

# THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church  
Livingston, Alabama



Volume XXIV, Number 5

May 2017



May 2017

## *This Month's Cover*

Our cover painting this month is Raphael's *Visitation*, in honor of the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary on May 31. Immediately after Jesus was conceived in her womb, Mary went to the hill country of Judea to visit her elderly cousin Elizabeth (Lk. 1:39ff). Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John the Baptist (Lk. 1:26), and when Mary approached her the infant leaped in her womb. It was then that Mary spoke the beautiful canticle known as the Magnificat. Raphael's painting is somewhat inaccurate in that Mary had just conceived, and would not have been visibly pregnant yet. In the background God, attended by two *putti*, overshadows the future John baptizing Jesus in the River Jordan—a typically Raphaelesque device. Mary is dressed in the earth tones that would be expected of a non-aristocratic girl of the time, but she has an overwrap of blue, the color that is usually associated with the Blessed Virgin. The painting is oil on canvas, completed in 1517. It is of medium size by Renaissance standards, being roughly 5x6½ feet. It is displayed in the Museo de Prado in Madrid.

Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino, commonly known as Raphael or Rafael, was born on April 6, 1483 in Urbino, a medieval walled city in the Marches on the central east coast of Italy. His father, Giovanni Santi, was a court painter to the Duke of Urbino, and was a highly reputed artist of the Early Renaissance. Raphael was trained in the High Renaissance style, and is generally classed with Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo as the trinity of Renaissance masters. Although he died on his 37th birthday, April 6, 1520<sup>1</sup>, he left a huge number of works of both paintings and architectural plans. Probably his greatest masterpiece is *The School of Athens* in the Vatican Stanza della Segnatura. It is a huge fresco honoring all the

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<sup>1</sup> Some report his birth and death dates as March 28. This would be the date by the Julian calendar, which was in effect during Raphael's life. The Gregorian calendar, which is what most of the world uses today, was not introduced until 1582, and by that the date would have been April 6.

great philosophers since ancient times. After his death most artistic critical attention fell on his rival Michelangelo, and it was not until the 18th and 19th centuries that Raphael was again recognized as one of the greatest masters of the High Renaissance as well as one of the greatest of all time, the equal of Michelangelo and Leonardo.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***A Word From the Editor***

Happy Easter! This is not a belated greeting, because Easter doesn't end until Pentecost on June 4. It was a delight seeing so many people in church on Easter Day; unfortunately, the next time we will see so many will be eight months from now at Christmas. Clergy joke about the regular churchgoers—those who go regularly every Christmas and Easter. I have been known at Christmastime to wish everyone a happy Easter, and vice versa. This was not to be impertinent (well, maybe just a little), but to point out that Christmas and Easter are inseparable. If God the Son did not take humanity upon himself through the Incarnation and intersect with history as Jesus Christ, then his death and Resurrection have no meaning. Likewise, if the Incarnate Son of God did not experience death just as you and I will, then his Incarnation is equally meaningless. Christmas and Easter, then, are both part of the same divine and cosmic event.

That event is what opened the gate of Heaven to us and made it possible for us to have everlasting life with God. It is so important that we set aside every Sunday, the day on which Jesus rose, as a special day to commemorate and celebrate this means of our salvation. While we should worship

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God every day of our life, we worship him in a special way on that day to give thanks and to receive from him the spiritual nourishment that enables us to continue following him in a world that basically wants no part of him. Every Sunday, then is a “little Easter” and therefore a “little Christmas.” We worship God on Sunday not in order to get a “feel good” rush or to “get something out of it,” we worship him because it anchors us to his Incarnation and Resurrection, and thus to our salvation. It is not something that we do when there is nothing more important—there is nothing more important.

