

The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

I hope that you all are having a blessed Advent and that your Christmas is truly wonderful. In the midst of all of the dangers and uncertainties in life and the world it is nice to have the beauty and traditions of the holiday season to rest in and enjoy. Of course, as they say, "Jesus is the reason for the season!" This month we celebrate his first "advent" ... his Holy Nativity that first Christmas Day. The incarnation of Christ is different from the nativity of Christ. We celebrate his incarnation on March 25th on the feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On that day, "*The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.*" (John 1:14) Nine months later, on December 25th, Mary was at full term, and the Word of God—our Lord Jesus Christ—was born in a manger. That is the "nativity" of Jesus. ("Nativity" comes from the Latin word "nativus" which means "arisen by birth.") The incarnation and nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ affirm two important things about humanity. The first is that humanity is fallen. We are dead in our trespasses and sin. As Saint Paul says in Romans 3:23, "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*" We are therefore in need of a savior, who is our Lord Jesus Christ. As we hear proclaimed during the Comfortable Words at every Mass: "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*" (1 Tim. 1:15) But the incarnation and nativity of our Lord also affirms a second truth about humanity, namely that humanity can be redeemed, and is good and worth saving. An ancient heresy called gnosticism claimed that matter was bad, and therefore that Jesus could not possibly have been a real human being if he was also God. They thought that God would never deign to take human flesh if it was fundamentally bad in itself. But the Church has always opposed this heresy, and we see her doing so throughout the Bible, and in the New Testament especially in the writings of Saint John. The Church teaches that humanity, though fallen, is, like the rest of creation, fundamentally "good", and that through faith in Christ we and the rest of creation will one day be restored to our true nature. (Likewise all of creation is good, though, like man, it is fallen because of the sin of Adam.) John 3:16 says, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" It is hard to imagine that God would love the world and everything in it, including man, if it is so utterly evil and repulsive and beyond hope and redemption. This Christmas and always may we give thanks to God for the greatest gift of all, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who by his death on the cross conquered sin, and by his resurrection conquered death. Jesus did this not just for the whole world in a general sense, but specifically for you and me. Why? Because God made us and he loves us, and he wants us to be with him, and share in his life through Jesus Christ. Let us ask him for grace and strength to live holy lives, and that we would be transformed more and more into people fit for eternal life. Merry Christmas!

Faithfully, your priest, *J. Gordon Anderson*

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By the late Rev'd John R. Cooper

UPCOMING HOLY DAYS:

Dec 8th - Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Dec 15th, 17th, 18th - Ember Days

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Dec 21st - St Thomas' Day

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 27th - St. John's Day

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Dec 28th - The Holy Innocents

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jan 1st - The Circumcision

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Jan 6th - The Epiphany

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

FOR ALL THE SAINTS: *Who is Saint Nicholas?*

Saint Nicholas' feast day occurs on December sixth. He ranks as one of the most popular of all the Saints, although in the last few centuries enthusiasm has waned considerably. As evidence of his popularity, it is to be noted that in England alone there are three hundred and seventy-five churches dedicated to him.

Saint Nicholas is the Patron Saint of children, sailors, travelers, merchants, and pawnbrokers... quite a variety. Not a great deal is known of his early life, save that he was born of noble Christian parents at Parara, a seaport town in Asia Minor. From his childhood his life was dedicated to God and when his parents died, shortly after he became a priest, he distributed the riches of his inheritance to the poor. He was elected Bishop of Myra under circumstances that were very exceptional. The Bishop of Myra had just died, so the Clergy decided to elect the first man to enter the Church the next morning. Saint Nicholas, arising early to pray, was chosen. This happened in the fourth century.

The three golden balls outside pawnbrokers' windows are traceable to an incident in Saint Nicholas' life. It seems that a certain nobleman of Parara lost all his money. He was at a loss to know how to support his three daughters honorably, when Saint Nicholas learned of his plight. For three successive nights he threw in the window of the nobleman's house a bag of gold, one for each daughter. (See illustration.) These three bags of gold are used in nearly every representation of Saint Nicholas, usually in the shape of three golden apples. From this symbol the Medici family of Florence derived their sign, since they were moneylenders. From them it has become a familiar sight all over the world.

