

# THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church  
Livingston, Alabama



Volume XXVII, Number 11

December 2020



## December 2020

## ***This Month's Cover***

Our cover painting this month is *The Virgin and Child Surrounded by the Holy Innocents* by Peter Paul Rubens. The original was oil on a wood panel, which Rubens transferred to oil on canvas in 1616. It measures 4'2"x3'4", and is displayed in the Louvre, where it has hung since Louis XIV acquired it in 1671. The painting is sometimes called *The Virgin and Angels*, although it is universally recognized as depicting the souls of the Innocents. This title doubtless derives from the common false concept that the dead become angels when they go to heaven. A close look at the face of the baby Jesus reveals a shocked look of horror, as if he were saying, "What have you done?" On January 8, 1968 the painting was slashed by a deranged man, but it has since been fully restored.

The Feast of the Holy Innocents (December 28) commemorates Herod's massacre of all the infants aged two and under in Bethlehem, in an attempt to kill what he saw as a rival, the prophesied King of the Jews (Matt. 2:16). Medieval tradition depicts it as a slaughter of hundreds of babies, but that is vastly exaggerated. Bethlehem at the time was a small town, and the total number of infants under two was probably well under thirty. Naysayers claim that this never actually happened, since Matthew's report is the only written record of it, and if it were true there should be some reference to it in the Roman annals. On the other hand, such a massacre is not only quite consistent with what we know of Herod's rule, but it was also not at all an uncommon event in the brutal ancient Middle East. Roman culture had little reverence for life, and even less for the lives of young children. They would have taken little notice of the massacre as long as it did not inconvenience any Romans or

*The Epistle* is published monthly except August by Saint James' Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470-0446, the Rev. R. R. Losch, Editor, email [rlosch33@gmail.com](mailto:rlosch33@gmail.com), Phone 205-499-0968. Copyright © 2020, Richard 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.

interfere with their tax revenues. It is therefore not surprising that it is not mentioned in their records.

Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) was the most influential painter of the Flemish Baroque tradition. He was also a classically educated scholar and an international diplomat who frequently advised and socialized with the crowned heads of Europe. We wrote about him more extensively in the July/August, 2018 *Epistle*, to which we refer you if you want more detail. You can download it at <http://rlosch.com>. Click on the “Epistle” tab and then on that issue.

*Richard R. Losch+*

---

## ***A Word from the Editor***

The tumult and the shouting dies;  
The Captains and the Kings depart:  
Still stands Thine ancient sacrifice,  
An humble and a contrite heart.  
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,  
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

So reads the second stanza of Kipling's *Recessional*, a poem that displeased Queen Victoria because it points out the transience of empires and authority, and emphasizes that if we forget God, our worldly power is meaningless. Our presidential election is now over, but unfortunately the tumult and the shouting have not yet died, and the captains and the kings are still making their presence very much known. As in most elections, there will always be some who are happy with the results, some who are not, some who don't really care, and some who become completely unstrung. If it is any consolation to those who are unhappy, it will not be all that long before no one but a handful of historians will know or much care what happened in the 2020 election. What does matter, both to us and to future generations, is that we not forget that “still stands thine ancient sacrifice, an humble and a contrite heart.” All through the campaign both sides made dire predictions of the calamities that would ensue if their opponent won. They are nothing compared

to the calamity that will ensue if we continue to forget that God is still in charge, and turn our backs on him. Just keeping “In God We Trust” on our coins and keeping “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance is not enough. Talk is cheap. It is living and thinking as if we trust in God, and working to keep this a nation unified under God that matters. I am not talking about a Church-and-State issue. If we are constantly aware of the presence and grace of God, the Church will not have to tell the State how to govern morally, and the State will not have to try to control the Church, because the two will work hand-in-hand in peace and harmony. The forces of apathy, greed, power-hunger and selfishness are always at work to separate us from God and from each other. God has given us the tools to fight them, lest we forget. He gave us the Church, the Sacraments, prayer, and Holy Scripture. If we fail to use these tools then we will forget—and if we forget, we are in grave peril.

*Father Rick Losch*

---

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

We are grateful to Jason Gordy and his workers of Deep South Landscaping for their gift of giving and planting the winter flowers in the prayer garden, and for pruning and cleaning up the shrubbery in the church yard and rectory. We appreciate their hard work and generosity!

