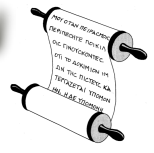


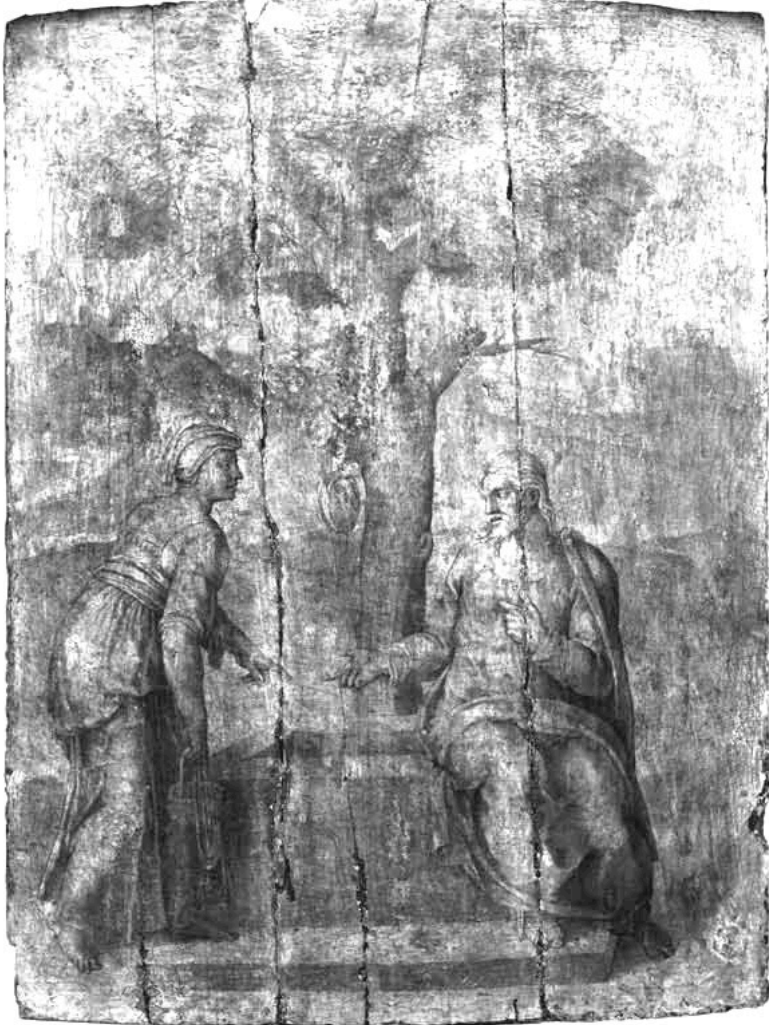
THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



Volume XXI, Number 5

May 2014



May 2014

This Month's Cover

This month's cover is "Christ and the Woman of Samaria" (John 4:5-26), allegedly by Michelangelo. It is drawn on gesso (plaster) in bistre ink, which is a dark yellow-brown pigment made from the soot of burned wood. The gesso was laid on a poplar panel that has warped over time into a curve, cracking the gesso. It was drawn for his friend Vittoria Colonna (1490-1547) in about 1540, when Michelangelo was roughly 65. She was from a wealthy and prominent Roman family, and was famous throughout Europe as a poetess and advocate of Church reform. She sought a middle way between Roman Catholic and Lutheran teachings. She and Michelangelo were close friends (at least), and he wrote several sonnets praising her physical and spiritual beauty. She was a regular correspondent with both Michelangelo and Princess Marguerite of Angoulême, the sister of the French king Francis I. In her correspondence with her, Vittoria often mentioned Michelangelo.



Vittoria Colonna
(Michelangelo)

This particular drawing is special because it is controversial. Michelangelo made several spiritual images for Vittoria, but until very recently modern scholars have questioned whether this one is original. It was accepted as original until the end of the 19th century, at which time its authenticity was challenged. In time it came to be generally accepted that it was a copy of

the original, but in 1978 that began to change again. When the conservators of the London Courtauld Institute cleaned it, they found it to be of the very highest quality, indicating that it was either the work of the master himself or of one of his most talented students. The experts now believe that if it is a copy, it was copied from the original under the tutelage of Michelangelo himself.