We generally think of Saint Nicholas in connection with the Christmas story. How this came to be is not at

all clear, except that the custom of giving gifts at Christmas probably gave rise to the confusion. From the incident just related, the custom arose on the eve of Saint Nicholas' Day to distribute gifts in remembrance of his munificence. The gifts were placed either in the shoes or hose of the children, at night, and the next morning the children would rush downstairs to see what Saint Nicholas had left for them.

Saint Nicholas was devoted to the sea, and travelled about a great deal. On one occasion he saved the ship in which he was traveling by commanding the

waves to cease. Long after his death stories were told of his appearing to ships in distress, a white robed, rosy-cheeked figure appearing at the helm, guiding the ship safely into port. From this he came to be the patron saint of sailors.

Undoubtedly you have seen representatives of Saint Nicholas arrayed in a cope, mitre, and pastoral staff, standing beside a tub in which stand three naked children. The origin of this symbol is a bit terrible. During a famine a certain landlord of an inn took to stealing little children, pickling them with the intent to serve them to his guests as pork. Saint Nicholas happened by this inn, made the horrible discovery, and going out to the barn and making the Sign of the Cross over the tub, restored the children to

life. Another version of this story says that the victims were young men who were traveling. From this story we can readily see how St Nicholas became the Patron Saint of travelers and children.

Today, we can be certain that St Nicholas was a man of deep personal piety, Christian humility, an unbounded love for his fellow men, and is rightfully deserving of his place among the saints. Merry Christmas to all! ✠



ECUMENISM: *The True Basis of Church Unity*

There is much talk these days about church unity. Such slogans as "A divided world demands a united Church" popularly appear. None would deny that our blessed Lord left here on earth one Church as His mystical Body and that He intended that this Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church should remain one. Obedient to the will of Christ we Anglicans should strive for unity among ourselves. We should set our own house in order before we approach others on the question of Church Unity. Anglicans, unite!

Now unity among Anglicans does not mean uniformity of worship. It is possibly the genius of the Anglican tradition that it permits varying forms of worship, liturgical and extra-liturgical. But it does not permit varying forms of doctrine, and it is in the realm of sound doctrine that Anglicans can and should unite.

When a deacon is ordained to the sacred priesthood he vows that he will "minister the Doctrine and Sacraments, as the Lord hath commanded and as this Church hath received the same." He further vows that he will "with all faithful diligence banish and drive away from the Church all erroneous and strange doctrine." In the preface to the Book of Common Prayer it is stated that "different forms and usages may without offense be allowed, provided the substance of the Faith be kept entire." In the same preface it is further stated that "this Church is far from intending to depart from the Church of England in any essential point of doctrine, discipline or worship." In the preface of the Church of England Prayer Book it is written, "Of the sundry alterations proposed unto us, we have rejected all such as were either of dangerous consequences (as secretly striking at some established Doctrine or lawful practice of the Church of England or indeed of the whole Catholic Church of Christ) or else of no consequence at all but utterly frivolous and vain."

To what does all of this add up? Just this, there is in the Anglican tradition the great body of the Faith, "the Faith as this Church hath received the same." This Faith is based on the doctrine of the whole Catholic Church of Christ. And, where is this doctrine? It is primarily and preeminently in the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, crystallized in the Creeds (Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian), commonly assented to in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, defended by the decrees of the General Councils of the undivided Catholic Church. It is this Faith which is expressed or implied in the Book of Common Prayer. It is this Faith, too, which is the

rallying point around which Episcopalians can and should unite.

Now this Faith is often referred to as Catholic Tradition, for such it is. Its doctrines or teachings are concerned with such subjects as the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Church, Holy Scripture, Angels, Sin, Grace, Eternal Life, Sacrifice, etc., etc. Catholic Tradition as this Church hath received the same is the Good News of Jesus Christ in lesson form. It is the putting in order of the Gospel so that the disciples of our blessed Lord could carry out His divine command, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations." And we modern Anglicans have no right to approach other Christians with any proposal for unity until we know what we are to teach. We must acquaint ourselves with "the Faith as this Church hath received the same." In this process we shall be drawn together in the bonds of doctrine and in the unity of faith.

