

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

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January 2013

This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is *The Flight into Egypt*, a small (6x10 in.) engraving on paper by Martin Schongauer, executed sometime between 1470 and 1475. It is displayed in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

Schongauer was a German engraver and painter, and was the most important German printmaker before Albrecht Dürer. His prints were widely circulated through Europe. He was also known as Bel Martino and Martin D'Anversa. He was born about 1450 in Colmar, Elsaß (Alsace). He was the third of the four sons of Caspar Schongauer, an Augsburg goldsmith who moved to Colmar in 1445. He was trained by a now unknown but contemporarily highly regarded engraver, known today only as Master E. S.¹ Schongauer established at Colmar a school of engraving that produced a number of great Renaissance artists. Despite his success and popularity, not a great deal is known about his personal life. He died at Braisach, a town about halfway between Colmar and Freiburg, in 1491.

Although his main interest was engraving, Schongauer was an extremely accomplished and honored painter. He was a disciple of the Flemish artist Rogier van der Weyden. It is not known whether he actually studied under him, but his style was very sim-

ilar, and was at least the equal of any of his Flemish contemporaries.

Schongauer's primary accomplishment was the production of a huge number of exquisite engravings that were not only in demand in Germany, but were sold all over Europe. They were particularly popular in England and Spain. Giorgio Vasari, in his sixteenth century biographies of the great Renaissance artists, says that Michelangelo copied one of Schongauer's engravings in *The Trial of Saint Anthony*. Between 1470 and 1475 he produced dozens of engravings of the life of Christ, from the Annunciation to the Ascension. Our cover is from this collection.

Richard R. Losch+

Antonio Meucci

Few people have heard of Antonio Meucci (1808-96), yet his invention changed our lives forever. He was an Italian engineer who invented a communication device that he called a *teleteléfono*. He demonstrated it in 1860 and took out a patent caveat in 1871. Unfortunately, Meucci's poverty and mismanagement allowed credit to go for many decades to Alexander Graham Bell, who patented his own device in 1876. It is now generally accepted that Meucci was the true inventor of the telephone.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Master E. S. is the first engraver to put his initials on his work, but we do not know what those initials stood for. Schongauer used the initials M†S. They can be seen at the very bottom of the engraving.

A Word from the Editor

When I was in the first grade my desk was next to the wall, and beside it was an enormous calendar. I don't know why we remember insignificant things from our early childhood, but I clearly remember staring at that calendar and wondering if 1940 would ever end. Now it seems like it was only a couple of years ago that I was hanging on the bell rope at Saint James' ringing in the new millennium. As we get older the weeks, months and years go by increasingly fast, and there is a reason for that. When I was staring at that calendar a year was a sixth of my whole life. Now it is almost an eightieth. The effect of something on your life is directly proportional to how significant a part of your life it is. If it is only a tiny part of your life, it demands little attention and has little value to you.

This is the time of year that we go through the annual ritual of making New Year's resolutions that we know we will break within days. It seems to me that a far more beneficial exercise would be to examine ourselves and try to determine what we value most (and least) in our lives. In other words, we need to examine our priorities and, if necessary, rearrange them.

When we consider that we spend a few decades in this phase of our life and an eternity in the next, it strikes me that perhaps we should spend a bit more time now in preparation for then. For most of us, the portion of time and attention that we devote to our spiritual lives seems rather paltry when we consider how important that

time and attention is. Preparation for eternity requires a lot more than an hour in church every two or three weeks (if we even go that often), an occasional theological discussion, and writing a few checks.

We are talking about the Church, not a country club membership. We are talking about getting into heaven and keeping out of hell. This is serious stuff! I am reminded of the woman who said to the Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, "I'll have you know that I don't believe in hell." He replied, "You will when you get there."

As I said at the beginning, time passes increasingly quickly as we travel through this vale of tears to "that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns." We never know when we will be called, and when that time comes it will be too late to start preparing. On the other hand, right now is a great time to start, or to improve on what we have already started.

