

# The Centurion

The Parish Magazine of St. Alban's Church

1011 Old Joppa Road, Joppa, Maryland, 21085



My dear People:

The other day I was out shopping and saw an inflatable corgi “snow tube” for sale. It was basically a big inflatable corgi dog that kids could use to sled down hills and whatnot. I wanted to buy it so badly since we have a corgi, but alas, the kids are now too old for that sort of toy. We got our Pembroke Welsh Corgi named Nugget almost two years from a longtime breeder at Fairfield Farms in Jarrettsville. Fr Bill Smith’s niece, Sally Hurst, who works at Country Life Farm and is a Jack Russell Terrier breeder, graciously directed us to the breeder, one Donna Sullivan. Despite growing up with a number of dogs I had never heard of corgis until my wife and I lived in Florida. Some parishioners at St. Mark’s, where I was serving my title as curate, were corgi lovers and had two very big and spoiled ones as pets. Being classic anglophiles the couple always had corgis because they were the breed owned by Queen Elizabeth II. Valerie and I thought it would be fun to own one someday, so here we are. Ever since we have had Nugget I have noticed more and more corgi-related products on the market. We have corgi key chains, corgi socks, corgi ornaments, corgi stuffed animals, corgi stickers, and more. There are even corgi ice cube trays. Is this a new thing? I doubt it. They have always been popular dogs for a variety of reasons... I just never paid attention to that fact! I never opened my eyes and just looked around. My ‘corgi antennae’ were not up.

Isn’t that how it can be with God and spiritual things? We think God is not present in our lives, and we forget about him, when in fact he is there all around us. He reveals himself to us in the beauty of the creation. He speaks to us in our consciences. We hear something of his grandeur when we listen to Bach, Beethoven, or Brahms. We see him in the majestic works of art created by the old master artists, and more. When we have these experiences or encounter these things we might think that the visceral reaction is all there is (e.g. “Wow! Isn’t Michelangelo’s ‘David’ incredible.”) But there is more to them than their own beauty. For when we really look, and we really listen, these works point us to something greater than themselves, namely truth, beauty, and goodness... to God himself. We begin to apprehend God, who was actually there all along. And then our antennae go up! When we have had that initial experience with the divine, we begin to look for God elsewhere, and notice him—or something about him—in everything that we see, and we begin to experience him in ways that we hadn’t before. Why? Because we are looking for him. We are expecting him to do something in our lives, and to transform us. In the Advent Collect we ask God for grace to “*cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armor of light.*” (Rom. 13:8 ff.) Light helps us see and discern. This season of Advent may God give us grace to see and discern him in the world and in our lives. May we be attentive and looking for him so that, by his grace, we may truly find him.

Faithfully, your priest, *J. Gordon Anderson*

December 2023

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UPCOMING PRAYER BOOK  
HOLY DAYS:

**Dec 8th - Conception BVM**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Dec 20th - Ember Day**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Dec 21st - St. Thomas**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Dec 22nd - Ember 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 26th - St. Stephen**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Dec 27th - St. John**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

**Dec 26th - Holy Innocents**

Holy Communion at 10:00 a.m.

Please see the parish website for the complete list of Sunday and Holy Day services offered each month.

[www.saintalbansjoppa.org](http://www.saintalbansjoppa.org)

LITURGY: *The Names of Christmas*

The Book of Common Prayer has this title on page 96 for Christmas Day: “*The Nativity of our Lord, or the Birthday of Christ, commonly called Christmas Day.*” But there are many other names and titles we associate with Christmas. This month we will hear from Fr. Francis Weiser, S.J.’s wonderful book “*Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs*” (Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1952 — p. 67 ff.) about some of these other ones — where they come from and what they mean. (The following is all adapted from Weiser’s book.)

**Christmas Names and Greeting:**Liturgical Names:

The original Latin names for Christmas are *Festum Nativitas Domini Nostri Jesu Christi* (The Feast of the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ), and the shorter form, *Dies Natalis Domini* (The Birthday of Our Lord).

From these Latin names most nations obtained their popular terms for the Christmas feast: *Il Natale* (Italy), *La Navidad* (Spain), *Natal* (Portugal), *Nadal* (Southern France), *Nadolig* (Wales), etc. The Greek *Genethlia* means “Nativity,” as do the names for Christmas in Hungarian (*Karácsony*) and in most of the Slavic languages: *Boze Narodzenie* (God’s birth) in Polish; *Rozhdestvo Khrista* (Christ’s Birth) in Russian and Ukranian.

The French word *Noel* can be explained as either coming from the Latin *natalis* (birthday) or from the word *nowel* which means “news.” (ed. note: see our 1940 Hymnal, p. 30). It is possible that both explanations are right. *Noel* and *nowel* may be words of different origin that have become identical in meaning because they are pronounced the same.

