

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



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This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Pompeo Batoni (1708-1787). Painted in the Roman style and completed in 1773, it is oil on canvas, measuring 4'6"x3'4". It is displayed in the *Kunsthistorischesmuseum* of Vienna, who acquired it from the artist immediately upon its completion. The painting shows the repentant prodigal being forgiven and embraced by his merciful father (Lk. 15:11ff). It was intended to emphasize God's love and forgiveness, and shows no indication of the bitter and unforgiving older brother.

Pompeo Girolamo Batoni was born in Lucca in Tuscany (northern Italy) in 1708, the son of Paolino Batoni, a noted goldsmith. As a boy he was apprenticed as a goldsmith to this father, who also taught him painting. He was far more attracted to painting than to his father's trade, and at the age of 19 he moved to Rome, where he remained for the rest of his life. There he studied for five years under Augustino Mastucci, Sebastiano Conca and Francesco Inperiali. A stroke of good fortune gained him his first commission. In 1732 a heavy storm forced him to seek shelter under a portico on the Capitoline Hill. The Count of Baccaresca had also sought shelter there, and he noticed Batoni sketching the bas reliefs in the portico. He was impressed with the sketches, and asked to see more of his work. When he saw Batoni's studio he immediately commissioned him to paint an altarpiece for his family chapel. The work quickly gained widespread admiration, leading to a number of other important commissions. Along with his religious paintings, Batoni became even more in demand for his portraits, for which he is most noted today. He was particularly popular with the many British noblemen who traveled through

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Rome, so many of his portraits reside in Great Britain today.¹ In 1769 his dual portrait of Emperor Joseph II and his brother Leopoldo (later Emperor Leopold II) earned him an Austrian noble title. His health began to fail him seriously during the last decade of his life, and he did very few paintings during that period. He died in Rome in 1787 at the age of 79. Despite his extraordinary fame and success during his lifetime, his estate was found to be insolvent. His widow was forced to appeal for public assistance in exchange for several works that were in his studio, most of which are now in the Uffizi in Florence.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

I am not a professional historian, but I have been an aficionado of ancient Roman history for many years. One thing that has long fascinated me is their political campaigns, particularly in the later years of the Republic. They make the viciousness of the 1800 Adams-Hamilton conflict or the 1828 Adams-Jackson campaign look warm and friendly. By the first century BC the people had come to expect political campaigns to involve clearly false and libelous accusations, politically instigated and financed mob violence, and even murder. The venom that drips from Cicero's writings about Marc Antony still burns today (Antony retaliated by having Cicero murdered). It shows that political nastiness is nothing new. Please do not read into this more than I say. I am not comparing modern America with ancient Rome, and those who do so have little understanding of the immense differences between the two cultures and the two political systems. I do offer the caveat, however, that we could become as bad if we are as careless about averting it as the Romans were in their earlier and more civil days.

I am writing this on Primary Election Day, and I will be going out shortly to cast my own vote. With the congressional

¹ In the 18th century every British gentleman was expected to travel in Italy as fundamental part of his education.

mid-terms and several gubernatorial elections coming up in November, we can expect to see a fervor of political campaigning in the next few months. It is going to be hard for most people to remain objective as we are inundated with posturing, promises and propaganda, but remaining objective is nonetheless the most important thing we can do. Heed the old railroad crossing warning: stop, look, and listen. And as we look, we need to look in both directions, because neither side of any political spectrum can be wholly right or wholly wrong.

As Christians, we have a further duty, and that is that we not allow ourselves to slip into anger, hatred, or a desire for political vengeance against those who disagree with us. We must pray that we maintain our own level-headedness, and also pray for the voters and for those who seek or hold public office, “that they may be led to wise decisions and right actions for the welfare and peace of the world.” Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, decide with your head and not your emotions, and then do your best and trust in God to sort it all out. He will. He may take his time to do so, but he will sort it out.

