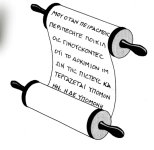


THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



Volume XXII, Number 2

January 2015



January 2015

This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is *The Adoration of the Magi*, a 1423 altarpiece by Gentile da Fabriano. It is tempera on wood, approximately 9¼'x9¾', and is liberally gilded and inlaid with gold and silver. It is currently on display in the Uffizi in Florence.

The piece was commissioned by the banker Palla Strozzi, Florence's richest citizen. It was for his family chapel in the sacristy of the church of Santa Trinitá. The only lighting in the chapel was by candles, so Gentile designed the gilding, inlay and bright colors to reflect the altar candlelight. The effect must have been astounding. Unfortunately, the effect is lost in the plentiful lighting of the Uffizi.

The altarpiece shows several scenes in the early life of Christ, but the central theme is the adoration of the Magi. Modern viewers tend to think of it as too "busy," but that was its intent. It was meant to be seen by the worshipers again and again over many years, and each time it is studied something new seems to appear. This and other works by Gentile had a strong influence on Florentine early Renaissance art. It is considered his masterpiece, and is the culmination of the International Gothic style that would evolve into the classic Italian Renaissance style. Palla Strozzi and his father Onofrio appear in the painting behind the youngest (third) magus. Palla is the man in the red hat and Onofrio is the falconer beside him.

Gentile da Fabriano, as his name suggests, was born around 1370 in Fabriano, a large town about 35 miles

south of Florence. When he was about 10 his mother died and his father, Niccoló di Giovanni Massi, about whom little else is known, retired to a monastery where he died 5 years later.

Nothing is known of Gentile's formative years. One of his first known paintings, *Madonna With Child*, was done in about 1395. It shows a distinct Italian late-Gothic influence. By 1405 he was working in Venice, where he assisted with a panel (now lost) for the Church of Santa Sofia. It is believed that Jacopo Bellini studied in Gentile's workshop. Between 1410-1420 he worked in several cities on church panels, all of which are now lost. By the end of 1420 he was in Florence, where he began work on *The Adoration of the Magi*, which was completed in 1423. While in Florence he painted several other magnificent works, although *Adoration* is considered his greatest. In 1427 he arrived in Rome, having accepted a commission by Pope Martin V to decorate the nave of the Basilica of Saint John Lateran. He died sometime before October 14, 1427. His work in the basilica was completed by Pisanello.

Gentile was said to have been buried in Florence, although there is no evidence of his tomb there. There is evidence, however that he was actually buried in Santa Maria di Trastevere in Rome, where he died.

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is published monthly except August by Saint James' Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470-0446, the Rev. Richard R. Losch, Editor. Phone 205-499-0968, email loschr@bellsouth.net. Copyright © 2015 R. R. Losch. Permission is granted to reproduce text items in parish newsletters or bulletins (but not on the Internet or digitized) as long as they are reproduced completely and in print, and credit is given.

A Word from the Editor

A new year has come again, and with its advent we are reminded once more that life is a series of opportunities for new beginnings. In fact, that's what our faith is all about—new beginnings. This sinful and broken world had no future but to descend ever more into corruption and evil, careening toward destruction and damnation. Starting over was beyond our capability, so God came into the world and gave us the chance for a new beginning. It was not mere coincidence that the early Christian patriarchs chose the winter solstice as the time to celebrate the birth of Christ, and that it comes so close to the time that we celebrate the beginning of a new year. The Bible tells us that with the birth, death and resurrection of Christ, God has made a new creation—an opportunity for us to start over (and, we would hope, do a better job of it with his help).

We symbolize the beginning of a new year with the making of resolutions that are usually aimed at improving our lives. Unfortunately, we normally keep these resolutions for only a few days at the most, and then we tend to revert to our old ways. Change is always hard, and unless we are diligently and consciously determined to change, the expected alternative is to take the easier way and stick to what we are used to. Inasmuch as it often keeps us in the misery or mediocrity that represent the easy way, it is illogical not to try to change. Of course, no one has ever accused humanity of being naturally logical.