Richard R. Losch+

Parochial Report Statistics for St. James'

	2012	2013
Total Active Baptized Members	26	25
Total Communicants in Good Standing	22	22
Average Sunday Attendance	21	19
Easter Sunday Attendance	23	26
Total Sunday Holy Communions	50	50
Total Weekday Holy Communions	5	5
Private Holy Communions	3	0
Daily Offices held on Sunday	1	2
Daily Offices & other services held on Weekdays	10	10
Burials conducted	1	1

Parochial Report Statistics for St. Alban's

	2012	2013
Total Active Baptized Members	4	4
Total Communicants in Good Standing	4	4
Average Sunday Attendance	6	11
Easter Sunday Attendance	N/A	N/A
Total Sunday Holy Communions	12	11
Total Weekday Holy Communions	1	0
Private Holy Communions	N/A	N/A
Daily Offices held on Sunday	0	0
Daily Offices held on Weekdays	0	0
Burials conducted	0	0

A Word from the Editor

At the end of March I spent a week in the Great Smokey Mountain National Park with a group from the University of West Alabama. It was an amazing experience for a number of reasons. Even though the weather was wet and cold (including a day of snow), the beauty of those mountains is breathtaking. It is difficult to imagine that anyone could contemplate the raw power it took to create them and the awe-inspiring beauty that resulted, and not know that creating this was an act of God. That gorgeous wilderness is the perfect metaphor for “the power, the wisdom and the goodness of the Grand Artificer of the Universe.” It puts a whole new light on Shakespeare’s line, “Tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones, and good in everything. I would not change it.”¹

As those who know me are aware, walking is far from my strong suit, yet this trip involved a good bit of it along rough mountain trails. As fiercely independent as I am, it was humbling to be aware that I could not do it without help. With an old friend on one arm and a new friend the other, I made it over boulders, roots, streams and steep hills. When I looked at one trail, my reaction was that I wasn’t sure I could make it, but I would try. At the other end of it I thought of two things: the Beatles’ song, “I can get by with a little help from my friends,” and

Yoda’s admonition, “There is do and there is not do. There is no try.” I did, with a little help from my friends.

God gave mankind dominion over the earth, but this did not mean that we were given the right to exploit and despoil it. With that dominion comes the responsibility to husband it well, and to be accountable stewards of its resources. Sad to say, we have done a pretty lousy job of it. I am not a “tree-hugger,” and I believe that the jury is still out on the nature and cause of climate change (if that makes me a “denier,” so be it). On the other hand, I believe that our environmental responsibility is more than just a practical matter—it is even more a spiritual one. Perhaps we need to spend a little less time focusing on the conveniences of life in a modern world, and look a bit more to a concern for the natural resources of the earth that make those conveniences possible.

Today, as in so many other things, we have become polarized on the matter of environmental responsibility. Some seem to want to return the earth to the rule of the animals, and others don’t seem to care what happens to it as long as we can squeeze every last drop of wealth from it. Both extremes could destroy what God has given us.

I wish everyone could experience the beauty I have seen on those mountains. It is spiritually restorative. As Lucy said to Charlie Brown, “I can look at it, but it can’t look at me”—but it sure can make me look at myself a lot more closely.

¹ *As You Like It*, II.1.563. Some quote this as “God in everything,” but that would be pantheistic and pagan, and that is not how Shakespeare, a Christian, wrote it.

Father Rick Losch

Evening Prayer and Parish Supper

Our May service of Evening Prayer will be on Wednesday, May 21st, at 6:00 p.m. with a cookout following in the parish house. Grilled hamburgers and hotdogs will be furnished. Signup sheets for potato chips, baked beans, salads, buns, deserts and tea will be posted in the parish house kitchen as well as a sheet for those planning to attend, so that we may know how many to plan for. A nominal contribution will be asked of each person to defray the expenses for this event. As always there will be plenty of good food and fellowship. Please make your plans to attend.