*Father Rick Losch+*

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## ***Be Wordly Wise***

### ***Religious and Sacrilegious***

If we look closely at these two words we can see that they are not actually related. The second word is *sacri-legious*, not *sac-religious* (although that is how it is usually pronounced<sup>1</sup>). The word *religion* derives from the Latin *re-*, again, and *ligere*, to bind. It means rebinding (we get the word *ligament* from *ligere*). It is the reunion or rebinding of man to God after man’s fall. The word *sacrilege* derives from the Latin *sacer*, sacred, and *legere*, to take possession of or to steal.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore the stealing (or abuse) of that which is sacred. Although *sacrilege* is usually associated with religion, if we watch our *i*’s and *e*’s we can see that the two words come from completely different roots.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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<sup>1</sup> Many words are mispronounced more often than they are pronounced correctly. One that immediately comes to mind is “anti-Semitic,” which is usually mispronounced “anti-Simetic.” This is hatred of Semites (Semitic people), not of Simites (whoever they may be). As an aside, though anti-Semitism is hatred of all Semitic people (mainly Arabs and Jews), the word usually is used to mean hatred only of Jews.

<sup>2</sup> *Legere* is one of those words whose meaning depends on the context. It can also mean to choose or to gather together (in that meaning it is the root of the word *legion*). It is not to be confused with *legare*, which means to appoint, and is the root of the word *legate*.

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## ***Sunday School***

The last day of Sunday School will be Sunday, May 28. We will be on recess until September 10, the Sunday after Labor Day.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***Altar Flowers Are Back***

Now that Lent is over we have flowers on the altar again, and we need volunteers. You can use flowers from your own garden, or arrange with Dogwood Florists to prepare them. There is a sign-up chart in the sacristy. If you have a nice flower garden but don't feel you have the time or talent to arrange them, please speak to Carolyn Patrenos and she can get someone to arrange your flowers for you.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***Forward Day by Day***

The new *Forward Day by Day* daily devotional booklets for May, June and July are available on the table in the vestibule/narthex and in the tract rack in the parish house. In addition to the small booklets we have large print editions available. Please feel free to take either size.

*Hiram Patrenos*

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## ***Hippity Hop***

I am often asked where the Easter Bunny legend came from, and for years I have given the same answer—and apparently the wrong one. In 1835 Jakob Grimm wrote a book called *Deutsche Mythologie* (“German Mythology”) in which he proposed that the name Easter (*Ostern* in German) came from the pagan Celtic fertility goddess Oestre.<sup>1</sup> This became a common explanation for the source of the name. Unfortunately, although it is very widely accepted, it is apparently not

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<sup>1</sup> Oestre's name is the root of the words estrus and estrogen.

true. Oestre is the Celtic version of the Middle Eastern goddess Ishtar, Ashtara, Ashera or Astarte, depending on which Middle Eastern region worshiped her. Her annual festival was at the time of the Pascal full moon,<sup>1</sup> which determines the dates of Passover and Easter, so it fell at about the same time as those feasts. Since she was the goddess of fertility, one of her symbols, appropriately, was the rabbit. Allegedly this spilled over into Easter and became associated with that feast as the Easter Bunny. The egg is a symbol of the Resurrection (the chick bursting forth from the egg as Christ burst forth from the tomb). How the bunny came to be associated with laying Easter eggs, however, is not clear, since rabbits are mammals and do not lay eggs.

This is the common explanation, but the only problem is that it apparently is not true. It is true that the rabbit was one of the symbols of most of those versions of the fertility goddess, but the name Easter did not come from the name of Oestre, she was never associated with Easter, and thus her rabbits are not the source of the Easter bunny legend.

The name Easter derives from the Old German *Austron*, which means sunrise. Since the disciples went to the tomb at dawn on the first Easter, sunrise has been associated with Easter from the very earliest days of Christianity.<sup>2</sup> In ancient times *Austron* entered the German language from the Latin *auster*, south.<sup>3,4</sup> In the northern lands the sun rises in the southeast and sets in the southwest. Only Germanic languages (including English, which is in the Germanic language fami-

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<sup>1</sup> The Pascal full moon is the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox, which is the day in the spring when day and night are of equal length. It falls on March 20.

<sup>2</sup> The idea of the “rising of the Son” depends on the German and English languages and is a relatively recent construct.

<sup>3</sup> Even though the word *austron* has something of a Greek flavor, it has no roots in Greek. The names Austria and Australia derive from *auster*.