As Hamlet said, “Aye, there's the rub.” Our humanity is our greatest challenge. Because we are a broken and sinful species, we humans are not a pretty lot. It is in our nature to careen toward destruction. The good news, though, is that God has given us the opportunity for a new beginning—to become a new creation—by making all things new (Rev. 21:5). He gives us the opportunity to transcend the natural and embrace the supernatural. Because Christ, in his divinity, humbled himself to take upon himself our humanity, he opens the way for us to be exalted by uniting ourselves with his divinity. There could be no greater new beginning than that.

The responsibility to take advantage of this new beginning now lies with us. The Bible and the ancient teachings of the Church are very clear that salvation is not automatic or universal. It is naïve to think that all souls go to heaven. In fact, that is what the Church is here for—to give us the opportunity to keep out of Hell and get into Heaven. Salvation is an offer, not a guaranteed handout. We in turn must do our part to accept that offer by doing everything we can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to do the will of God rather than succumbing to our own will.

We were given a new beginning at our baptism, and we grasp onto that re-creation every time that we acknowledge our sins, honestly repent of them, and beg God's forgiveness.

Happy New Year, and happy New Beginning.

Father Rick Losch

Be Wordly Wise Hap

This word means “luck,” “fortune” or “a chance occurrence.” It is found frequently in classic literature although it is now considered archaic.¹ It derives from the Old Norse *happ*, which has the same meaning. It is the root of a number of words that are in common use today, including “happy,” “happen” and “hapless,” and the many words that derive from these. The suffix -y added to a noun turns it into an adjective meaning “full of” (as in a buttery biscuit or a nutty pudding). Thus adding it to “hap” gives us “happy,”² meaning “lucky.” Similarly, the suffix -en turns a noun or adjective into a verb (as in “frighten” or “deaden”) with the implication of “to cause.” Adding it to “hap” gives us “happen,” “to cause a chance occurrence.” Our modern “perhaps” (literally “through chance occurrences”) is also from “hap.” We occasionally run into the archaic “haply” (“fortunately” and “mayhap” (“possibly”).

“Haphazard” also derives from “hap.” To hazard something is to take a chance on it, so when something is haphazard it is done at the risk of bad fortune without thought for the possible consequences.

Richard R. Losch+

Evening Prayer and Parish Supper

January’s Evening Prayer and supper will be on Wednesday, January 14th at 6:00 p.m. We will celebrate the Epiphany season with a Mardi Gras dinner. Signup sheets for Creole and Cajun dishes and other foods, and for those who plan to attend are posted in the parish house kitchen so that we may know how many for whom to plan. In addition to bringing a dish you are invited to bring your favorite wine to share. For more details, please speak with Hiram Patrenos. As always, there will be plenty of good food and fellowship. Please plan to attend. Please note that in observance of Lent, we will not have a supper in February and March but we will begin a new season of suppers on the third Wednesday of April.

Hiram Patrenos

Thanks to the Dews

Many thanks to Rosalie and Ernest Dew for hosting a wonderful parish Christmas party in their beautiful home last month. We appreciate their warm hospitality.

Richard R. Losch+

Annual Parish Meeting

At the Annual Parish Meeting held on Sunday, December 7th, Madelyn Mack and Hiram Patrenos were elected to the Vestry for terms expiring on December 31, 2017, replacing Joe Moore and Rosalie Dew, whose terms expired December 31, 2014. Other members of the Vestry are Roy Un-

¹ Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*: “Be it art or hap, . . . the very dice obey him.”

² Orthography will often adjust spelling to represent the pronunciation. Spelling it “hapy” could lead us to pronounce it “hay-pee,” just as “nuty” could produce “nooty.”

derwood and Ethel Scott, whose terms expire on December 31, 2016, and Barry Green-Burns and Mary Helen Jones, whose terms expire on December 31, 2015. The Vestry met following the Annual Meeting and elected the following officers for 2015: Roy Underwood, Senior Warden; Hiram Patrenos, Junior Warden; Raiford Noland, Treasurer; and Fr. Losch, Clerk. Thank you to Mrs. Dew and Mr. Moore for their dedicated service to the Vestry and St. James.