Hiram Patrenos

ECW Yard Sale

The Episcopal Church Women (ECW) will have a yard sale May 15th - 17th during the Highway 11 Antique Alley Yard Sale. They plan to set up for the sale on the afternoon of Wednesday, May 14th, and to pack everything remaining after the sale on the afternoon of Sunday, May 18th. Everyone is encouraged to keep this in mind as they clean attics, storage buildings, and closets. Furniture is especially sought during this sale and we will be happy to help you move any items you wish to contribute. If you have items to be contributed, please speak with Hiram Patrenos to make arrangements to get the items to our storage space.

Hiram Patrenos

“Forward Day by Day”

The new *Forward Day by Day* daily devotional booklets for May, June and July are available 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

Bishop Sloan to Visit

The Right Reverend John McKee Sloan, Bishop of Alabama, will make his annual parochial visit to St. James' on Sunday, June 1st. Bishop Sloan will be the celebrant at Holy Communion, which will begin at 11:00 a.m. A parish luncheon will follow, for which a special menu has been planned. Signup sheets for specific dishes as well as for attendance will be posted in the parish house kitchen.

Hiram Patrenos

Sunday School Summer Recess

Our last day of Sunday School for children and adults this school year will be Sunday, May 18th. Sunday School will resume in the fall on the first Sunday after Labor Day. Thank you to our dedicated children's teachers, Ethel Scott, Rosalie Dew, and Madelyn Mack, who give their time and energy to make Sunday School available for our children, and to Fr. Losch for teaching the adult classes.

Hiram Patrenos

Why does a round pizza come in a square box?

Be Wordly Wise

A few quickies

Toady: We all have heard this term, which means a sycophant, yes-man or lickspittle. It is actually a shortened form of toad-eater, which is in turn a shortened form of toadstool-eater. In the 18th and 19th centuries quack medicine men would travel around the countryside peddling remedies for all sorts of ailments. A common one was a universal antidote for every kind of poison. The quack would frequently have a shill planted in the crowd who would eat allegedly poisonous mushrooms (toadstools). He would then have a mortal seizure, take the antidote, and instantly be miraculously restored to health.

Toadstool: The words toadstool and mushroom are actually synonymous, although botanists often distinguish the two. To them, toadstools have a flattened top and are usually poisonous, while mushrooms have a round cap, and some are edible. Etymologists disagree on the origin of the word. Some claim that it is simply a fanciful name, from the image of a toad sitting as on a stool on the flattened top of the fungus. Others claim that it derives from the German *Todstuhl*, “death chair.” Since most toadstools are poisonous and look like little stools, this is quite reasonable.

Mistletoe: We might not be quite so anxious to kiss under the mistletoe if we knew the origin of the word. Mistletoe grows as a parasite on hardwood trees, mainly oaks. The berries are food for many birds, although they are highly poisonous to humans.

Mistletoe sometimes is propagated by birds that eat its berries and then deposit the seeds on other branches in their droppings. The name derives from the Old English *misteltan*, which in turn derives from the Old German *Mistel*, “bird dung” and the Anglo-Saxon *tan*, “twig.” A sprig of mistletoe, then, is a “dung twig.”

Square: The first use of this word in English referred to a tool, the carpenter’s square. That derived from the Old French *ésquerre*, which means the same thing. That in turn derived from the Vulgar Latin *quadrus*, which also means either carpenter’s square or rectangle, and came from the Latin *quattuor*, “four.” The geometer’s use of square as an equilateral rectangle is no more than a couple of centuries old at the most. The expression “oblong square,” meaning an elongated rectangle, was common well into the 20th century. The carpenter’s or stonemason’s square¹ has been a symbol of honesty and morality for at least 5000 years. From this we get the expression “to be square,” meaning to be honest and moral. It is only quite recently that the expression has become pejorative, implying that someone is old-fashioned or tediously conventional.²

Richard R. Losch+

¹ A carpenter’s square usually has legs in a 2:1 ratio, while a stonemason’s square has legs of equal length.