<sup>4</sup> The English word *austere* looks similar, but it derives from a completely different word—the Greek *austeria* (’αυστηρία), harshness.

ly) use the name Easter or anything like it.<sup>1</sup> In modern German the feast is called *Ostern*. The Hebrew for Passover is *Pesach* (פסח), and the Greek for Easter is *Pascha* (Πασχα) (Passover in Greek is *Ebraiko Pascha* [Ἑβραϊκο Πασχα], Hebrew Easter). In almost all other languages the name of the Day of Resurrection is based on the Greek: *Pâques* (French), *Pascua* (Spanish), *Paschalnyj* (Russian), *Påske* (Norwegian), and even in Dutch, a Germanic language, it is *Pasen*. Even in English the adjective for Easter is Pascal. Obviously Oestre or Ishtar had nothing to do with these names.

Then where did the Easter bunny come from? All the evidence points to a German Lutheran tradition dating back to sometime before the 17th century. *Der Osterhase* (the Easter Hare) brought colored eggs, candy and sometimes toys to children on the night of Easter Eve (Holy Saturday). This is very similar to the legend of *Weihnachtsmann* (Father Christmas or Santa Claus). The hare was an important Christian symbol in central Europe from early times. People believed that the hare was hermaphroditic, and that it could reproduce without sexual contact. It thus became a symbol of the Virgin Mary. It was often used in medieval illuminated manuscripts and paintings depicting Mary and the infant Jesus, especially in northern Europe.

As we mentioned above, the egg is a symbol of the Resurrection. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, many Christians abstain from eating eggs during Lent. It is a sin to waste food, however, so to preserve them they would boil or roast them, and they would then be eaten on Easter when Lent was over. It became a custom to decorate them by painting them or coloring them in very imaginative ways. Eastern Orthodox Easter eggs are often beautiful works of art.<sup>2</sup>

*Richard R. Losch+*

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<sup>1</sup> One exception is Japanese, where it is *Isuta*, but this is because Easter was first introduced into Japan by English speaking people.

<sup>2</sup> In Russia the Tsar commissioned the jeweler Fabergé to make magnificent Easter “eggs” of gold and precious gems every year for Easter.

## ***Tell Them I AM Has Sent You***

When God confronted Moses at the burning bush and sent him to Egypt to free the Israelites, Moses asked, “Who shall I say has sent me?” God answered, “This is what you shall say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Ex. 3:14). The word we translate I AM is *ahiah* (אֶהְיֶה), “I who exist,” or “Existence.” He actually said, “Tell them EXISTENCE has sent you.” Of all the many names of God in the Old Testament, by far the most sacred is Yahweh (יְהוָה), which derives from this word and essentially means “He who exists.”

If you are not an atheist then you believe that God (or a pantheon of gods) exists. Thomas Aquinas argued that a belief in the existence of deity can be achieved through pure human reason, but that an understanding of his nature and how he operates can be attained only through revelation. From there, human reason guided by the Holy Spirit can give us not only an understanding of God, but also a spiritual relationship with him. The Rationalists during the Age of Enlightenment (mainly 17th and 18th centuries) believed that the only thing that was necessary is human reason, but this thinking ultimately led to some bizarre concepts of God and produced some very non-mainstream Protestant sects.

On of the questions that must be addressed once we accept the existence of God is what are his attributes? What about him can we describe in terms that we, as humans, can understand? God is not so mysterious or transcendent that we cannot know anything about him, and if we can know anything about him then we must use our human reason to do so, even if that reason is being used simply to understand what he has revealed to us.

The first and most important of God’s attributes is that he is eternal. This means that he has no beginning and no ending. This is a hard concept for us humans, who live in a world controlled by the passage of time, to grasp. In our personal experience, everything has a beginning and an ending, because we are a part of creation, and time is also a part of that



creation. Even though it is beyond our empirical experience, however, we can philosophize about timelessness, and we can even deal with limitlessness mathematically. We can therefore understand it as an attribute of God, even though we cannot experience it personally.<sup>1</sup> Being eternal is part of what makes him God. By sheer logic—human reason—we realize that something that is eternal must be the very essence of existence. God is, therefore, existence. “I AM has sent you”—that is, “I WHO EXIST has sent you.”<sup>2</sup>

Since creation had a beginning and God is eternal, this means that in human terms creation is only a “blip” in God’s existence. This tells us that for an eternity God was just fine without us, and therefore he does not need us.

