

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
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This Month's Cover

This month's cover painting is *The Annunciation* by Luca Giordano. Completed in 1672, it is oil on canvas, measuring 7'9"x5'7". It was originally an altarpiece inspired by one of Giordano's trips to Venice. It is on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. It depicts the angel Gabriel announcing to the Virgin Mary that she has been chosen to bear the incarnate Son of God. The Feast of the Annunciation is celebrated on March 25, nine months before Christmas.

As are most paintings of the Annunciation, this is traditionally idealistic, depicting Mary as a young woman in the blue robe that has been anciently associated with her. In fact she was a young girl, most likely in her early mid-teens (the normal marriageable age of the time), and would not have been able to afford anything as expensive as blue clothing. When the angel appeared to her she was terrified—his first words to her were “Fear not.” In the face of the Virgin Giordano has beautifully captured not only her purity and innocence, but the pious look of total obedience to God—“Be it unto me according to thy word.” Hovering over her are two *putti* (“baby angels”), a common Italian Renaissance device denoting divine grace.

Luca Giordano (1634-1705) was the leading painter and etcher in Naples in the late 17th century. Although he lived in the Baroque era and usually etched in that style, he often painted in the Renaissance style as well as the Baroque, and he was strongly influenced by the vibrant colors of Titian. He was noted for the speed with which he painted, and earned the nickname *Luca Fa Presto*, “Luca Works Fast.” Because he worked prolifically in many styles, including the Renaissance and Baroque, he has been accused of being an expert in all styles but

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a master of none. In fact, critics acclaim his proficiency in all. Notwithstanding, the British art historian Michael Levey says of him that he was “speedy, prolific, dazzling in colour, assured in draughtsmanship, ever-talented and never touching the fringe of genius.” Despite that, Giordano is generally recognized as one of the great masters of 17th century Italy.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

This year on March 6 we enter into Lent almost as late as it can ever be (the latest is March 10). I must admit that I always like an early Lent and Easter for two reasons. First, after all the busy-ness of the end-of-the-year holidays we suddenly hit something of a low in January and early February. I find that the onset of the Lenten disciplines points us in a more positive direction and is spiritually uplifting. Secondly, as most of you know, I detest winter weather, and Lent points to Easter, which means Spring. Spring in Alabama (despite the pollen) is a long season of beautiful warm days with the air redolent with a different floral scent every day. A late Lent, on the other hand, gives us time to settle down after the year-end hubbub and start thinking seriously about what spiritual discipline we plan to undertake when Lent begins. Lent is not about physical pleasures or discomforts. It is about trimming our frayed spiritual edges and getting our minds and souls in order. Even though Lent looks toward sharing the joy and glory of Easter, we must remember that before that joy and glory is achieved we must first also share in the sacrifice and agony of the Crucifixion.

Our Lenten discipline is not intended to inflict self-suffering, it is intended to be just what it is called—discipline, which means learning. Whatever we take on should leave us better, and spiritually stronger. If you give up chocolate for Lent because you need to lose weight you have completely missed the point, and you might as well go out and buy a box of Cadbury's. If you give it up because you love it and the self-denial will strengthen you, you are headed in the right direction. Even better than giving up something, though, would be to take on

something (perhaps extra regular prayer or Bible study) that will not only strengthen you, but also focus your thought more on the Gospel and the sacrifice of Christ. As Christians we are not necessarily called to suffer. We are called to accept whatever Christ wills for us, even if that involves suffering. Likewise, our Lenten discipline should not be chosen for its difficulty, but rather for what we think it could do for us spiritually. If that involves difficulty, so be it.

May the Holy Spirit guide you to choose a good Lenten discipline, and may you prosper spiritually from it.