² For decades the Cub Scout Promise included the promise “to be square.” The phrase was removed a few years ago because of the modern uncomplimentary meaning of the term.

Heaven Is For Real

I recently read Todd Burpo's *Heaven Is For Real*, the story of his little boy's near-death vision of heaven (I haven't yet seen the movie). While there are some serious theological and scriptural problems with it, it is an interesting read. It is written from a fundamentalist Protestant point of view by a rural Midwestern Wesleyan pastor who also runs a garage door company. I do not know much about his background, but from the book it appears that he preaches more from the heart than from a solid theological or scriptural education. I do not believe that he intentionally falsified anything, but he accepts such non-scriptural ideas as that everyone in heaven except Jesus has wings, and their size seems to have some significance. He also accepts the little boy's childlike claim that Jesus has a rainbow-colored horse. This is cute and sentimental, but hardly theological. The boy had never been told of a miscarriage that his mother had several years earlier, yet he knew about it, allegedly from meeting the unborn child in heaven. This sounds miraculous until we find out that his older sister had been told of it. It is not hard to picture her telling her brother. Little children are not noted for keeping secrets. Also, the boy claims that everyone in heaven is a young adult in his physical prime, yet he says he sat on Jesus' lap. This conjures up a rather curious image. The process of the boy's telling of his experiences in heaven took several years. In reading the book I cannot help the feeling that

Burpo unconsciously and unintentionally prompted the child to say some of the things that he did.

Before taking the book too seriously, one should also read D. Eric Williams' *Heaven Is For Real, the Book Isn't*. Both books are easy to read and can be completed in a single long evening. Williams is also a fundamentalist Protestant who challenges many of the premises of the boy's vision. Both he and Burpo are steeped in *sola Scriptura*, "only the Bible," Martin Luther's doctrine that the Bible is the only source of revelation. This is rejected by the catholic traditions,¹ which believe while the Bible contains all things necessary to salvation, the Holy Spirit uses many other sources as well to reveal his truth.

I do not mean to discourage anyone from reading the book or seeing the movie, but I admonish those who do so not to get caught up in the sentimentality of it. It is easy to want it all to be true, but a reasonable amount of doubt is healthy.

Richard R. Losch+

Noah? Really?

Any similarity to the biblical narrative of the flood and the movie whose main character is called Noah is purely coincidental. In fact, the producer of the film, an avowed atheist, said that he intended to make the most un-biblical biblical movie that he could. He certainly succeeded in doing that. I indicated in the above article that I do

¹ This includes the Roman, Orthodox, Anglican and (ironically) some Lutheran bodies.

not mean to discourage anyone from seeing *Heaven Is For Real*. Frankly, I would do everything I could to discourage anyone from wasting his money on *Noah*. It is badly conceived and badly made. Every actor has at least one film that he wishes he had never made. I am sure that Russell Crowe and Anthony Hopkins, two very fine actors, will list this as the one they wish they had never made.

I may not be being fair, because I did not see the whole thing. After the rock monsters helped build the ark and then Noah planned to murder his grandchild I left (it has been years since I have walked out in the middle of a movie). At least by leaving I prevented getting sick to my stomach.

Richard R. Losch+

Moses the General

The traditional image of the Exodus is that of Hebrew slaves toiling under the whip at the building of the pyramids, and finally being led to freedom by the humble but courageous prophet Moses. There are several things wrong with this picture.

In the first place, the Hebrews had nothing to do with the building of the pyramids. They were built at least a thousand years earlier, and they were not built by slaves. The rich Nile valley is the only truly habitable place in ancient Egypt, but even much of it is not habitable during the part of the year when the Nile regularly floods. The floodwaters, however, are so rich in nutrients that when they abate they leave behind some of the richest soil in the world. Several crops flourish in

it every year, providing more food than the Egyptians could ever consume. When the rest of the ancient world was steeped in famine, Egypt had plenty to eat and to sell. This made ancient Egypt an incredibly wealthy nation in which even the poorest people lived well. As a result there was little need for slaves, and there were far fewer slaves per capita in Egypt than in any other ancient culture in the world. In fact, there were so few slaves that it can be fairly said that Egypt was the only ancient culture in which slavery was an insignificant institution.