The confusion, disorder, and disunity among Anglicans are due in large measure to an utter absence in many quarters of the teaching of the Faith, or to individual priests (and, laymen for that matter) who teach the Faith not as this Church hath received the same but as they as individuals have received it. Thus the Faith becomes not the mind of the Church but the mind of individuals who set themselves up as pillars of the truth. No doubt such individuals are often sincere, though as often as not they are the victims of 'wishful thinking.' In the last analysis, however, we can no more trust an individual who says "In my opinion this is true" than we can trust an individual who says "Because my conscience tells me so, this is right." Just as the individual conscience often tells 'wrong time,' so does individual opinion. In the last analysis, therefore, we can trust only the corporate mind of the Church for the truth just as we can trust only the corporate conscience of the Church for the right. And the corporate mind of the Church is the doctrine of the whole Catholic Church of Christ. This is why the doctrine of the Anglican tradition so closely resembles the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church and the doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the other two branches of the Holy Catholic Church of Christ.

There are those who say that they would not know where to look for the teaching according to the mind of the Church and in keeping with Catholic Tradition. The writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers contain such teaching. Coming into the Middle Ages we find it in the *Summa* of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

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CHRISTMAS REFLECTION: *By the Rev'd John R. Cooper*

In Bethlehem of Judea there is a dark little cave with rough stone walls where the visitor is told Jesus was born. In this bare and cheerless place was born the one who has brought more spiritual richness, and more deep and true joy into the world than any other person who ever lived. In this utter simplicity was born the One whose teaching has changed the world's destiny. What a stark contrast is there!... between the bare little grotto, and the tremendous forces which have come out of it.

It is difficult for us, in the kind of world we live in today, to realize how much of the world's true greatness comes out of simplicity. Simplicity and humility underlie the whole Christmas story, and reveal to us something of the character of our Heavenly Father. He had his Son come into the world in the most simple, unadorned way. His entry was unknown and unnoticed, except by some simple shepherds, some wise men who were outside the Jewish nation, and a few saints like Simeon and Anna. Most people did not know about about this tremendous event. It was not accompanied



with the resounding of angelic trumpets nor with blazing letters written across the sky. His birth was in a most humble, quiet fashion,

Later he grew up in a carpenter's shop, working with his hands. And then he was a homeless wanderer with no wealth... at least as man understands wealth. He had to borrow a donkey on which to ride into Jerusalem, and borrow a tomb in which to be buried.

His birth and life goes so against our way of valuing things that it is no wonder so many people cannot accept him as their Lord and Savior. And yet, as we approach Christmas again and think about his birth and life, we find... simplicity... humility... love... sacrifice. These are at the heart of the universe... even as they

must be in our hearts... not only at Christmas, but always. ✠

From "Memories of Fifty-Six Years of Ministry" by the Rev'd John R. Cooper. Father Cooper was the first rector of Saint Alban's Anglican Church.

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It is also contained in the writings of such Anglican theologians as Richard Hooker and in the doctrinal sermons of H.P. Liddon and E.B. Pusey. In briefer or more concise form it may be found in such well-known books as "The Catholic Religion" by Staley, and "Catholic Faith and Practice" by Mortimer, as well as in such popular books as "The King's Highway" by Carleton, and "The Faith by Which We Live" by Fiske. This is to say nothing of the many spiritual writings of all ages.

Then, too, a careful study of the Book of Common Prayer will bring to light the Faith, since the Prayer Book is a book of Catholic doctrine as well as a book of Catholic worship. It behoves us as Anglicans to learn the mind of the Church and then in this common mind to set forth in all its glory the Faith once for all delivered to the saints. It is this Faith that the world

needs and it is this Faith alone that can be the basis for unity within any Church or between any Churches that shall dare to call themselves Christian.

When Anglicans arise from their timidity, when they refuse to surrender bits of doctrine but insist on keeping the Faith in its entirety, when they decline to accommodate their teaching to the popular demands of the modern and unredeemed world, when they drop any conception of the Revelation of the Son of God that is radically different from that set forth in the Gospel or in the Catholic Tradition, then they themselves will unite. The Faith as taught by them will not be sugar-coated, it will be radical enough to shatter the false foundations of modern life and provide confidence instead of doubt for the multitudes groping in the darkness of minds turned in on themselves. Such faith will conquer the world for as blessed John has written "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Anglicans, unite! Then, convert! ✠