The next logical step is to realize that since we had a beginning we are not eternal, and therefore although we exist, we are not existence itself. We participate in existence, and therefore we participate in God. God does not need us, but we need him for our very existence.

If God does not need us, then why did he create us and all the rest of creation? We can answer that question with a question. Why did Raphael paint? Why did Michelangelo sculpt? Why did Mozart compose? It was not necessary to their physical survival for these artists to produce, and yet in a spiritual way they had to do so. They perceived beauty in their souls, and they had a need to express it in their art. Likewise, it is in the very nature of God, who is beauty, to produce beauty. God did not create man because he needed someone to love—his love is perfectly fulfilled in the Blessed Trinity—he created

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<sup>1</sup> Christians, along with those of many other faiths, believe that we are everlasting, but we are not eternal. To be everlasting means to have a beginning, but then to go on forever. To be eternal means to have no beginning as well as no ending. Eternal life and everlasting life are not the same thing. We have everlasting life, but only God has eternal life.

<sup>2</sup> Jesus affirmed his divinity when he said, “I AM the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25); and “I AM the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6)—not just that he represented them; and “Before Abraham was born, I AM” (John 8:58).

man simply because he loves, and the essence of love is giving—creating—not receiving.

If we are creatures of love, why do we rebel against God? This is theologically known as the Problem of Evil, and it is well beyond the scope of this article. Simply stated, however, when God created us he gave us free will, which means that he gave us the ability to reject him. If we did not have that ability we could not love him—all we could do is obey him. That is not love, that is slavery. In order to be able to love one must also have the ability to disdain or even to hate.

This is theology and philosophy, not science. Science can tell us much about *how* all this happened, but it cannot tell us *why*. That is the realm of theology and philosophy, part of which can be grasped through reason, and most of which must come to us through divine revelation. Much of what is revealed to us can then be dealt with through reason, but often revelation must be the first source. Think of how many times in your life something has been a complete mystery to you until it is shown or explained, and at that point you have an “Aha! Of course!” moment.

God *is* existence, and because it is in his nature to create, we exist by *participating* in his existence. Saint Paul said, “In him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***He Descended Into Hell***

The Apostles’ Creed says that after Jesus died, “He descended into hell.” This phrase has been a point of discussion among theologians and the laity alike for centuries, although it has never been seriously argued by anyone who knows what he is talking about that Jesus descended into Hell, the place of eternal damnation. What, then, does it mean? Before we can explore the theological implications of it, we must first consider the language itself.

The English word hell comes from a long list of very similar Teutonic and Nordic words that are all rooted in the name

of the ancient Nordic goddess of the dead, Hel. It came into English via the early Anglo-Saxon. Only in Christian usage did it come to be associated with the place of punishment, and in that usage it is capitalized as Hell. When un-capitalized, hell, it simply means the place of the departed. This is how it is used in the Apostles' Creed. This is not a problem in most other languages, but in English it confuses the uninformed when we say that when we die we go to hell (not all that bad) until we are judged, but that once judged, the damned go to Hell (very, very bad). Some traditions in their liturgy have replaced the lowercase word hell with the phrase "the place of departed spirits."<sup>1</sup>

Most ancient religions believed that when a person died his spirit remained forever in a semi-aware state in a place of the departed. They were in what psychologists call a limbic state. During those first few moments before you fall asleep, you are often in a halfway state in which you are neither really awake nor completely asleep. This is a limbic state. In Hebrew this place is called *Sheol* (שְׁאוֹל), in Greek *Hades* (ᾍδης), and in Latin either *Hades* or *Inferus* (without an *n*—literally the Place of the Lower Ones). You were in a state of simple passive existence, and were neither happy nor unhappy. The ancients believed that truly evil souls went to a place of eternal suffering, where they were fully aware of their pain. The Jews called it *Gehinom* (גֵּהֵנוֹם) or *Gehenna*, the Romans called it the plural *Inferni* (with an *n*—the damned) and the Greeks (and sometimes the Romans) called it *Tartarus* (Τάρταρος). The Greeks and Romans also believed in a place of reward for the outstandingly righteous, called *Elysium* (Ἕλυσιον). There the souls were fully self-aware and

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<sup>1</sup> The 1928 Book of Common Prayer had no mechanism for including explanations, so it included a rubric that said, "And any Churches may, instead of the words, 'He descended into hell,' use the words, 'He went into the place of departed spirits,' which are considered as words of the same meaning" (1928 BCP, p. 12). This was strictly a means of explanation—they never really intended for anyone to do that.

lived in eternal bliss.<sup>1</sup> The Jewish equivalent was “the Bosom of Abraham,” and its description is not clear. The early Christians were well-versed in these traditions about the departed.