Father Rick Losch+

Fifth Sundays

Decades ago the Livingston Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian and Episcopal churches started dedicating each fifth Sunday to a community worship service that would rotate among the four churches. The purpose of it was to strengthen our ecumenism and to give each church the opportunity to share its traditional form of worship with the others. In the last few years the Baptist and Methodist churches have dropped out, but we and the Presbyterians held on and tried to maintain the tradition. A sharp decline in participation in the last couple of years has led us to decide that it is time to end it. Sunday is the day to worship the Lord in church, yet on recent fifth Sundays only a small handful of people have come when it is time to visit the other church. On future fifth Sundays we will therefore all worship in our own churches. We will continue to give the undesignated fifth Sunday collection to the Livingston Community Services Society.

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is Online

The last six years of *The Epistle*, including this issue, are now online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the “Epistle” tab at the top. You can read any issue online or download it as a .pdf file. This is an easy way to share articles with others.

Church Social Events

In a special project to involve more St. James' members in church dinners, the ECW extends an invitation to all members to select one or more of the quarterly church dinners to help with. Each dinner signup sheet will have designated spaces for signing up to be on an event team.

St. James' will host the 4 following socials for the coming year: the Mardi Gras Celebration, the July 4th Celebration, the Fall Tailgate Party, and the Christmas Party.

To make it easy for each team, the ECW will place a checklist of tasks in the Parish House kitchen before each event. The checklist will include items such as setting the tables with tablecloths, placing decorations on the tables, setting up chairs, getting the drinks ready, and some cleanup tasks including loading the dishwasher and laundering tablecloths. Hiram Patrenos has generously volunteered to continue to set out the tables and put them away.

This new project promises to provide more fun and fellowship for everyone at our socials. Looking forward to good times for everyone.

Sharon Underwood

Shrove Tuesday

On March 6th at 6:00 p.m., in observance of Shrove Tuesday, we will have a Mardi Gras dinner. Signup sheets for Creole and Cajun dishes, other foods, and for those who plan to attend are posted on the bulletin board in the vestibule so that we may know how many for whom to plan. Please note also that we are asking for volunteers (event team) to help with set up and clean up. In addition to bringing a dish you are invited to bring your favorite wine to share. For more details, please speak with the event team. As always, there will be plenty of good food and fellowship. Please make your plans to attend.

Hiram Patrenos

It's probably not a good idea to take a dog named Shark to the beach.

Ash Wednesday Service

On March 7th our observance of Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, will be held at noon with a service of Holy Communion and Imposition of Ashes. Please make your plans to begin your observance of the Lenten Season at this service.

Hiram Patrenos

Be Wordly Wise

Procrastinate

I have been putting off writing about this word for months. Unfortunately, we are all familiar with procrastination, which is putting off doing something until a later time, when it should be done now. Sometimes we procrastinate simply by rationalizing that we intend to do it as soon as possible, and sometimes we indulge in what psychologists call “creative avoidance.” This is convincing ourselves that there is something more important that needs to be done now, and thus putting off until later the task that we should be doing.

The word procrastinate first appeared in English in the 16th century. It comes from the Latin verb *procrastinare*, to defer until tomorrow. This in turn derives from *pro-*, bring forward, and *crastinus*, belonging to tomorrow. The latter derives from *cras*, tomorrow. Shakespeare loved to create new words out of common ones, and his plays and sonnets are full of them. I am no Shakespeare, but I propose a new word: precrastinate, from the prefix *pre-*, before. This would be to anticipate tomorrow by doing now what could well wait until tomorrow. If we precrastinate what we know will have to be done eventually, we might find that we never have to procrastinate.

Richard R. Losch+

I went to a bookstore and asked the saleswoman, “Where’s the self-help section?” She said if she told me, it would defeat the purpose.

If you try to fail, and succeed, which have you done?

Ash Wednesday Ashes

In ancient times almost all cultures associated ashes with three things: cleansing, mourning and grief, and repentance. They represent cleansing because a mixture of wood ash and water releases lye (potash), which is very effective for removing grease and oil, and is thus a good, although harsh, laundry product.¹ Ashes signified mourning in most cultures. The Bible is full of references to people pouring ashes on their heads or sitting in ashes as a sign of grief or mourning. Akin to this was the use of ashes to denote repentance, which is a form of mourning for one's sins. Ashes as a sign of repentance are also associated with cleansing, as in being cleansed from sin.