*Hiram Patrenos*

---

## ***Annual Parish Meeting***

Our Annual Parish Meeting will be held on Sunday, December 6<sup>th</sup> immediately following the 11:00 a.m. service. Reports of various parish organizations will be made, and two new Vestry members will be elected to replace Hiram Patrenos and Madelyn Mack, whose terms expire December 31<sup>st</sup>. They will not be eligible for re-election to the Vestry for one year. Other members of the Vestry are Joe Moore and Rosalie Dew, whose terms expire on December 31, 2021.

---

To be eligible for nomination and service on the Vestry, one must be:

- an active confirmed communicant in good standing at St. James' (communicants' names are printed in bold type in the parish directory);
- frequent and regular in worship attendance;
- a supporter of the work of St. James' by an annual pledge to the operating budget;
- willing and able to attend Vestry meetings and perform the work expected of a Vestry Member. Vestry meetings are normally scheduled after Sunday services on an "as needed" basis.

*Hiram Patrenos*

---

## ***Christmas Service***

Because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we will be keeping our celebration very simply this year. Our Christmas service will begin on Thursday, December 24<sup>th</sup>, Christmas Eve, with our traditional Christmas Eve Mass at 5:30 p.m. Father Losch will be the celebrant and our nursery will be open for this service. Unfortunately, we will not be having our annual parish Christmas party following the service.

*Hiram Patrenos*

---

## ***Christmas Flowers***

Each year St. James' Church offers the opportunity to remember loved ones through donations to the Altar Guild, which provides poinsettias and other decorations in the church for Christmastide. If you wish to make a donation for this (in memory of, in honor of, or in thanksgiving for), envelopes with forms are available at the back of the Church or you may print this information clearly and mail it along with your contribution to Carolyn Patrenos, P.O. Box 399, Livingston, AL 35470. Checks should be made payable to St. James' Altar Guild. Because of the increased costs for these flowers and

decorations, we ask for a minimum donation of \$40.00 for memorials. The deadline for inclusion in the Christmas bulletin is Sunday, December 20<sup>th</sup>. Your donation is tax deductible.

*Hiram Patrenos*

---

## ***Every Member Canvass***

We have begun our Every Member Canvass. Pledge cards are available on the table at the rear of the church. The Vestry needs this information so that it can budget appropriately for the upcoming year. If you have any questions regarding our parish finances, please do not hesitate to speak with a member of the Vestry or our Treasurer, Hiram Patrenos. Pledge cards are available on the table at the rear of the church and may be placed in the alms basins or mailed to St. James' Church, P.O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to St. James', its mission and work, and return your card no later than Sunday, December 8<sup>th</sup>.

*Hiram Patrenos*

---

## ***Wilmer Hall Christmas Contribution***

St. James' will be making a special gift to Wilmer Hall for its Christmas needs this year. Last year because of your generous contributions, we were able to contribute \$1,250.00 and we hope to be able to make that same gift this year or perhaps an even larger one. Envelopes are available on the table at the back of the church and contributions should be made payable to St. James' and designated for "Wilmer Hall Christmas". Envelopes may be placed in the Alms Basins or given to Hiram Patrenos. So that we may forward our contribution to Wilmer Hall in time for use this Christmas, the last day for making a contribution for this year is Sunday, December 6<sup>th</sup>.

*Hiram Patrenos*

---

*Why do we press harder on the remote control buttons  
when we know the batteries are getting weak?*

---

## *Novus Ordo Seclorum*

*Novus Ordo Seclorum* is the second motto of the United States on the reverse of the Great Seal.<sup>1</sup> It is often mis-translated “A New World Order,” but this is patently incorrect. Globalists often latch on to that mis-translation to argue that the Founding Fathers intended the United States to spur the development a global government. Not only is it clear in their writings that they had no such intent, but also that this is not what the Latin motto means. A more accurate translation is “A New Order of the Ages,” meaning that a brand-new system of government, never before seen, has emerged. Although the Athenian Democracy, the Roman Republic and the British Constitution were models on which the new American system was structured, the American governmental system was in fact unique in political history. This is why it is often called “the American Experiment.” Even though it is now over 230 years old and can no longer be considered an experiment, when it began it was something that had never before been tried.