The first version of the Apostles’ Creed was written in Greek, and only later was it translated into Latin. The original Greek said that he descended “to the lower ones” (*ta katota*, τα κατωτα), equivalent to “he descended below.” This is a clear reference to *Hades* or *Inferus*, the place of departed spirits, not to *Tartaros* or *Inferni*, the place of punishment. When the Creed was translated into Latin, the phrase used was *ad Inferos* (no *n*). Unfortunately, many scribes in ancient times were well versed in writing and copying scripts, but were not well educated. They did not recognize the distinction between *ad Inferos* and *ad Infernos*, and thus often inserted an *n* that did not belong. Their error made it read “to Hell” instead of “to the place of the lower ones.” This error is emphasized when translated into English, because in English the only distinction between hell (the place of the departed) and Hell (the place of the damned) is the capitalization of the latter.

The final question that comes up is, what did he do there? Jesus said that no one could come to the Father except through him. If that is so, then Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, all the prophets and all the faithful that came before Jesus are cut off from the Kingdom of Heaven. This, of course, makes no sense. When the penitent thief on the cross asked Jesus to remember him, Jesus said, “This day you will be with me in Paradise.” He did not ascend into heaven, though, until 43 days later. During the three days that his physical body lay in the tomb, Christ was in the place of departed spirits offering salvation to all those who were there. That was three days in human history, but the eternal Christ transcends history, and is outside the boundaries of time. All who have not heard the Gospel or have heard such a distorted version of it that no

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<sup>1</sup> In some traditions the only people who went to Elysium were heroes who died bravely in battle (or later died of wounds incurred bravely in battle), and women who died giving birth to future brave warriors.

reasonable person would accept it will have an opportunity to accept Christ after death. Perhaps even those who have lost their faith will have a “second chance”—that is up to God. We wonder why at that point anyone would reject him, but there are those who have become so sin-filled, hard-hearted or closed-minded in this life that even in the next they would still reject him.

Christ came into the world and died in order to offer salvation to all mankind. He descended into hell to offer that salvation to all who for whatever reason did not have an opportunity to know him in this phase of their lives.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***“The Epistle” Is Online***

The last four years’ issues of *The Epistle* are online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the “Epistle” tab at the top, then click on the issue you want to see. You can read it online or download it as a .pdf file.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***Pontius Pilate***

In almost every service we say either the Nicene or Apostles’ Creed, which means that in almost every service we mention Pontius Pilate. Other than that of our Lord himself, no name appears so frequently in liturgical worship. We may well ask why, particularly when we consider what a vile man he was. The gospels treat him rather gently for good reason. They were written to tell the story to Gentiles, most of whom were Romans or sympathetic to the Romans. The Jews already knew what a monster Pilate was, and there was nothing to be gained by painting a Roman leader as such.

Pilate was a scion of the the Pontii, who were a powerful Roman Patrician family.<sup>1</sup> Every Patrician male had at least

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<sup>1</sup> The Patricians were nobility who descended from the original families of the Roman Republic.

three names. We don't know Pilate's given name (*praenomen*), but there is good evidence that it was probably Lucius. His family name (*nomen*) was Pontius, and in Roman society he would have been addressed as Lucius Pontius, not as Pilate. His third name (*cognomen*), Pilatus, was a family nickname. The cognomen was not an official name, but families carried them for generations. Pilatus means Javelin-thrower."<sup>1</sup>

There were only two jobs that were socially acceptable for a Patrician—the military, and politics. Most Patricians started as military officers, and once they had made a name for themselves there they went on into politics. We know nothing of Pilate's military background, but it is certain he would have had one. The Pontii were an important family, so the next step would be for Lucius Pontius to be given a political appointment by the emperor. It is evident that he was not well-liked in Rome, so Tiberius appointed him as Procurator of the most God-forsaken outpost of the Empire—a miserable dustbowl in the southern portion of the Province of Syria, called Judea.