One of the first steps is to become a regular and faithful participant in the worship of the Church. This is the moral and spiritual obligation of every Christian. We do not worship in order to get something out of it, but in order to give of ourselves to God and to others. In doing so we will often get far more out of it than we ever realize. Often our very presence can be a subtle source of spiritual encouragement to others, and that is a blessing to us. May such blessings be many!

Father Rick Losch

Evening Prayer and Parish Supper

January's Evening Prayer and supper will be on Wednesday, January 16th at 6:00 p.m. and will celebrate the Epiphany season with a Mardi Gras dinner. A sign up sheets for Creole and Cajun dishes and other foods will be posted in the parish house kitchen, along with a sign up for those who plan to attend so that we may know how many for whom to plan. Wine will be furnished. For more details, please speak with Hiram Patrenos or Candace Strickland. As always, there will be plenty of good food and fellowship. Please make your plans to attend. Please note that in observance of Lent, we will not have a supper in February or March. We will begin a new season of suppers on the third Wednesday of April.

Hiram Patrenos

Every Member Canvass

Thank you to all who have returned their pledge cards. If you have not yet completed your pledge card, it is not too late. Pledge cards are available on the table at the rear of the church. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to St. James'. Cards may be placed in the alms basins or mailed to the treasurer, T. Raiford Noland, St. James' Church, P. O. Box 446, Livingston, Alabama 35470

Hiram Patrenos

In order to maintain your perspective you should have a dog that adores you and a cat that ignores you.

Annual Parish Meeting

At the Annual Parish Meeting held on Sunday, December 2nd, Mary Helen Jones and Barry Green-Burns were elected to the Vestry for terms expiring on December 31, 2015, replacing Candace Strickland and Roy Underwood, whose terms expired December 31st, 2012. Other members of the Vestry are Hiram Patrenos and Madelyn Mack, whose terms expire on December 31, 2013, and Joe Moore and Rosalie Dew, whose terms expire on December 31, 2014. The Vestry met following the Annual Meeting and elected the following officers for 2013: Hiram Patrenos, Senior Warden; Joe Moore, Junior Warden; Raiford Noland, Treasurer; and Fr. Losch, Clerk. Thank you to Mrs. Strickland and Dr. Underwood for their dedicated service to the Vestry and St. James'.

Hiram Patrenos

Wilmer Hall Christmas Contribution

Thank you to everyone who contributed towards our special gift to Wilmer Hall for its Christmas needs this year. Through your generosity St. James' contributed \$750.00 for the Christmas needs of the children. A letter of thanks from Wilmer Hall has been posted on the bulletin board in the parish house.

Hiram Patrenos

Even in adversity, it's a lot more pleasant to be an optimist who guesses wrong than to be a pessimist who guesses right.

Tennis Team Lunch

On Sunday, November 11th, The University of West Alabama Men's and Women's Tennis Teams attended our services for a blessing of their tennis racquets and a barbecue lunch following the service. Thanks to everyone who helped with this event.

Hiram Patrenos

Chicken, or Egg?

We are at a point when we need to confront a serious question: as we look at the problems and their causes in our troubled society, which is the problem, and which is the cause? Since the Sandy Hook murders I have heard and seen a number of times the argument that the decay of our society began in 1963 with the removal of prayer from the public schools. This may well be true, but if so it is purely a matter of historical timeline, not a matter of cause and effect. The landmark Supreme Court decision *Murray (O'Hair) v. Curlett* was not the cause of the problem, and restoring prayer to the schools will not cure it. That decision was merely a symptom of a spiritual cancer that had been eating away at our society for many years, and continues to do so. There were many other symptoms becoming apparent at the same time, only we did not want to acknowledge them as major problem, or confront them. They included the rise of the "me" society, in which we advocated putting "number one" (ourselves) first. Frank Sinatra's "I Did It My Way" hit the top of the charts, but it should also have hit a

nerve—its popularity was a clear statement that we extolled personal secular values at the expense of community and spiritual values. We did everything possible to boost the self-esteem of our children before they had accomplished anything for which they had a reason to esteem themselves. Worse, we refused to teach values for fear that they might conflict with the values of others. In the name of political correctness and "diversity" we trampled on the civil liberties of the many in order to satisfy the tastes and values of the few. While the prime moral mandate of majority rule is to protect the rights of the minority, we have gone to the ridiculous extreme of manacled the majority on the basis of a complaint from a single individual. We have envy and anger with those who have more than we do, and contempt for those who have less; we embrace immorality; we murder our unborn; and we openly accept a level of violence and vulgarity that would have been inconceivable even seven or eight decades ago.