Hiram Patrenos

Thanks, Decorators

Thanks to all who worked so hard on the Fourth Sunday of Advent to decorate the church for Christmas. Thanks especially to Candace Strickland, without whose leadership and knowledge of making the wreaths the job would have been much harder. Thanks also to Hiram Patrenos for finding, harvesting and setting up the beautiful tree, and to Drayton and Zina Pruitt for donating it in memory of their late grandson Chance.

Richard R. Losch+

Every Member Canvass

Thank you to all who have returned your 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, AL 35470.

Hiram Patrenos

Negotiation

The biblical Hebrew phrase for negotiation could not be clearer. It is *masa u-matan* (מָשָׂא וּמָתַן). The root of *masa* means to take something for oneself, and the root of *matan* means to hand something over to someone else. The *u* is "and." In Hebrew, negotiation is literally "take and give," or as we would say, "give-and-take."

Richard R. Losch+

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 \$1,000.00 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

Why the Reprints?

Due to my recent accident, the September *Epistle* never got printed and mailed. Although it is available online,¹ a large number of our readers never saw it. That, along with a bit of laziness during the holiday season busy-ness, led us to reprint a few of the articles so they could see them.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the "Epistle" tab at the top of the page. The last two years' editions are there as PDFs.

Drinking Ashes

The Roman scholar and author Marcus Varro, as quoted by Pliny the Elder,¹ gave advice to sufferers of abdominal problems: “For abdominal cramps or bruises, your hearth should be your medicine chest. Drink lye made from its ashes, and you will be cured. One can see how gladiators after a combat are helped by drinking this.” One might be tempted to dismiss Pliny’s suggestion of drinking lye immediately, since he was prone to report almost any “facts” that he found interesting, including gold-mining ants in India and fantastic monsters in Africa. This makes him fun to read, but not a reliable source. However, the fact that he quotes Varro, who has been found to be very reliable, lends credibility to his claim. The problem, though, is that until recently we had no evidence to verify the claim that gladiators drank lye.

Lye was originally produced by steeping wood ashes in water, then filtering and boiling down the solution.² Although lye is poisonous, the solution is weak enough before it is boiled down that it could be drunk without serious damage. If the drink that Varro refers to were simply a mixture of ashes and water, the lye content would be very low. In fact, if that were the case then there would be some activated charcoal in the drink, and that is very beneficial to the di-

gestive system. Any significant amount of lye, however, would seriously damage the alimentary tract.

The majority of gladiators in ancient Rome were slaves, although a few free men (and surprisingly, a few women) sold themselves to the gladiatorial schools. The risk of death was extremely high, but a successful gladiator could retire with freedom, fame, glory and huge wealth. They were the “rock star” athletes of the time, and were honored and paid like the top professional athletes of today. Gladiatorial combat began in the early republican days of Rome as a funeral rite for famous warriors. By the imperial period (first and second centuries A.D.) it had become a major source of public entertainment.

Varro’s reference to the drinking of lye by gladiators has puzzled scholars until a recent study was done in Ephesus. A chemical analysis was made of the bones of gladiators exhumed from a gladiatorial cemetery just outside the city. This was compared with a similar analysis of the bones of average Ephesian citizens. The study confirmed what has long been believed, that the primary diet of the gladiators, just like that of other average Romans, was vegetables and grain—mainly barley. The gladiators, however, had a significantly higher strontium to calcium ratio, suggesting that they, at least those from Ephesus, did indeed drink a potion of ashes (*cinis lixivus potus*) as described by Varro and reported by Pliny.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ *Natural History*, XXXVI.203.

² This was the source of the first soap. When lye and fat are mixed in the correct ratio, the result is soap.