From the time he arrived in A.D. 26 Pilate hated the Jews. He was bitter about being appointed to Judea, and he had no time for people like the Jews who would not grovel before Rome. Many years before, in order to keep peace with the Jews, Rome had agreed that no pagan symbols would be brought into the city of Jerusalem. Pilate's first order was to place shields of Mars and Venus on the entrance to the Antonia, the Roman fortress, to erect a Roman Eagle (the symbol of Jupiter) over the governor's palace, and to order the legions to bring their standards (staffs bearing images of their patron gods) into the city. According to the historians Philo and Josephus, Pilate's record was one of continuous brutality and intentional religious offense to the Jews. Finally in A.D. 36 he was called back to Rome for trial, where he committed suicide. Generally the only reason a Patrician would commit

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<sup>1</sup> These family nicknames were often descriptive and were sometimes by our standards insulting, but the Roman families carried them proudly. "Caesar" meant "fine head of hair." Strabo (Pompey's cognomen) meant "cross-eyed." Brutus meant "beastly." Ahenobarbus meant "red-beard."

suicide was because he was given that as an alternative to being publically executed and thus disgracing his family.

When Jesus was brought before Pilate by the Sanhedrin, it appears on the surface that Pilate tried to do what was right and save him, but finally “caved” under their pressure. In fact, he hated Caiaphas even more than he hated the Jews in general. If Caiaphas had wanted Jesus’ release, Pilate would have pressed for his conviction. If we keep that in mind, it becomes very apparent that the whole trial was a “cat-and-mouse” game with Caiaphas, and when Pilate got tired of it he condemned Jesus to be crucified and went in to dinner. The final slap in the face to Caiaphas was the inscription that Pilate wrote over the cross, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

Why, then, if Pilate were such a monster, do we remember his name in the most basic statements of our faith? The answer is actually quite simple. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God’s love and forgiveness, and of all that is perfect. Pilate is the embodiment of fallen humanity with all its barbarity, and of all that is worldly. Placing Jesus Christ and Pilate together anchors into history God’s great act of salvation, Christ’s death on the cross, which saved the fallen world that is so desperately in need of salvation.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***Thank You, Deep South Landscaping***

Many thanks again to Jason Gordy and his crew at Deep South Landscaping for their generosity in donating their time and talent to beautifying our prayer garden. They do outstanding work, and we are greatly appreciative.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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*A Sunday School teacher asked the children to draw a picture of the Flight into Egypt. Johnny’s picture showed five people in an airplane. There were Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus, and two others—a very fat man and a man at the front of the plane. The teacher said, “I recognize the Holy Family, but who are the other men?” The boy replied, the one in the front is Pontius the pilot, and the fat man is Round John Virgin.”*

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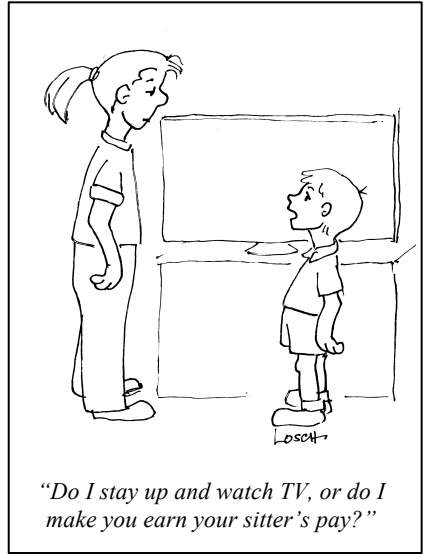
## *ECW Yard Sale*

The ECW will have a yard sale at the church on Saturday, May 20, starting at 9:00 a.m. This will be a fine time to get rid of all the stuff that has been cluttering up your cabinets, closets and drawers all winter. Remember that one person's junk is another person's treasure. If you have something that is too big for you to deal with please contact Hiram Patrenos.

*Richard R. Losch+*

**JAMIE**

by **Richard R. Losch**



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