquered death. And now, all who are part of Jesus — who have faith in him and are baptized into him — have the hope of passing through death to eternal life. All of this begins with the Incarnation of the Son of God, and his Holy Nativity is where God’s amazing plan for salvation kicks into full gear. Thanks be to God! ✠

## PARISH NEWS &amp; UPDATES:

**Christmas Giving Recipient for 2020**

This year we are doing something different for our Christmas giving. Instead of a family we are going to be helping out Birthright of Bel Air, MD. Special thanks to Susan Kelly for connecting us with this great organization. Birthright is a non-profit pregnancy care center that supports pregnant women. That includes the prenatal stage of a pregnancy, childbirth and help to integrate the child into the family. Please google Birthright of Bel Air if you need more specifics. <https://birthrightharfordcounty.org> There is a giving tree at church that will have envelopes available if you want to contribute a check or cash to the cause. The cause offers women and families a life affirming alternative to abortion. Birthright accepts items such as formula, baby clothes up to 24 mos., wipes, paper towels and diapers, size 4, 5 and 6 and infant rattles and teethers. Maternity clothes are welcome. These items can be dropped off at the church. Unwrapped items are preferred and gently worn clothing is acceptable. If you donate at St. Albans, please have the items/check at the church on or before Sunday, December 20. All donations to Birthright go specifically to Harford County families. If you choose to send a check or monetary donation directly to Birthright, the address is : 38 E. Gordon St. Bel Air, MD 21014. On your card please include that you are part of the St. Albans congregation. Contributing to Birthright is a way for our church to carry our Christian values into the community.

**Seminarian Sunday**

Thank you for your support for Seminarian Sunday this month! We will post the total raised at the end of December.

**Memorial Lavabo Bowl**

The Flying Geese Quilting Guild, the lovely group of quilters who met at the church on Wednesday mornings for years up until the pandemic began, recently donated a sterling silver lavabo bowl to the church. The lavabo bowl is the small bowl the celebrant uses to wash his hands at the offertory. "Lavabo" means "I will wash" in Latin, which corresponds to the beginning of the silent prayer he prays at that point in the service. This generous gift was given in memory of Debbie Dachille, a member of the guild who died suddenly in October. The bowl is inscribed with a memorial to her, and her name has

been added to our parish chantry list so we can offer the Mass for the repose of her soul at our monthly Requiem Mass. We thank them for this generous gift and we pray for the repose of Debbie's soul.

**An Article About Our Guest Organist**

Here is a link to a great column about Dr. James Anthony who has been serving as interim organist for the last few months! <http://tunews.towson.edu/2014/05/12/departments-of-musics-heart-and-soul-to- retire-after-43-years/> This was written on the occasion of his retirement from teaching a few years back. We hope that everyone has been enjoying his phenomenal musicianship these last few months, and we thank him for filling for us!

**Flower Dedications**

It is still possible to dedicate flowers at church, even if you cannot come for in-person worship! Just let the rector know what day you would like and he will tell you if it is available. The florist will take care of all of the details. Your name and the person or event for whom or which it is dedicated will be announced at the services. The donation amount is \$35 and the flowers will be up for two weeks.

**Weekday Services**

Don't forget that we offer a service of Holy Communion at least once during the week. This is a good opportunity for people who do not feel comfortable coming to church on Sundays due to the "crowds" (though it's hardly crowded) to come to church another time to make their communion. A typical weekday service of Holy Communion has only 3-5 people... and that includes the clergy! So there is plenty of space to spread out. The day of the service will change from week to week, so be sure to check your e-mail each Sunday or Monday for when the weekday service will be. (The time will always be 10:00 a.m., but the day will change.)

**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) ☩