The Virgin Birth

Many skeptics today challenge the doctrine of the virgin birth of Jesus, basing their arguments on modern scientific knowledge. Virgin birth is not all that uncommon in lower animals (it happens frequently among insects), and is called parthenogenesis. The problem is that in parthenogenesis the offspring is always female. For a male to be produced requires a Y-chromosome, and a male must contribute this. In other words, Jesus, being a male, had to have had a human father—at least according to the argument of the skeptics, who seem to have forgotten Jesus' own admonition, "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). One of the great scientific leaps forward in recent years is genetic engineering, by which we can alter chromosomes. Some people who have no trouble believing that human scientists can do it seem to have a very hard time believing that God can do it. If we believe that God created all things, including the Y-chromosome, then it should not be all that difficult to believe that he could have created one in the Blessed Virgin's womb.

Another argument used is that the parthenogenesis of a human male (or a male of any mammal) would be unique. This reminds us of Macro's line in *I, Claudius*, "Admittedly, it is very unusual. But then that is the nature of miracles—that they are unusual. And if for that reason some choose not to believe in them, then more fool they." If the virgin births of males were common, then there would be

nothing significant in that of Jesus.

Modern science has, admittedly, thrown a monkey-wrench into the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, in that it has caused us to re-examine it. This is good, however, because it causes us to recognize the miraculous power of God, whereas up until a couple of centuries ago the idea of a virgin birth caused no serious intellectual problem. It will help if we examine the ancient concepts of the nature of conception, which were believed well into the eighteenth century.

Before the days of the microscope, no one knew of the existence of human eggs or sperm cells. The ancient idea, which pervaded all cultures for thousands of years was as follows. Each month a fertile female produces a mass of blood that has the potential to provide the matter to form a baby. That blood, however, is purely material—it contains no "life force," which is necessary for the production of a child. The male semen, on the other hand, does not contain any of the matter required, but provides the life force to enliven the woman's blood. It was similar to their understanding of how a seed grows. The earth provides all the matter for the plant, and the seed provides the living spirit that enables the production of a new plant. The Bible and other ancient writings often refer to semen and descendants as "seed" (Gen. 9:9, 38:9).

Another interesting belief was that the female is a cooler being than the male. The man's genitals are external to keep them from overheating, while

the woman's are internal to keep them warm. The warmest part of a woman is her womb. If it is sufficiently warm it will produce a male, and if not it will produce a female. In ancient times to refer to a woman as "hot" did not mean that she was sexually attractive or stimulating, but that she was fertile and capable of bearing sons. It was not until modern times that we learned that the father, not the mother, determines the sex of the child. Henry VIII went through six wives trying to find one that could produce a healthy son, because it was universally believed that the woman determines the sex of the child. This does not justify his behavior, but it helps explain it (his lust was also a critical factor).¹

The arguments supporting the Virgin Birth are powerful. The first and simplest is the textual argument. Matthew (1:18) and Luke (1:35) clearly state that Jesus was conceived through the action of the Holy Spirit, without a human father. While modern science has problems with this, the Bible is quite clear on the matter. This is not something that is implied or hinted, but is clearly and unequivocally stated. From there on the only argument that can be raised is the authority of Scripture itself.

The second argument is more philosophical, although it depends somewhat on the first. Taken to a *reductio*

ad absurdum, it is simply that God can do whatever he pleases. If he wants to implant a Y-chromosome in the womb of the Virgin, then so be it.

The third argument is theological. If we accept that the world has fallen into sin and has thus cut itself off from God (Rom. 3:23), then for God to redeem the world requires that he do a "new thing"—that he create a new condition for us, free of the stigma of sin and religious corruption. The prophets' preaching about morality and obedience was not sufficient to raise us up out of the mire of sin into which we had fallen, so God went a step further. It was not a surprise to him that he had to do something different—it was part of his plan from the beginning—but the world had to be prepared for it through the faith of the Jews and the teaching of the prophets. God himself, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, took upon himself human flesh in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, and lived among us, fully divine and yet also fully human (Heb. 4:15). He died on the cross as a human, and was raised from the dead as both God and man in order to elevate us to the realm of the divine. "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14). Since the appearance of Jesus Christ into human history marked the "new beginning," it was appropriate that he be born of a virgin. Ultimately, however, it has to be a simple matter of faith and piety.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ It is ironic that Jane Seymour, the only one of the six whom he truly loved, was also the only one who bore him a son. Sadly, she died two weeks after delivering the frail and sickly Prince Edward.