The motto was not original with them. It refers to the *Fourth Eclogue* of Virgil, a Latin poem with which any well-educated man in the 18<sup>th</sup> century would have been familiar:

*Ultima Cumaevi venit iam carminis aetas;  
Magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo.  
Iam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna,  
Iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto.*

Now is come the final era of the Sibyl's song;  
A great order from the ages is born anew.  
Now Justice returns, Honored Rules return;  
Now there is a new generation sent from high heaven.

---

<sup>1</sup> On the reverse of the dollar bill, on the left and right of the word ONE, the two circles are the reverse and obverse of the Great Seal. The principal motto, on the obverse, is *E Pluribus Unum*, “One [Nation] from Many [States].” The other motto on the reverse is *Annuit Coeptis*, which is usually translated, “[Providence] Favors [Our] Undertakings.” *Seclorum* is a Latin poetic form of the word *saeculorum* (as “eterne” means eternity in English poetry). While it is related to the English word secular, it means eternity, not world. See “Wordly Wise” in the September 2020 *Epistle*.

Medieval Christians believed that Virgil, who lived in the first century BC, was prophesying the coming of Christianity in this passage. His life (70-19 BC) overlapped the reign of Augustus (27 BC-AD 14), who restored Rome's classic values and morals, and reigned over almost four decades of relative world peace (the *Pax Romana*). Medieval Christians believed that era to have been a preparation for the coming of Christ. Augustus' reign was considered a Golden Age for Rome, and Medieval Christians believed the great Latin poets of that era, especially Virgil, to have been divinely sent prophets. This is why Dante chose Virgil to be his guide through *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. This belief was no longer common during the Age of the Enlightenment (the era of our country's founding), but it still had a strong influence at that time. The Founding Fathers would have seen no conflict between Virgil's poetry and their Judeo-Christian or Enlightenment values.

Charles Thomason, the Secretary of the Continental Congress and a noted expert on Latin poetry, was instrumental in designing the Great Seal of the United States and in choosing the three mottoes. He translated *Novus Ordo Seclorum* as "A New Order of the Age." He said that he chose it to signify "the beginning of the new American Era" starting with the adoption of the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

*Richard R. Losch+*

---

## ***The Epistle is Online***

The last eight years of *The Epistle* are now online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the "Epistle" tab at the top. On a mobile device, click on the blue menu at the top right and select the "Epistle" page. You can read it online or download it as a .pdf file. This is an easy way to share articles with others.

*Richard R. Losch+*

---

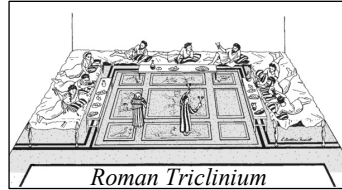
*The next time you think you have made a stupid decision,  
remember that in 1969 an NBC executive cancelled Star Trek.*

---



## *Dinner in Jesus' Time (Part II)*

The Roman dining room was called a *triclinium*, Latin for “three couch place.” There were many variations, but in the typical triclinium the tables were arranged in a Π (*pi*) shape with low couches on the outer sides. There were generally three couches on each side, making seating for nine people.<sup>1</sup> Each couch was about 6' long and 2½' wide, and was made of stone, concrete or wood. The couches were covered with cushions for the diners to recline on. In some triclinia there were no tables, but the couches were much wider to make room for the food. Sometimes there were several small tables placed in front of the couches. Slaves served the diners from inside the Π. The host reclined at the *locus summus* (highest place), which was the center couch at the middle of the Π, with the most honored guest at his left.<sup>2</sup> The couches on his left were the *locus medius* (middle place). The lowest place (*locus minus*) was the last couch on the host's right. In family dinners the women joined the men, but formal banquets were sometimes for men only. If women accompanied their men to such a banquet they usually ate separately, generally in another room.<sup>3</sup> The Greeks almost never allowed women at their dinners, the only women allowed in the dining room being entertainers or slaves. The Etruscans ate with women as equals, and the early Romans adopted that custom. Near the end of the dinner there would often be an



<sup>1</sup> The Greeks tended to put people closer together than the Romans. Couches that would normally accommodate three people in the Roman tradition would accommodate as many as five in the Greek.