In a word, our society is broken because we have gotten our priorities completely out of line. We push God to one side, and then wonder why he is withdrawing his blessings. Restoring our spiritual life is essential, and each of us can do this in our own lives. The question remains, how do we restore it to our society? I don't know. I do know, however, that each of us has the obligation to pray harder than we have ever done before for the salvation of our nation.

Richard R. Losch+

Be Wordly Wise

Cashing In

Many of our terms for money have interesting roots that reach back into antiquity. The basic unit of American currency (and that of many other nations), the dollar, gets its name from a German silver mine. On January 15, 1520 a Bohemian banker, Hieronymus Schlick, minted a new design of a silver coin. He named it the *Joachims-thaler* after the mine in Joachimsthal¹ from which the silver came. People quickly shortened the name of the coin to *Thaler* (pronounced “tahler”). In various spellings the *Thaler* became the basic unit of exchange in several European states, and in England it came to be known as the “dollar,” although it was not a unit of exchange there. In the American colonies both the dollar and the British pound were used, but when the United States was formed Congress decided to use only the dollar (which was based on a decimal system) rather than the very complicated British system of pounds, shillings and pence.²

The dollar is divided into one hundred cents, but Americans have always referred to the cent as a penny, which is actually a British term. The

British penny, whose symbol was *d*, was based on the Roman *denarius*. This was the equivalent of a day’s pay for a laborer.³ There is actually no such thing as an American penny. “Penny” probably comes from the German *Pfennig* (a small coin), but no one knows the true origin of the word.

In the old British system there was a half penny coin colloquially called a ha’penny (pronounced *hape-nee*), and a quarter penny coin known as a farthing. That word came from the Old English *fēortha*, “fourth.” We still use the expression “not worth a farthing.”

The Roman *denarius* left its mark on modern times. Not only was it the soured of the British penny, but also it became the *dinar* that is the monetary unit of Serbia and many Middle Eastern countries. It also produced the Spanish *dinero*, Portuguese *dinheiro*, and Russian деньги (*dengi*), “money.”

Some of our slang terms also have interesting roots. The ten-dollar bill used to bear a Roman numeral X for ten. It came to be colloquially called a sawbuck, because a sawbuck, the support stand for a bucksaw, has an X-shape. Because of this, by about a hundred years ago the term “buck” came to mean “dollar.”

The term “money” comes from the Roman goddess Juno Moneta, in whose temple the first Roman coins were minted. “Mint” derives from the Old English *mynet*, “coin.” No one is sure of the origin of “cash.”

Richard R. Losch+

¹ In German, *Tal* and *Thal* mean “valley” (both words are pronounced the same).

² There are twelve pence (pennies) to a shilling, and twenty shillings to a pound. In the latter part of the twentieth century Britain went to a decimal system, with one hundred “new pence” to a pound. The old system was called “Lsd” for pounds (£), shillings (s) and pence (d). The *d* came from the Roman *denarius*.

³ Thus the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, who were paid a penny for the day, is not as unreasonable as it sounds on the surface.

Gnosticism and the Gnostic Gospels

The so-called “Gnostic¹ Gospels” are a collection of fifty-two books written in the second to the fourth centuries. They are based on the teachings of a number of Christian prophets and spiritual leaders, including Jesus himself. Most of them are highly imaginative, and some are nothing less than bizarre. They have received popular attention in recent times through a number of movies and books, among the most notable of which is Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*. Most of them were known at the time the Bible was canonized, but with good reason they either were not even considered for inclusion in the Bible, or were summarily rejected.