Father Rick Losch+

Be Wordly Wise

Evangelical

The word evangelical is an adjective meaning related to the Gospel, but in modern times it is often capitalized and used as a noun meaning a specific kind of Christian. When so used, it is often in a pejorative sense, meaning a literalistic, aggressive, closed-minded and usually politically conservative religious extremist. There are some people like that who call themselves Evangelicals, but that is not really a proper use of the word. It is also often associated with TV preachers, who are called televangelists. Some of these are sincere preachers, and others not so much. To use the word correctly, an evangelical Christian is one who focuses on living and sharing the teachings a Gospel that teaches love and tolerance, and allows none of the above abuses. The word derives from *Evangel*, a synonym of Gospel.

This in turn comes from the Greek *euangelion* (ευαγγελιον), good message or good news.¹ This derives from a combination of the prefix *eu-*, good, and *angelion*, message (which is the source of the word angel, a messenger of God). The Gospel (capitalized) is the Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ. A gospel (lowercase) is a written account of the story of how Christ brings that Gospel to us. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the writers of the four gospels that tell us of the Gospel, are the four Evangelists.

Richard R. Losch+

Be Still, and Know that I Am God

Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God.” We would like to remind our worshipers that it is considered Church courtesy to remain silent both before *and after* the service so that those who wish to pray or meditate may do so in peace. Please save your visiting and conversation for after you are outside. Frequently the clergy wait at the door to greet the people, and finally give up and go back to the office when only one or two come out. Some may say that no one stays to pray anyway—maybe that is because there is so much talk that it discourages their staying. We appreciate your cooperation.

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is Online

The last nine years of *The Epistle* are 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+

Is there a synonym for synonym?

¹ In Greek a double g (γγ) is pronounced and transliterated as *ng*. Thus *αγγελος*, literally *aggelos*, is actually *angelos*, angel.

Domitian's Persecution—Was It Real?

There is nothing new in political spin and misinformation devised for the purpose of sullyng an enemy politician's reputation. Over time, fake news often becomes accepted as fact. This is apparently what happened to a Roman emperor who is almost universally denounced as being the cruelest and most brutal persecutor of Christians since Nero. I refer to the last Flavian emperor, Domitianus Flavius Vespasianus, commonly known as Domitian (r. AD 81-96). The Australian historian Brian Jones, an expert on the Flavian Dynasty, has challenged the claim of the Domitianic persecution.¹

After Nero's suicide in AD 68, Vespasian, the first commoner to become emperor, ascended the throne.² The Roman Empire was bankrupt, corrupt, and on the verge of collapse. In his ten-year reign, Vespasian, who turned out to be Rome's best emperors, restored the empire's political and financial stability, as well as its self-respect and power. When he died in AD 79 his son Titus succeeded him. Titus was probably the most popular emperor since Augustus, but he died of a fever in 81,³ and his younger brother Domitian ascended the throne. Unlike Titus, Domitian was a strict and sometimes ruthless ruler, but he was also just and very competent. He ruled for fifteen years, the longest reign of any emperor since Tiberius. The aristocracy hated him, however, because he would not allow their self-indulgence and corruption to threaten the stability of the empire. In AD 96 they assassinated him.

¹ Jones, Brian, "Domitian, Nerva, and the Bias of Suetonius," *Collection Latonus*, Brussels, Jan. 1, 2002.

² There were three emperors before him, Galba, Otho and Vitellius, but they each reigned only a few months before being assassinated. The year from June 68, when Nero committed suicide, through July 69, when Vespasian came into power, is known as "the year of the four emperors."

³ His short reign may account for his popularity. He did not live long enough to make any serious enemies. Christians and Jews hated him, however, because while his father Vespasian was emperor, Titus put down the rebellion in Judea and Galilee, and destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple.