Who Wrote Saint Paul's Epistles?

This sounds rather like a “Who’s buried in Grant’s Tomb” question, but in fact it is far from it. The Bible contains fourteen letters attributed to Saint Paul. These were written, in some cases, decades before the four Gospels, Acts, Revelation and the other letters in the New Testament, and are thus the earliest surviving Christian writings.

Fifteen hundred years ago no one had any doubt that Paul had personally written all of them. By the early Middle Ages, however, scholars had universally rejected his authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and that rejection still stands today except among the most closed-minded fundamentalists.¹ Hebrews was written by an unknown disciple of Paul who clearly understood Pauline theology, although it is believed that it was written after Paul’s death. In ancient times it was not considered fraudulent for a disciple to write in his teacher’s name as long as he was convinced that what he was writing was completely consistent with his master’s teachings.²

¹ There are still people today who believe that every word of the Bible (generally the Protestant version) was dictated directly by God to human scribes. However, to defend that belief requires a suspension of reason and a level of faith that can truly be called blind. Most Christians today believe that the Bible was inspired by God, but not dictated word for word.

² Similarly, it was not fraudulent for Paul to claim to have studied at the feet of the great rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), even though it is unlikely that Gamaliel was still alive when

The jury is still out on some of the remaining thirteen letters, however. There is no dispute among scholars that seven of the letters came directly from Paul during his lifetime: Romans, Galatians, Philemon, Philippians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and 1 Thessalonians. In most cases Paul probably did not write them personally, but either dictated them to scribes or told scribes what to say and then personally edited them before they were delivered. In ancient times it was uncommon for an author to write his works with his own hand. Paul did write a portion of Galatians with his own hand, however (Gal. 6:11).³

The authorship of the remaining six letters is still disputed among scholars. Three have a reasonable claim to authenticity (2 Thessalonians, Colossians and Ephesians), while a majority of scholars reject the Pauline authorship of the so-called pastoral letters, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. A rapidly growing minority, however, among whom is the great New Testament professor Luke Timothy Johnson, believe that all six were authored by Paul. Johnson gives very compelling arguments for this, but they are beyond the scope of this article.

One of the reasons that the authorship of these letters are disputed is

Paul studied in Jerusalem. To have studied at the feet of one of Gamaliel’s chief students was considered tantamount to having studied under Gamaliel himself.

³ He comments on what large letters he uses to write it. One of his afflictions may have been a palsy or bad eyesight, which would require him to write larger than normal-sized letters.

that they vary so greatly from one another in language usage and structure. While all are written in the same Greek, the way the Greek is used differs from one letter to another. Greek was Paul's native tongue. He was born and raised in Tarsus, the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia, where Greek was spoken (as it was in the greater part of the Roman Empire). Although as an educated Jew he would have been fluent in Hebrew, Aramaic, Classic Greek and Latin, Koine (common) Greek was nonetheless the tongue in which he would have been most comfortable, and was the language in which he wrote.

What many interpreters today fail to take into account is that one of the basic parts of an ancient education was rhetoric. Today we tend to think of rhetoric as the ability to speak eloquently, but it is in fact much more than this. It is the ability not only to choose one's words and expressions elegantly, but also to speak (or write) with a particular audience in mind. One of the great rhetoricians of modern times was Martin Luther King, Jr. When he was speaking at Harvard he was as eloquent and well-spoken as any Harvard professor. But when he was speaking to an audience of uneducated Southern blacks he sounded just like one of them. His particular genius was that when he was speaking to a mixed audience, each listener heard him in his own way. In ancient times, learning to do this was an essential part of a good education.

As a rhetorician, Paul was a genius. Each of his letters is crisply tai-

lored not only to his audience, but to the purpose of the letter, using a different style, structure and vocabulary to fit the situation. He uses one style to praise, another to scold, and another to teach. These differences have led some to claim that they were written by different authors, but scholars of ancient rhetoric recognize the differences for what they are—differences in approach, not in authorship.