During the flood season there was no work for the farmers, and many of them could not even live on their land. At that time they would volunteer to work for the pharaoh, because by doing so they could go to heaven with him when they died. They happily labored on the pyramids and other building projects. They had nothing else to do while their farms were flooded, and it was a way to obtain everlasting life in paradise.

When the Hebrews moved into Egypt they were welcomed as friends. Joseph sat next to Pharaoh, and when he invited his brothers to move to Egypt to avoid the famine he invited far more than just his eleven brothers and their families. They would have been the leaders of large tribes with retinues numbering into the hundreds.

At about this time a Semitic tribe from northern Canaan known as the Hyksos ruled Egypt. We do not know their real name—Hyksos is Egyptian for “foreign invaders.” It is also unknown whether they actually invaded

Egypt, or simply moved in much earlier and eventually gained power by sheer force of numbers. Most scholars today lean toward the latter theory. The Egyptians were not particularly welcoming to foreigners, so it is highly unlikely that they would have invited the Hebrews to move into Goshen, the richest portion of Egypt. It is even less likely that a foreigner such as Joseph would have been placed next to Pharaoh as the second in command. The Semitic Hyksos rulers, on the other hand, might have welcomed the Hebrews, and would have had no qualms about having a fellow Semite in such a powerful position.

In the 16th century BC the Egyptian Amhose I rebelled and successfully expelled the Hyksos rulers, establishing himself as the first pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty. One of his first acts would have been to suppress the friends of the Hyksos, the Hebrews. They were growing rapidly in numbers, and thus posed the same threat as the earlier Hyksos. Contrary to the usual translations of the Bible, however, they were almost certainly not enslaved. Rather, they would have been conscripted into a *corvée* labor force. *Corvée* conscription is similar to slavery, with an important exception. *Corvée* laborers, while they are required to perform assigned tasks, did not lose their human rights (as all slaves did in ancient times), and they were paid wages for their work. They were not free to refuse to work, however, and they were not free to come and go as they pleased, but were required to live in labor camps at the

work site. Since all pharaohs loved construction projects, the Hebrew laborers would have been put to work as brick makers and builders.¹

In the era of the Hyksos there were a number of renegade tribes throughout the Middle East known as Habiru. The word Habiru is Akkadian for “outcast,” and may be the source of the name Hebrew. The Habiru were not bandits, but were military units that put themselves out for hire as mercenaries. An increasing number of scholars believe that the Israelites were Habiru who were brought into Egypt as mercenaries to supplement the Egyptian army. It is possible that the Hyksos were also originally such a mercenary group, and that they eventually became strong enough to gain ruling power in a military coup. Once the Hyksos were defeated and expelled, the Egyptians would naturally have feared a similar coup from the Hebrew mercenaries. The safest move, then, would be to remove them from military service and put them to work as a *corvée* labor force.

Based on that theory, Dr. Richard A. Gabriel² has proposed a fascinating picture of the oppression and eventual

¹ Rameses II, who was almost certainly the pharaoh at the time of the Exodus, was obsessed with building. The Israelite “slaves” who escaped Egypt under Moses were building the city of Rameses in the Nile Delta.

² Gabriel, a professor of military history at the Royal Military College of Canada, has published over a dozen books on military history. He goes into great detail about many of the Old Testament battles in *The Military History of Ancient Israel* (ISBN 978-0275977986).

exodus of the Israelites. He says that they remained a part of the army, but were removed from their military duties and conscripted as *corvée* laborers in order to keep them under control. This humiliation would have been a hard burden for proud soldiers to bear, and the more they chafed under it the more the Egyptians oppressed them. After a few generations they had lost all their military status and were looked upon simply as forced laborers. They remembered their past honor and secretly continued their military training, however, awaiting the time that they could rise up and leave.