Ashes, being a form of dust, are also a reminder of our mortality: "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:14). Lent is a season dedicated to developing a greater awareness of our sins and of repentance for them, as well as being a constant reminder of our mortality. It is therefore appropriate that we begin Lent with the imposition of ashes.

Palm Sunday is the first day of the most solemn week of the Christian year, climaxing in Good Friday, the day of the Crucifixion of Jesus. The ashes that are used on Ash Wednesday come from burning the palms that were blessed on the previous Palm Sunday. In this way we link the beginning of Lent with the climax of the previous Lent, thus reminding us that repentance and awareness of sin must be ongoing, not just an annual event. In ancient tradition the ashes of Ash Wednesday, like the palms of Palm Sunday, are what are called sacramentals, not sacraments. This means that even though they are blessed and used for a sacred purpose, they are available to anyone, even the unbaptized.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Soap is essentially a balanced mixture of animal fat and lye, in a process called "saponification." In days of yore most rural people made their own soap by dissolving potash from their wood ashes, and then mixing it with animal fat from cooking. Ivory Soap's claim of being "99⁴⁴/₁₀₀% Pure" means that they had achieved an almost perfect ratio of fat to lye.

Saint Patrick of Ireland

While Saint Patrick's Day (March 17) is not a major feast in the Anglican calendar,¹ it has become an important observance in the American culture, particularly in regions such as the Northeast where there is a large population of Irish Catholic descent. It is popular across the country, however—it is said that on Saint Patrick's Day every American manages to find a little Irish in his ancestry somewhere.

Patrick (Patricius) was born in Britain about A.D. 390 of a Roman-British Christian family. He was kidnapped by slave traders when he was 16 and was sold as a slave in Ireland, where he served five years as an indentured shepherd. He escaped when he was 21, and by a perilous journey made his way to Gaul (now France), whence he eventually returned to Britain. He was educated as a priest, and eventually became a Bishop. In 432 a vision called him to return to Ireland to convert the very people who had enslaved him. He Christianized the pagan island by love and teaching rather than by force, unlike many missionaries of his time. Legend says that he used the three-leafed shamrock as a tool to explain the Trinity, and thus the shamrock is a symbol both of Saint Patrick and of Ireland. He adopted the Gaelic form of his name, Padraic, by which he is still known in Ireland today. He died in A.D. 461, leaving Ireland a permanently Christian country.²

Saint Patrick is reputed to have driven the snakes out of Ireland. It is true that there are no snakes there, but Patrick had nothing to do with it—there is no paleozoological evidence that there have ever been any snakes in Ireland. Some scholars say that it is an allegory for his having driven out Satan (“the Old

¹ While it is observed as a minor feast in most Anglican calendars, it is dropped this year because it falls on a Sunday. Sometimes minor feasts that fall on Sunday are “translated” (moved to another nearby date), while others are simply dropped for that year. St. Patrick is such a feast.

² Ireland remained a bastion of Roman Catholic Christianity for 1500 years. Sad to say, in the past 50 years or so corruption, abuse and the heresy of Modernism have weakened the Irish Church dramatically.

Serpent”) by abolishing paganism. There is another explanation for the legend, however. In some parts of the world in Late Antiquity military groups adopted the Spartan idea that a man would fight more diligently for his lover than for his country, and so they encouraged homosexuality among the soldiers. By Patrick’s time this had become rampant, and was a major moral problem. He is credited with being primarily responsible for the abolition of this practice, and the remembrance of that is reflected in the legend of his having expelled the snakes.¹

Saint Patrick is, of course, the patron saint of Ireland. His shield is shaped like that of Saint Andrew (the patron saint of Scotland). It bears a “saltire” (X-shaped) cross, except that his is a red cross on a silver field, while Saint Andrew’s is a silver cross on a blue field. The crosses of Saints Patrick, Andrew and George make up the flag of the United Kingdom, the so-called “Union Flag.”²

Richard R. Losch+

The Calling of the First Apostles

In reading of the calling of the first Apostles, one may find it hard to imagine that anyone, no matter how charismatic, could simply walk up to total strangers and get them to leave behind everything they have and follow him. This is what seems to have happened, though, when Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John (Matt. 4:18ff). They dropped their fishing nets, left their father behind in the boat, and followed him.