When we say that some are bizarre, we might consider *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*,² which tells stories of Jesus’ childhood. In an attempt to tell stories showing his divine power, the stories actually make him out to be somewhere between a brat and a monster. For example, he restores life to a dried fish; when a boy teases him he curses the boy, turning him instantly into a decaying corpse; when his parents try to teach him he rebukes them and starts teaching them. *The Gospel of Judas* consists of conversations between Judas and Jesus. In this work, Judas is the only one of the twelve who understands what Jesus is trying to teach. He is the hero, obey-

ing Jesus’ orders to betray him so that he may be arrested and crucified.³

Gnosticism was an early movement that was condemned by the Church as heresy. It is not clear whether it was originally a movement within Christianity or was a non-Christian movement that came to be accepted by many Christians. Most scholars today accept that it started among Hellenized Jews, and came into Christianity as some of them were converted. Hellenized Jews were Jews who had adopted much of Greek culture after Alexander’s conquest of the Middle East. The Jewish Gnostics revered a number of Old Testament characters, especially Adam and his son Seth, Noah, and the three companions of Daniel (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego). Another important character was the non-Biblical Norea, who saved the Gnostics from the flood in Noah’s time. There is an extant Gnostic cult in the Middle East that reveres John the Baptist. Many scholars believe that Simon Magus (Acts 8:9ff) was a Jewish Gnostic.

The Greeks believed that the soul is imprisoned in the flesh, and that all flesh is intrinsically corrupt and evil. Death is the freeing of the soul from the prison of the body. While they had no concept of heaven or everlasting life as we think of it, they believed that after death the soul wandered in a

¹ The *G* is silent. It is pronounced “Nostic.”

² This should not be confused with *The Gospel of Thomas*, which may be the most authentic of all the Gnostic gospels.

³ In *The Last Temptation of Christ* Nikos Kazantzakis portrays Judas as the one closest to Jesus, and as the only Apostle who was strong enough to carry out that assignment.

state of passive existence in the underworld (Hades). Only the most grievous sinners suffered punishment, and only the bravest and most righteous had a conscious existence in bliss (the Elysian Fields). They believed that the soul (*πνευμα*, *pneuma*¹) sustains the body, and that the departure of the *pneuma* from the body allows the body to decay.

In ancient times there were many Greek gnostic cults. These were people who believed that they had been favored by some particular god, who then gave them secret knowledge by which they could communicate with the gods. Through this special knowledge they could receive spiritual enlightenment that would enable them to free themselves from the material world.² Some of these cults used hallucinogenic herbs or mushrooms for this purpose. The term Gnostic comes from the Greek *gnosis* (γνώσις, “knowledge”). In classic times this would be used much as we use “enlightenment” or “wisdom.”

Christian Gnosticism may have actually been a reaction to orthodox Christianity rather than a heresy that grew out of ignorance or misinterpretation of Christian teaching. The Gnostics taught that the flesh is evil, and that the goal is to be freed from it. This enlightenment was to be found

from within, however, not from without. Salvation was obtained by establishing a private personal relationship with God. It was a “just you and me, God” type of religion that is completely antithetical to orthodox Christianity, which teaches that salvation comes through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and the collective unity of all Christians with him (the Church). According to the Gnostics, the Church is not needed as an intermediary for the salvation of souls. Gnosticism was essentially a separate religion that was something of a commingling of Jesus’ teachings and several Eastern religious philosophies.

There was no single Gnostic movement. Like Greek Gnosticism, there were dozens of Gnostic Christian cults. While they were found throughout the Christian world, their main concentration was in North Africa and the Middle East. Many of them were strongly Platonist in their teaching. Among others they claimed as Gnostics John the Baptist, the Apostle Thomas, Mary Magdalene, John the Evangelist, Saint Paul, and even Jesus himself. The Nicolaitans, condemned in Revelation 2:6 and 15, were a Gnostic cult. A major third century heresy, Manichaeism, was also Gnostic. The Manichaeans were the followers of a third century Iranian named Mani. They were strongly influenced by Buddhism and Zoroastrianism, teaching a dualism that focused on the conflict between two gods, one good and one evil. Manichaeism survived well into the thirteenth century, and traces of it can

¹ *Pneuma* also means “breath.” Jesus breathed on the Apostles to impart the Holy Spirit to them (John 20:22). The Greeks also used *psyche* (ψυχη), “mind” to mean “soul.”