<sup>2</sup> In the early Republican Era the host reclined at the far end of the right-hand side as we look at the illustration. By Jesus' time the place of honor had shifted to the center of the middle side.

<sup>3</sup> In the Georgian through the Edwardian eras in Western civilization it was customary for the ladies to withdraw to another room for tea or sherry after dinner so the men could smoke their cigars, sip their cognac and carry on conversations that they thought would be beyond women's concerns.

orator or some entertainment (e.g. musicians, dancers, acrobats, and in later times gladiators, although they did not fight to the death). These performed inside the Π.

Banquets lasted for hours, and were made up of several courses. The first course was a time for gathering and greeting, and consisted of a light wine and generally fish of some sort. This was followed by several courses of meats and delicacies. Greek banquets had fewer courses and followed a pattern more like what we do today. There was a light appetizer course, then the main meal. This was followed by what was called the *symposium*. This consisted of light food, as the symposium was primarily dedicated to conversation. In the Greek tradition this conversation was usually a philosophical discussion in which a specific topic was explored.<sup>1</sup> In the Roman tradition it was more commonly devoted to either general conversation or an orator or poet. The final course was usually again something light like fruit and cheese or a dessert, and a fine wine. At the Last Supper, it was probably at the gathering that Jesus washed the disciples' feet, at the symposium he gave his main teaching and consecrated the bread, and at the last course that he consecrated the wine (Lk. 22:19-20). Since this was either the Passover meal or the traditional meal in preparation for the Passover, it was almost certainly more like a family dinner, and not a lavish banquet such as the Romans usually gave.

Party games are not a modern idea. A popular game at a Greco-Roman dinner was *kottabos*, in which guests tried to hit a central target by flinging from their fingertips the last few drops of wine from their cups. The winner received a prize of a honey-cake or some delicacy. This game originated in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC Greece, but was still widely played in Jesus' time.

The final event at a dinner was the departure, which involved many formal ceremonial "good-nights" and much drinking. At a typical Greco-Roman banquet, which might last three to five hours or more, huge amounts of wine were con-

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Plato's *Symposium*, which takes place at a dinner and is a discussion of various forms of love.

sumed. As a final thoughtful gesture, a good host would send a slave home with each guest to see that he arrived safely.

Many people have the impression that Roman banquets were lascivious orgies. This was not so in Jesus' time (the era of Augustus and the early reign of Tiberius), although it began being so in Tiberius' later years, and was very much so by the time Nero died (AD 68). The *Satyricon* of Gaius Petronius Arbiter, generally believed to have been published during Nero's reign, describes Trimalchio's orgiastic feast. While this is a satirical work, the degeneracy depicted in it was not at all uncommon by the latter half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. After that time Roman culture stabilized a bit for the next couple of centuries.

As we mentioned above, most Jews, even the non-Hellenized ones, followed a similar pattern in their dinners. For the most part Jewish banquets were less lavish than Roman ones, and even by Nero's time had not degenerated into orgies. In one respect, also, they often were quite different. Roman dinners were private, in that no one was welcome in the dining room but the guests and slaves. In Galilee, on the other hand, dinners were often held in the courtyard of the host's house, and neighbors were allowed to stand around and watch. They were not welcome to join in any conversation, but they could listen. This was actually a touch of arrogance, in which the host could show off his bounty to the lowborn. At Jewish parties a guest might bring friends with him. While these friends did not recline at the main tables with the invited guests, they partook of the food and conversation. This often made it very difficult for a host to know how many for whom to prepare, so there was often an excess. Generous hosts gave the surplus to the poor. This is the likely reason that they ran out of wine at the wedding at Cana of Galilee. Probably more people showed up than had been expected. When Jesus was having dinner with the Pharisee, a sinful woman rushed in and washed his feet (Lk. 7:36ff). It was because such dinners were open that she was able to do so, even though that was a serious breach of protocol. That was also why the Pharisees were able to be there to rebuke Jesus when he had dinner with the tax collector Levi

bar-Alphaeus (who became Saint Matthew) (Mark 2:15ff). As Jesus' reputation spread, many people would gather to stand around and listen to his teaching when he was having dinner.