¹ This is why so many traditionalists are furious at Cardinal Dolan’s having allowed Gay Pride groups to march in the New York City Saint Patrick’s Day Parade in the past couple of years. The 8th century Saint Walpurga is credited with driving the werewolves out of Bavaria. Historians believe that this also is based on her driving homosexuality out of the military.

² The Union Flag is often misnamed the “Union Jack.” A jack is a small national flag displayed on the bow or stern of a ship when it is at sea. The Union Flag would be a Union Jack only when it is so displayed. The incorrect term Union Jack, however, even though it grates on the ears of many, has become so common in recent years that like the inane expression “I could care less” it is coming to be generally accepted.

Some may say that he used his divine power to cause them to do this, but that would be a violation of the freedom to refuse him that God has given to all people. It would also be a violation of what Saint Paul so clearly teaches, that when Christ took on humanity he “emptied himself” of his divine power and except in extraordinary circumstances used only the power that is available to any faithful human (Phil. 2:7).

Whether we are reading a translation of the Bible or the original Hebrew and Greek, if we lock ourselves into only the specific words that we read we are casting aside huge amounts of information that can be deduced by broadening our outlook a bit. Consider, for example the Gospel accounts of the women at the Crucifixion. Although Luke tells us a great deal about the women who were with Jesus during his ministry, he says nothing about those who were at the foot of the cross. On the other hand, Matthew, Mark and John tell us exactly who were there. Although only John names Mary the Mother of Jesus, there can be little doubt that she was present and the others did not mention her because this was so obvious. All three evangelists name three other women at the foot of the cross. With a little logical deduction it becomes pretty clear who they were.

All three identify Mary Magdalene as one of the women. As for the other two, Matthew lists Mary the mother of James (“the Less”) and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons (27:51). Mark lists Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome¹ (15:35). This leads us to conclude that Salome and the mother of Zebedee’s sons are the same person. John lists Mary the wife of Clopas, and Jesus’ mother’s sister (19:25). It would be reasonable, then, that Mary the wife of Clopas was Mary the mother of James and Joses. The final deduction, then, is that the mother of Zebedee’s sons (Matthew), Salome (Mark), and Jesus’ mother’s sister (John) were all the same person. Zebedee’s sons were the Apostles James and John. If our deductions

¹ This is not Salome the dancer. She is not named in the Bible, but is identified only as Herod’s stepdaughter. The Jewish historian Josephus says her name was Salome, which was a common name in those days.

are correct, that would make James and John Jesus' first cousins.¹ If this is so, then consider the following scenario.

Zebedee and his family lived in Capernaum, which is about thirty miles from Nazareth. In those days a walk of thirty miles, while it would take a couple of days, would not be at all out of the question. After all, Mary and Joseph walked almost a hundred miles to Jerusalem every year for the Passover (Lk. 2:41). It is likely, therefore, that occasionally they would go to Capernaum to visit Mary's sister Salome. Jesus would go with them, of course, and he, James and John would play together while their parents visited. Thus there is a very strong possibility that Jesus knew James and John from childhood.²

Zebedee and his sons, James and John, were partners in the fishing business with Peter and Andrew (Lk. 5:10). Since they owned their own boats, we know that the business was prosperous. In those days business partnerships outside the family were rare, and were made only with trusted people whom they had known for years. It is reasonable, then, that the original partnership was with Zebedee and Jonas, Peter and Andrew's father. If so, Peter and Andrew had probably known James and John since childhood, and thus had also known Jesus for years.

Now we return to the call of these first four Apostles, who were clearly the "inner circle" of the twelve. If over the years they had all known each other well, they would have known how Jesus thought and would have recognized his leadership. Even though at that point they likely did not realize that he was the Messiah, let alone the Son of God, they certainly would have recognized that he was on his way to becoming a great

¹ It is often interpreted as great effrontery for James and John's mother to have asked Jesus for special privilege for them when he came into his kingdom (Matt. 20:20ff). If she were his aunt, however, it would have been quite reasonable to ask this for his own cousins.