Gabriel's theory answers a lot of questions. How, for example, did a rag-tag band of slaves escape from and outwit the Egyptian army, and then go on to conquer a well-organized and militarily strong civilization such as the Canaanites? God, of course, can do whatever he wants with whomever he wants, but he usually works within the context of nature and his creation, not in spite of it.

Moses was the ideal one for God to choose to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, and undoubtedly God prepared him for that purpose. Although he was a Hebrew and eventually came to know his real family, he was raised in the court of the pharaoh Seti I as the adopted son of Seti's daughter. He was treated as his adopted grandson and as a half-brother of the prince who would eventually become Rameses II.¹ As such, he would have been

given an education worthy of a member of the royal household. This would have included extensive military training. As royalty who was not in line for the throne, his destiny would have been to become a general. When he killed the Egyptian guard and was cast out he lost his status both as royalty and as a military officer, but his military training could not be undone. When he returned to Egypt to lead the Israelites out, he knew how to lead an army, and he understood military strategy and tactics. In fact, according to Gabriel, his battles show that he was a tactical genius. During the forty years of wandering in the wilderness he trained not only the army, but also his second in command, Joshua, who was also a military genius.² By the time they moved into Canaan and attacked Jericho, the Israelites were a hardened, blooded, and well-disciplined army commanded by a leader who was a brilliant strategist. It was not until after the death of Joshua that the military prowess of the Israelite army began to weaken during decades of wars with the Philistines.

Richard R. Losch+

Egyptians were strictly obedient to the letter of the law (a trait that was also inculcated into Moses). Seti's decree was not that the Hebrew newborn male children should be killed, but that they should be cast into the Nile (Ex. 1:22). That is exactly what Moses' mother did.

² Many modern generals, including Pershing, Patton, Montgomery and Rommel studied the tactics used in several biblical battles. This was especially useful in World War I in fighting the Ottomans in the Middle East. Many of the battles there were fought on the same sites as the battles in the Bible.

¹ The question is often raised as to why Moses was not killed when he was found, but rather was saved in defiance of Seti's order. The

A New Light on Petra

Petra, the capital of the ancient Arabian kingdom of Nabataea, has been a city of mystery for centuries, as has been the kingdom itself. Nabataea was a kingdom across the Jordan just east of Judah. Its original settlers came from Arabia. Because it was in such an inhospitable region in the middle of the desert, no one wanted it. It therefore survived the territorial expansions of Alexander, the Seleucids, Rome, and Herod the Great.

Nabataea is never mentioned in the Bible, although we know that King Aretas II assisted the Maccabean revolt that led to the independence of Judah. Herod Antipas' first wife, Areta, was the daughter of King Aretas III of Nabataea. When Herod divorced her to marry his niece and sister-in-law Herodias,¹ it precipitated a border war that cost him a large eastern portion of his kingdom. Paul barely escaped arrest in Damascus at the behest of Aretas IV (Acts 9:23ff).² When Paul speaks of journeying into Arabia (Gal. 1:17), most scholars believe that he was referring to Nabataea.

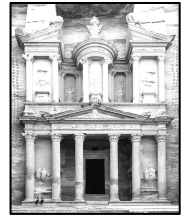
Little was known of Nabataea until the middle of the 20th century, when a number of archaeological discoveries uncovered a great deal of information about it. The city of Petra was known,

¹ It was Herodias who demanded the death of John the Baptist, and finally achieved it when she convinced her daughter Salome to ask for his head. She hated him because he preached against her incestuous marriage to Herod.

² At the time the Nabataeans ruled that portion of Syria.

but because of the unusual language of the Nabataeans its inscriptions were not deciphered until the 1930s. They revealed a huge amount of information about Nabataea, including the fact that Petra was the capital of the spice trade³ throughout the Middle East in the first century AD. This was the main Nabataean industry, and it made it a wealthy kingdom. The Aretan dynasty had become completely Hellenized, and Petra was built as a Graeco-Roman city. In the first century it was equal to any of the great capitals in the ancient world, with the exception only of Rome itself.