² The Pythagoreans were a Gnostic cult who believed that they could obtain spiritual release through mathematical knowledge.

still be seen in many modern writings, particularly those of some of the more fundamentalist Protestant sects.¹

The Gnostics were prolific writers, and produced a number of fascinating but thoroughly heretical texts. Fifty-two of them have survived, and are commonly referred to collectively as the “Gnostic Gospels.” As we mentioned above, some of them are nothing less than bizarre, but several are quite interesting. Among the best known are the gospels of Mary, Thomas, Truth, Philip and Judas.²

The Gospel of Mary was discovered in 1896 in an Egyptian fifth century papyrus codex³ that contained several other Gnostic writings. All were written in Sahidic, an ancient Coptic dialect that represents the last stage of the ancient Egyptian language. Coptic all but disappeared shortly after the advent of Arabic with the Islamic invasion in the seventh century. Today it survives only in the Coptic (Egyptian Christian) Church. Most scholars believe that the Gospel of Mary was originally written in

Greek sometime in the second century, and was translated into Coptic much later.

It is not clear to which Mary it was supposed to be attributed, although the consensus is that it was Mary Magdalene. It is highly unlikely, however, that it was written by her or by any other Mary who was a disciple of Jesus, of whom there were several. There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is that there is strong evidence that it was written at least a century after their time. There are six missing pages at the beginning of the text, and four in the middle.

The highlight of the book is a discussion of a vision that Mary had of Jesus, and Peter’s rebuke of her on the basis that Jesus would not have shared with a woman things that he had not shared with the rest of them. He is offended that Jesus had selected Mary above the rest of them to interpret his teachings. Needless to say, this book is very popular with feminists, who use it as proof of the Church’s misogyny and as an argument for women priests and bishops. The fact that it clearly was written by heretical Gnostics and rejected since ancient times does not seem to bother them.

The Gospel of Thomas was discovered by an Egyptian peasant in Nag Hammadi in 1945. It is part of a collection of books known as the Nag Hammadi Library that contains fifty-two books, including a Coptic translation of Plato’s *Republic*. Rather than a narrative, it is a collection of one hundred fourteen sayings attributed to Jesus. They are for the most part con-

¹ The Manichaeans took the conflict between God and Satan to a completely heretical level.

² The Gnostic gospels are usually referred to as “the Gospel of So-and-so,” while the Canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are properly referred to as “the Gospel according to So-and-so.” To be perfectly correct, it should be “the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to So-and-so.”

³ A codex is a manuscript bound with individual pages like a modern book, rather than in the scroll form that was more common in ancient times.

sistent with what the Bible tells us about his teachings, and it is entirely possible that they are a record of an oral tradition that goes back to his time. Although it is unlikely that the writer actually was Thomas the Apostle, the sayings may for the most part be authentic. There is no mention of the other Apostles, miracles, or (most importantly) Jesus' death and resurrection. It begins with, "These are the hidden words that the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote them down." The term "hidden" indicates that it was likely written by a Gnostic, although its inclusion with the Gnostic texts of the Nag Hammadi library does not necessarily prove that. On the other hand, Jesus is portrayed as a spiritual guide whose words, when properly interpreted, will bring eternal life (a particularly Gnostic concept). Orthodox Christianity, however, teaches that it is Christ's sacrifice, not his words, that brings salvation and eternal life.

The Gospel of Truth is also one of the Nag Hammadi books. It was clearly written in the mid-second century by Valentinian Gnostics, and possibly by the founder of that sect, Valentinus himself. It was known to Saint Irenaeus (130-200), the Bishop of Lyons, who declared it heretical in 180. The book describes the origin of Error, personified as a female. Ignorance and the yearning of mankind to see the Father engendered Fear, which coalesced into a fog that empowered Error. The Father sent Jesus to overcome the ignorance, but this angered Error, who coerced men to crucify

him. The book goes on to describe how knowledge overcomes ignorance and grants salvation, which is a state of eternal rest. It contains no account of Jesus' teaching or deeds other than the crucifixion. It focuses on the search for knowledge, which is a typically Gnostic theme.