² It is also reasonable, if they were so related, that Zebedee's family would meet up with Joseph's family along the way on the long annual Passover trip to Jerusalem. Perhaps when Jesus was 12 and stayed behind in Jerusalem (Lk. 2:43f), Mary and Joseph thought that he was with his cousins. While this is all conjecture, it fits the Biblical account quite well.

prophet, and that eventually they would follow him. At about the age of 30 (Lk. 3:23) Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and then struggled with temptation in the desert. He then returned to begin his ministry. The first place he went was to Capernaum. He did not come to the first Apostles as a total stranger saying, “Follow me.” What he said in effect was, “The time has come. Now we begin. Follow me.” They knew that this time would come, and they were ready to follow him as soon as he said the word. They dropped their nets and left their father with his blessing, and followed Jesus in his ministry.

Richard R. Losch+

The Annunciation

The Feast of the Annunciation (March 25) is actually a dual observance. We celebrate not only the revelation to the Blessed Virgin that she had been chosen to bear the incarnate Son of God, but also the Divine Conception of Jesus in the Virgin’s womb.¹ There is an extremely important detail in the story of the Annunciation that is often overlooked. When the Angel Gabriel told Mary that she had been chosen, she was perfectly free to refuse. Free will is one of the greatest gifts that God has given us, and he does not withdraw it when he selects some individual to serve him. When Gabriel spoke to Mary he told her what would happen, not what had already been done. Only when she gave her consent (“Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it unto me according to thy word”—Lk. 1:38) did the Holy Spirit descend on her and miraculously cause her conception.

It should be noted that Mary was not a fool. She knew full

¹ This was *not* the Immaculate Conception, but rather the Miraculous or Divine Conception. The Immaculate Conception refers to the conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary by Saints Anne and Joachim, her parents. This doctrine teaches essentially that since Christ should be born of a pure vessel but had not yet sanctified the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Mary was granted the grace of baptism—including release from the onus of original sin—at the moment of her conception in the womb of Saint Anne. Many people refer to the conception of Christ as the Immaculate Conception, but that is a completely incorrect use of the term.

well that becoming pregnant before her marriage to Joseph would cost her dearly. At the best she would be disgraced and scorned, and by the law of the time she could have been put to death. Joseph would have been perfectly justified in canceling their betrothal, and if so it would be highly unlikely that any other man would ever have her. If her father chose not to have her put to death, she would be dependent on him for her very survival for the rest of her life. Mary knew all this, yet had sufficient faith in God to accept whatever he had in store for her.

The Annunciation, then, is not only a feast of the celebration of the Incarnation of Christ, it is also a stark reminder that true faith requires obedience to God's will whatever that will may be. It also reminds us that faith and obedience will be rewarded. The Blessed Virgin Mary, the paragon of faith and humble obedience to God, now reigns as the Queen of Heaven.

Richard R. Losch+

The Son of God

In the Gospels, Jesus is referred to as the Son of God, yet in many passages he is referred to as Joseph's son (Lk. 4:22, Jn. 1:45, Jn. 6:42). Which is he? Those who believe that Jesus was conceived miraculously by the will of the Holy Spirit can accept Joseph only as Jesus' stepfather—his mother's spouse, but not his biological progenitor. There are many explanations for the Bible's references to Joseph as his father. One, of course, is that most of the people knew him only as such, since until at least near the end of Jesus' earthly life they did not recognize him as the Christ. The Jews did not have family names (as the Romans did), but rather they were identified by their father's name or by where they came from. Jesus would have been known either as Jesus the son of Joseph (*Yeshua bar-Yossef*), or as Jesus of Nazareth (*Yeshua Hanotzri*).