A unique feature of Petra is the beautiful buildings carved out of the rose-colored stone hills there. Because of their color, Petra is known as the Rose City. The most striking of these buildings is al-Khazneh, "the Treasury." It is a temple to the chief Nabataean god, Dushara.⁴ It is a breathtaking sight when one realizes that it was not constructed of stones,



³ Frankincense and myrrh were rare and precious spices, but as they were grown in southern Arabia they would have been readily available in Petra. There is a strong likelihood that the Magi, who were Persian astrologers, would have passed through Petra on their way from Persia to Jerusalem. Frankincense and myrrh were hard to obtain in Persia. They were common baby gifts among the rich, and it is likely that the Magi planned to purchase them when they passed through Petra.

⁴ In ancient times the treasuries of most nations were kept in the temple of the chief god.

but was carved from a single rock.

One of Dushara's characteristics was that he annually overcame the evil forces that destroy the sun, thus guaranteeing its restoration for the coming agricultural season. He was, therefore, the god of the winter solstice. An analysis of the construction of the temples and palaces in Petra indicates that the Nabataeans were strongly guided by astronomical events such as solstices and equinoxes. Another building that is very much like al-Khazneh is ad-Deir, "the Monastery." Inside its gate is an altar to Dushara. Each year at sunrise the sun falls directly on the altar every day for a week before and a week after the winter solstice.

While the evidence is strong that the Petran culture and religion were oriented to astronomical phenomena, the jury is still out among scholars as to what degree this is true. There can be little question, however, that astronomy was at least an important factor in their culture. If that is true, there can also be little doubt that astrology also played an important part in it. Astrology was important in all ancient cultures. While most scholars excepted the Jews from this, recent discoveries indicate that astrology was also an important factor in the Jewish culture, especially after the time of Alexander's conquest. Judaism formally rejected astrology as pagan, but recent discoveries of a number of Judean horoscopes indicate that many nonetheless believed in it.

Richard R. Losch+

Beautiful Again

Saint James' has been awarded the Livingston Beautification Award once again. We are all proud of our beautiful church and its grounds, but the vast bulk of the thanks and credit goes to Hiram Patrenos. He puts in countless hours maintaining the buildings and caring for the landscaping and the meditation garden. Let's not forget to express our gratitude for the years of service he has volunteered to Saint James' as our organist and building and grounds superintendent.

Richard R. Losch+

What is "Church?"

The Greek for "church" is *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία), from which we get "ecclesiastical." It means "assembly," and comes from the Greek roots that mean "call out." The earliest Christians referred to themselves as the *ekklesia*, indicating that they considered themselves a community of especially called out people. It is interesting that the Aramaic¹ for "synagogue," *kenista* (קניסתא) also means "assembly," and also derives from the roots for "call out." Most scholars believe that it originated in the concept of having been "called out" to freedom from slavery in Egypt. The early Christians may also have thought of themselves as having been called out to freedom from slavery to sin. The word "church" derives from the Old Saxon *Kirche*, "Church."

Richard R. Losch+

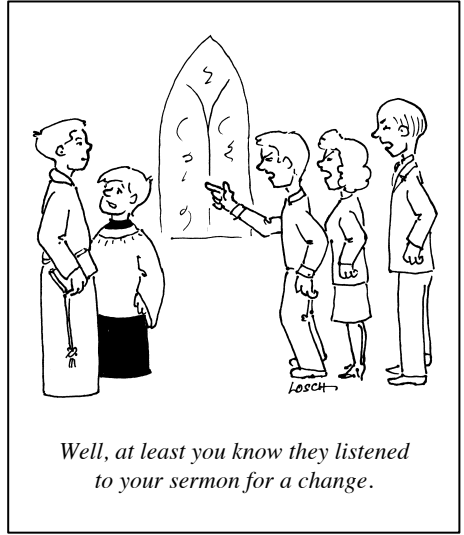
¹ Aramaic was the language of Judea in Jesus' time, and would have been what he spoke.

Don't Forget
 INTERFAITH
 MEN'S
 BREAKFAST
 MAY 4
 7:45 A.M.
 Mark your Calendar

LIVINGSTON FIRST
 PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



*Well, at least you know they listened
 to your sermon for a change.*



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