The Gospel of Philip is another of the Nag Hammadi collection. Although the first text of it was found in that library in 1945, the book was known to researchers from the many references to it dating back to the third century. In structure, style and language it is very similar to the Gospel of Thomas. However, it is not a collection of sayings, but an anthology of Gnostic teachings, probably of the Valentinian Gnostics. The Gospel of Philip is primarily responsible for the idea that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. It states, "There were three who always walked with the Lord: Mary, his mother, and his sister, and Magdalene, the one who was called his companion. His sister and his mother and his companion were each a Mary."¹ In another passage it says that Jesus "used to kiss her often on her . . ." The next word is missing due to damage to the text. While the marriage proponents would like to think that the next word is "lips," it could just as easily have

¹ Even if he had a sister it is highly unlikely that she would have been named Mary. The Jews would never name a child after a living ancestor. Those who would like to validate this passage claim that she was a half-sister through a previous marriage of Joseph.

been “cheek” or “hand.” In those days both of these were common expressions of friendship between people of the same as well as the opposite sex. Some scholars argue from a purely historical point of view that there is a possibility that Jesus was married, but even if he were there is almost no likelihood that it would have been to Mary Magdalene.¹

The Gospel of Judas was written no earlier than the second century. Like the Gospel of Truth, Saint Irenaeus condemned it as Gnostic and heretical in 180. Like the Gospel of Philip, scholars knew of its existence, but no text of it was known until a copy was found in very bad condition on the antiques black market in 1943, and was finally reconstructed in 2006. An antiques dealer named Frieda Nussberger-Tchacos bought a leather codex in 1943, but simply stored it away without realizing what an important find she had made. In the 1970s she was concerned about its deteriorating condition and took it to experts, who recognized what it was. It is called the Tchacos Codex, and contains several Gnostic texts, including the only known copy of the Gospel of Judas. The experts undertook its reconstruction and translation, and released the text to the public in 2006. A member of the team, A. J. Levine, said that the codex reveals no new

historical information about Judas or Jesus, but is an invaluable tool for reconstructing the history of Gnosticism, particularly in Egypt.

The Gospel of Judas consists of sixteen chapters of conversations between Judas and Jesus, and focuses particularly on Jesus’ death, although it contains very few narrative elements. It presents Judas as the only Apostle who understands Jesus’ teachings on spiritual matters and cosmology. He appears to be Jesus’ confidant, and as such is given information that is not available to the others. This is typical of Gnosticism, which centers on secret knowledge that leads to enlightenment.

The book’s theology is in many places directly contradictory to orthodox Christian doctrine. In the beginning, God created angels and lesser gods, and assigned twelve of them to rule over chaos and the underworld (earth). One of the lesser gods was Adamas, the father of humanity, for whom the angels created a mystical body that became Adam. God is all-forgiving, and does not require sacrifice for sin. He sent Jesus into the world to die in order to placate the angels and lesser gods, who were angry at the sins of mankind. It was Judas’ responsibility, being the only one who understood, to see to it that Jesus was handed over to the authorities to be crucified.

It should be patently obvious why these Gnostic gospels were condemned as heretical, and summarily rejected by the Christian Church.

Richard R. Losch+

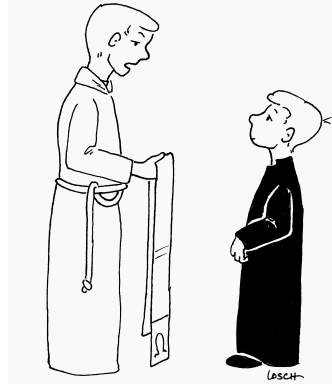
¹ In *The Da Vinci Code* Dan Brown makes the case that Jesus and Mary were married, and were the ancestors of the Bourbon kings. Quite frankly, this claim is ridiculous. He supports it by an excruciating twisting of fact, adulterated generously with pure fancy.

Don't Forget
+ INTERFAITH MEN'S BREAKFAST JANUARY 6 7:45 A.M. +
Mark your Calendar +

**SAINT JAMES'
EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

JAMIE

by **Richard R. Losch**



“Jamie, quoting the Bible at your sister’s wedding is commendable, but perhaps you shouldn’t have chosen ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’”



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