Not all Jewish dinner parties were held in courtyards. Many were held inside or on rooftops, but still followed more or less the Roman pattern. The poor usually had dinner on the flat roofs of their houses, which is where they spent most of their time when they were at home.<sup>1</sup> The Last Supper was an inside meal, however, held in a room on the second floor of a house (Mk. 14:15). We are told little more about the nature of the place, but the preparation for the meal would very likely have included laying out a triclinium-like dining arrangement.

Very early Christian worship was not held in churches (there were none until much later), but in people's homes. It was generally centered around a sacred meal called the *Agape* (a Greek word for familial love). The structure of the worship was based on the synagogue service, and that led up to a celebration of the Holy Eucharist. This was followed by the "love feast," the *Agape*, which was more or less a normal meal. In fact, since everybody brought food to it, it was rather like a modern covered dish supper. Any leftover food was taken to the poor. Most early Christian communities were very small, but they usually had at least one member who had a house that could accommodate such a service. Unlike other dinners, the *Agape* usually had no distinctions of gender or social class, and even slaves were treated as equals during it. The only requirement was to be a faithful baptized Christian. When it was over, normal status was resumed. As Christianity evolved and congregations grew, the *Agape* faded out as a regular part of the service, placing the full emphasis on the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

*Richard R. Losch+*

---

<sup>1</sup> Only the rich had comfortable houses in which they lived inside. Most houses were stuffy and cramped, and people stayed inside them only when the weather was bad (which was not often in the Palestinian climate). Most of their activities were on the flat rooftop or in an open courtyard. Nonetheless at dinner, like everyone else, most reclined rather than sitting.

## *The Queen of Sheba*

One of the mysteries of the Old Testament is the identity of the Queen of Sheba and the land she ruled. The Bible tells us that having heard of Solomon's wealth, power and wisdom, she traveled to Jerusalem to see for herself (1 Kg. 10 and 2 Chr. 9). After a series of questions she was astonished by his wisdom, saying, "Your wisdom and prosperity far surpass the report that I had heard" (1 Kg 10:7). She gave him 120 talents of gold, precious gems, and the largest amount of spices ever brought to Jerusalem (1 Kg 10:10). She remained in his court for a long time, then returned to her own land of Sheba with many priceless gifts from Solomon. Neither the Bible nor any extra-biblical source provides any real information as to where Sheba was, but ancient tradition and reasonable deduction have settled on two possible locations, in Africa and in Arabia.

One claimant is rather exotic. The Kingdom of Cush or Kush lay south of Egypt, and was part of the region known as Nubia. During the numerous ebbs and flows of the Egyptian Empire over its 4000 years, Nubian kingdoms were back and forth as independent nations or Egyptian vassals. In the early first millennium BC, Solomon's time, the Egyptian 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty was weak, controlling only Lower Egypt (the Nile Delta portion of the traditional Egyptian Empire). Cush was independent, and was essentially the portion of Nubia that is now known as Ethiopia. Nubia was rich in gold mines, and was one of the ancient world's primary sources of gold.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church holds that Sheba was ancient Ethiopia. A document revered by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church<sup>1</sup> tells of the Queen of Sheba, who is the beautiful Ethiopian Queen Makeda, who travels to Jerusalem and has a love affair with Solomon. On the return trip she bears Solomon's son Menelik, who is raised in Ethiopia. At age 22 he travels to Jerusalem to meet his father. Solomon is greatly pleased with

---

<sup>1</sup> This document is called *Kebrā Nagast* (The Glory of Kings) that is dated sometime between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Because of that late date it is of rather questionable authority.

him, and tries to convince him to remain in Jerusalem and become his successor. Menelik chooses to return to Sheba to become the king there. Solomon sends with him the firstborn sons of several of the elders of Israel, and Menelik takes the Ark of the Covenant back to Sheba. Many Ethiopians today believe that the Ark of the Covenant is in the Chapel of the Tablet next to the Church of Maryam Tsion in Aksum, Ethiopia, and that God withdrew his grace from Israel and made the Ethiopians his Chosen People.<sup>1</sup> No one is allowed to enter the heavily guarded chapel. Archaeologists and other scholars have for centuries been refused their requests to enter the chapel just to see the Ark. This of course makes one wonder what if anything is really in there. The emperors of Ethiopia (the last one being Haile Selassie, who died in 1975) bore, among their other titles, the epithet Great Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Ethiopian Orthodox Christians consider themselves to be the physical and spiritual descendants of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. They study Torah, observe the Jewish dietary laws, circumcise boys on the eighth day, and observe Saturday as the Sabbath.