Popular Names:

The English word *Christmas* is based on the same pattern as the old names for other feast days in the liturgical year, such as *Michaelmas*, and *Candlemas*. The first mention of the name “*Christes Maesse*,” dates from the year 1038. It means “the Mass of Christ.” The English nation (as did all Christian nations at the time)

acknowledged the Sacrifice of the Mass as the most important part of the Christmas celebration. For instance, the word in the Dutch language was *Kermis* (the Mass of Christ); the old Dutch form is *Kerstes-misse* or *Kersmisse*, the German *Christmesse*.

The German word for Christmas, *Weinacht*, or, in the plural form, *Weinachten*, means “the blessed (or holy) night.” Similar terms meaning “the holy night” are used in some Slavic languages (Czech, Slovak, Yugoslavian). The Lithuanian word *Kaledos* is derived from the verb *Kaledoti* (to beg, to pray) and has the meaning “Day of Prayer.”

Yule:

The origin of the word *yule* is disputed. Some scholars say it comes from the old Germanic word *Jol* (*Iul*, *Giul*), meaning a turning wheel (in this instance the sun wheel rising after the winter solstice). A better explanation, however, might be the Anglo-Saxon word *geol* (feast). Since the greatest popular feast in pre-Christian times was the celebration of the winter solstice, the whole month of December was called *geola* (feast month). This name was preserved in the English and German languages, and later applied to the Feast of Christmas: *Yule* in English, and *Jul* in German.

Merry Christmas:

When this greeting was originally used, the word *merry* did not mean “joyful, hilarious, gay [sic],” as it does today. In those days it meant “blessed, peaceful, pleasant,” expressing spiritual joys rather than earthly happiness. It was thus used in the famous phrase “*Merry England.*”

The well-known carol “*God rest ye merry, gentlemen*” is an excellent example of the original meaning of merry. The position of the comma clearly shows the true meaning (i.e. that the word is not an adjective describing “gentlemen”), and therefore is not “God rest you, joyful gentlemen,” but “God rest you peacefully, gentlemen.” ☩

## 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 &amp; UPDATES:

**Getting Seasonal Terminology Straight**

Note: Christmas is not the celebration of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ! That mystery is celebrated on the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BCP, p. 235) which always falls on March 25th. Notice the Collect for the Annunciation: “*WE beseech thee, O Lord, pour thy grace into our hearts; that, as we have known the incarnation of thy Son Jesus Christ by the message of an angel, so by his cross and passion we may be brought unto the glory of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.*” What Christmas celebrates is the nativity—the actual physical birth—of our Lord. Notice the title of the feast in the Book of Common Prayer (p. 96): “*The Nativity of our Lord, or the Birthday of Christ, commonly called Christmas Day.*”

**Five Things Jesus Did Not Say**

1. “*Follow your heart.*”— Jesus actually said, “Follow me.”
2. “*Be true to yourself.*”— Jesus actually said, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny himself.”
3. “*Believe in yourself.*”— Jesus actually said, “Believe in me.”
4. “*Live your truth.*”— Jesus actually said, “I am the truth.”
5. “*As long as you are happy.*”— Jesus actually said, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?”

**4th Sunday in Advent (December 24th) — ONE 9:00 A.M. SERVICE!**

Since the Fourth Sunday in Advent falls on Christmas Eve we will have just one 9:00 a.m. service that morning. It will be a sung communion service without incense. Please note this does NOT count as a Christmas service! Our Christmas services will be as usual: Christmas Eve on the 24th at 5:30 p.m. and Christmas Day on the 25th at 10:00 a.m. Please make a note of this!

**Advent is Not a Penitential Season**

There is perpetual confusion surrounding the nature and status of Advent. Because purple (or the related color of blue) vestments are worn, and the Gloria is not said at the Holy Communion many people assume that Advent must be a season of penitence on par with Lent.

But those things notwithstanding, Advent is no such thing! The telltale signs of this is that it is not a season of fasting (BCP, p. li), and that the ‘Alleluia’ is not omitted from the liturgy. [N.B. Omitting the ‘Gloria’ does not mean the season or feast is of a penitential nature because the fact is it is often omitted throughout the year on various saints days, and therefore (like the Creed) not a critical part of the Mass. (It was —again, like the Creed— actually a later addition to the service!)] So what is Advent? It is a season of quiet expectation where we contemplate the coming of our Lord... how he *came* to us as a babe in the manger, how he *comes* to us in the Holy Eucharist, and how we *will come again* in his glorious majesty to judge the living and the dead. Because of this it is a more subdued season of ecclesiastical year, but not exactly a penitential season.

**Painting Help**

The church could use some volunteers to help paint the wainscoting in the nave. The 1980’s mauve is being painted over in a bright white to freshen and brighten up the place. A few sections have already been done and it looks great. Please let the rector know if you would like to help. No experience or tools are necessary.

**Building Project**

Don’t forget to give in support of our building project! Every little bit helps. As with all gifts to St. Alban’s any amount of money you donate at any time is 100% tax deductible. *We are now over \$11,000 in donations!*

**Social Media**

Check us out on social media on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter! There are announcements and other important bits of information about us posted on these platforms on a regular basis.

**Thank You For Your Support**

“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) ☩