It should also be noted that like virtually all writing of that time, Paul's letters were intended to be read aloud, not to be perused silently. The ability to read silently was considered a great gift, and few could do it. Even when reading privately, one would read aloud.¹

With the possible exception of Romans, Paul's letters were not written for the purpose of teaching, and they were not intended to define theological issues. They were simply letters intended to deal with specific problems that faced specific churches. They were so powerful, however, that more and more people demanded copies, and they quickly spread through all the Christian churches. Because they were intended to deal with different situations in different churches, the rhetoric in each differs.

Despite the claim of some, Paul did not invent Christianity. He simply expounded on the Faith that had been deposited with the Apostles. Thanks be to God, however, he did it magnificently.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Philip overheard the Ethiopian eunuch reading Isaiah (Acts 8:28).

Gematria

(Reprinted from the September 2014 Epistle)

No, Gematria is not an ancient Roman province. Rather, it is a quasi-mystical Jewish interpretation device that goes back to ancient times and is still practiced today. It is closely related to Numerology. Numerology is the belief in a mystical, magical or divine connection between numbers and the relationship of events. Since ancient times it has been believed that letters of the alphabet have a numerical value. In fact, many cultures wrote numbers using letters (such as in Roman numerals).¹ For example, the first letters of the Greek alphabet are Α, Β, Γ, Δ (alpha, beta,² gamma, delta) and so forth, where Α=1, Β=2, Γ=3 and Δ=4. It is unclear whether the number values were given because of the order of the letters, or the letters were ordered according to their value. Most ancient alphabets, including Hebrew, had numerological values. It's interesting to note that there was no symbol for zero, which was a concept that ancient mathematicians had no idea how to handle.³

In Gematria, the numerological value of a word is simply the sum of the values of its individual letters. If two words or phrases have the same numerological value, then practitioners of Gematria believe that they

have a relationship. This relationship is then sought as a key to the interpretation of the passage.

An example of Gematria can be found in the stories of Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28:12) and the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai (Ex. 20). In Hebrew the word used for Jacob's ladder is *sulam* (סֹלַם).⁴ Its numerological value is 130.⁵ The Hebrew for Sinai (סִינַי) also has a value of 130, so Gematria would claim that they are related. The usual interpretation is that Jacob's vision of the ladder extending into heaven, with an angel descending it, was a symbol of God's descending to earth to present Moses and the Israelites with the Law, and to establish his covenant with them.

Early Christians also used Gematria. Saint John said that the number of the beast (Satan or the Anti-Christ) is 666 (Rev. 13:18). There are many attempts in Greek and Latin, some rather contrived, to associate this with the Roman emperor Nero. Although John wrote Revelation in Greek, he was a Jew whose native tongue was Aramaic, a language that was written in Hebrew letters and was closely related to Hebrew. In Aramaic, Nero Caesar is *Neron Kesar* (נְרוֹן קֶסָר). The numerological value of that name is 666, identifying Nero, the great enemy of Christians, as the Anti-Christ, the enemy of God.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ The numbers we use today, called Arabic numerals, were invented by the ancient Arabs, and were brought to Europe by Crusaders.

² That's where we get the word alphabet.

³ The Arabs also discovered zero and how to work with it.

⁴ In English this sounds like it might be related to *shalom*, "peace," but in Hebrew the two words are spelled differently.

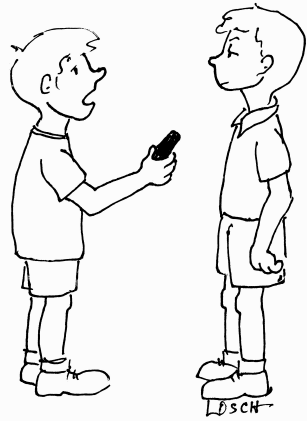
⁵ Sanekh (ס)=60, lamedh (ל)=30 and mem (מ)=40. The Hebrew alphabet has no vowels.

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

LIVINGSTON FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



*"Mr. Jones next door gave me this
jackknife for my birthday and asked
if I know what's inside my drum."*



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