There were two main cultures represented in first century Palestine, and often they were in conflict. After Alexander the Great swept east in the 4th century B.C. most of the peoples in his path quite happily adopted Greek civilization and the Greek language. It was superior to almost all other cultures of the time

(which even the Romans grudgingly admitted, infusing it richly into their own). While local languages were still used, by Jesus' time most people throughout the western world were also fluent in Greek. In many regions it became the predominant language.¹ In Rome in the first century B.C. a man's education and social status were called seriously into question if he did not speak flawless Attic Greek.² The only people who resisted the Hellenization of their culture were the Jews. There developed a rift between the traditional Jews and those (mostly the younger set) who accepted many of the Greek values. They were known as Hellenized Jews. Some even went so far as to abandon their Jewish faith in favor of Hellenic paganism. Unlike most other peoples of the time, however, the majority of Jews resisted Hellenization and although they knew Greek, they remained true to the old ways and the old faith.

The reason the issue of Hellenization is important here is that Greeks and Jews had different attitudes toward fatherhood. To the Greeks, a man was considered a father only if he were the biological progenitor of the child. Adoption was legal and often practiced, but the adopted child, while having all the legal rights of a biological child, was still not considered the true blood son or daughter of the adoptive parent. To the Jews (and to some extent the Romans), quite the opposite was the case. Son-hood was not a matter of biology, but of will and obedience. By Jewish law (although this one was almost never

¹ This is why the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek (the Septuagint), and why all the New Testament books were written in Greek, even though written by Aramaic-speaking Jews (except for Luke, a Greek). They were not translations into Greek, but were originally written in that language. They were intended to be distributed worldwide, and almost anyone in the known world who could read at all could read Greek.

² At the beginning of the 1st century B.C. Gaius Marius, Julius Caesar's uncle by marriage, paved the way for Caesar's dictatorship. He was of high Roman birth and had become extremely wealthy from his military adventures, but he grew up in northern Italy. He spoke perfect Greek, but with a slight rural accent. Because of that his enemies called him a "country bumpkin with no Greek."

observed by Jesus' time), if a child were grievously disobedient the father could declare him no longer his son and deliver him to be executed (Deut. 21:18ff). On the other hand, if a father-son relationship were strong and the child were obedient to the father, biological kinship did not matter. Thus Jesus' obedience to God his Father and to Joseph as his father would, in the eyes of most Jews, have been sufficient to identify both God and Joseph as his fathers, although their concept of God as his Father would be seen as a purely spiritual relationship, open to any Jew.¹ The idea of Jesus' being the incarnate Second Person of the Holy Trinity (God the Son) would have been considered blasphemy by the Jews.

When he taught the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to address God as "*Our Father.*" All who are obedient to God are his sons and daughters. Likewise, when the people of Nazareth said that Jesus' mother and brothers were outside, he said, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mk. 3:35). All, therefore, who are obedient to God are adopted as his children: "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15).

As Christians we understand that Jesus Christ was the Son of God not only as an obedient servant of God, but also because he is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who took humanity upon himself. By the standards of Jewish law and custom, however, Joseph was fully Jesus' father in every respect by virtue of Jesus' obedience to Joseph, even though he did not beget him biologically.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ This is why Ishmael, although his mother was a slave, was considered in every respect Abraham's son. By Jewish law, a person's family lineage comes through his father. His "Jewishness," however, regardless of his religion, comes via his mother, not his father. Thus the child of a Jewish mother and Gentile father is unquestionably Jewish, while there is some question (although not outright rejection) of the Jewishness of the child of a Gentile mother and Jewish father. This was an issue regarding citizenship in the early days of the modern state of Israel, although today if either parent is Jewish the person is eligible to apply for Israeli citizenship.

A Touch of Trivia

Gouverneur Morris (that was his name, not his title) of New York is called “The Penman of the Constitution” because he was the author of the Preamble (“We the People ...”). He is not the man who actually scribed it, however. The beautiful calligraphy of the original document was the handiwork of Jacob Shallus of Philadelphia, who was paid the handsome sum of \$30 to engross one of the most important documents in history. In today’s money that would be about \$800.

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JAMIE

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