The whole story of Makeda, Menelik and the Ark of the Covenant comes from a late oral tradition that was not written down (as far as we know) until at the very earliest 1500 years after Solomon's time. It is therefore to be taken with a large grain of salt. The only thing that supports Ethiopia's being the biblical Sheba is the gold. The Bible tells us that the queen gave Solomon 120 talents of gold, which would have a modern value of about \$150 million. That is a huge treasure, but with the profusion of gold mines in Nubia it is not unreasonable.

The other claimant to being Sheba actually has some ancient ties to Ethiopia. The southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, particularly the region that is now Yemen, was one of the world's primary sources of spices and fragrant resins (including frank-

---

<sup>1</sup> Another legend says that the Queen of Sheba had craftsmen sneak into the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem and make an exact copy of the Ark. She then stole the true Ark and substituted the copy so that Solomon would not realize that it had been stolen until it was too late.

incense). Not only were many of them grown there, but it was also a major trading center for spices, gems and gold. It traded regularly with the coastal cities of Gaza. In the first millennium BC it was known as the Kingdom of Saba. Not much is known about it, but it is obviously a prime candidate for being the Bible's Sheba. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, the period shortly after Solomon's time, southern Arabia had a strong influence on Ethiopia. There was a much mutual trade, as well as a wave of immigration of Arabs into that region. Some scientists believe that a significant portion of modern Ethiopians may have Arabic ancestry and would have carried on Saba's legends.

The discussion and investigation of this question will undoubtedly continue for ages, but to most scholars it seems that the likely candidate for the identity of Sheba is the Kingdom of Saba in southern Arabia.

*Richard R. Losch+*

---

## ***Bah! Humbug!***

Ebenezer Scrooge had nothing on the 17<sup>th</sup> century New England Puritans. In 1659 they banned the celebration of Christmas in Boston, under penalty of public humiliation in the stocks. They argued that it was "Popish" and there was no Biblical basis for the celebration, so they made it illegal to take the day off from work, or to have any public or private celebration of the feast. The ban was finally revoked in 1681, but it was almost 200 years, the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, before it became fashionable to celebrate Christmas in the greater Boston area.

Theodore Roosevelt, an avid conservationist, forbade Christmas trees in the White House while he was President because he said it would send the wrong message to the American people. He feared deforestation, and encouraged Americans to drop the tradition. His son Archie did not share his father's ecological enthusiasm, however. He sneaked a fully decorated tree into the White House and hid it in a closet.

*Richard R. Losch+*

---

---

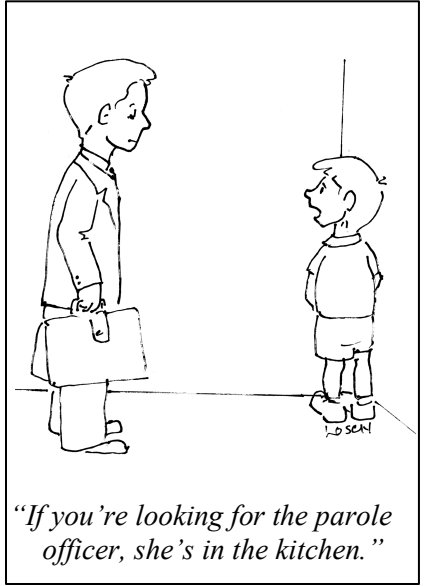
# A Touch of Trivia

“Merry Christmas” is the very first text message ever sent on a cellphone. On December 3, 1992, Neil Papworth, a 22-year-old Canadian engineer, wrote the message on a computer, since cellphones did not have keyboards at the time. He sent it over the Vodafone GSM Network to the cellphone of Richard Jarvis, the director of Vodafone. He received it on a bulky Orbit 901 cellphone, one of the first with a viewscreen.

*Richard R. Losch+*

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



Saint James' Episcopal Church  
P. O. Box 446  
Livingston, AL 35470

Non Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Livingston, AL  
Permit No. 18