Over two hundred years later, in the early 4th century, the Christian historian Eusebius wrote a history of the Church. This was the first reference in Christian literature to a persecution by Domitian. He quotes Melito of Sardis (AD 100-180) as saying that Domitian had made “slanderous accusations” against Christians. He also cites the claim of the theologian Tertullian (c.155-c.220) that Domitian was as cruel as Nero but was much more intelligent, and soon came to his senses and recalled the Christians he had earlier exiled (Nero never exiled any, but killed all he could find). On the other hand, Eusebius cites Irenaeus (c.120-c.203), who says that Domitian’s persecution extended no further than to exile John to the Isle of Patmos and several other Christians to the Isle of Pontia. Then Eusebius, with no other known evidence than these three relatively mild accusations, states that Domitian “stirred up persecution against us.” The ship of defamation was launched, and a century later Orosius, in his *History Against the Pagans*, claimed that Domitian had ordered a vicious empire-wide persecution. There is no evidence whatever for this, yet the slander not only took hold, but over the ages became so deeply rooted that today it is almost universally accepted. In fact, there is evidence to the contrary. For example, Pliny the Younger, who had served as a court lawyer under Domitian, said in a letter to the emperor Trajan that at that time he had never been present at the trial of a Christian. Jones concludes that “no convincing evidence exists for a Domitianic persecution of the Christians.”

It is true that Christians were persecuted from their earliest days until the reign of Constantine I (r. 306-337), who banned persecution and legalized Christianity throughout the empire. Except under Valerian (r. 253-260) and Diocletian (r. 284-305), there was never an empire-wide persecution of Christians. Most persecutions were brief and under local magistrates, although especially in the early days they were frequent and brutal. Domitian was a strong and effective emperor, and does not appear to deserve the bad name he has been given.

Richard R. Losch+

Shavuoth and Pentecost

We tend to think of Pentecost as a Christian feast, but it is important that we understand that it is actually a major Jewish feast on which a critical event in Christianity occurred. After that event it became for Christians a major Christian feast that should not be confused with the Jewish feast of Pentecost.¹ The Jewish feast is *Shavuoth* (שבועות), the Feast of Weeks, that celebrates the giving of Torah, the Jewish Law, to Moses on Mount Sinai. Its origin is a bit confused, because it seems to have had two sources. According to tradition the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai seven weeks after leaving Egypt. This would be forty-nine days, but by the ancient method of counting they would have included the day that they left, making it fifty days.² The word Pentecost comes from the Greek word for fifty. The feast is celebrated fifty days after the second day of Passover.³ Although the Bible does not say so specifically, the giving of the Torah is the explanation of the origin of Shavuoth that is most commonly associated with it. The feast is also rooted in the first harvest of grain (Ex 34:22), and this is more likely its true source. The “first fruits” of any crop were always considered a special blessing from God, and were a significant part of all harvest sacrifices to him. We normally associate the harvest with autumn, but in the Palestinian climate the first gathering of grain was in the spring.

The date of Passover, like that of Easter, varies according to the time of the full moon with regard to the Vernal Equinox. Since the date of Shavuoth hinges on that of Passover, that varies as well. Likewise, the Christian Pentecost is always fifty days after Easter, whose date varies with the moon as well.

¹ Because of that, Jews today rarely call their feast Pentecost, but use the original Hebrew name, *Shavuoth*, which means “Weeks.”

² See “Three Days in the Tomb” in the June 2022 *Epistle*, p. 5.

³ The reason for its being the second day has to do with a grain sacrifice, a “wave offering,” that the Law required to be made on the second day of Passover. That was the day they actually exited the Land of Egypt.

Also, since Easter is always on a Sunday, it is not often that Easter and Passover fall on the same date, although they are always close to each other. As a result, of course, Shavuoth and the Christian Pentecost rarely fall on the same date either.

In Jesus' time, pilgrims from all over the known world descended on Jerusalem by the thousands.¹ Every spring the population of the city would double or even triple, and most of these pilgrims who had traveled enormous distanced would stay through the whole fifty days and not leave for home until after Shavuoth.² On the Shavuoth following the Resurrection of Jesus, his disciples were gathered together in a closed room in fear for their lives. He had appeared to them a number of times, and then ten days earlier he had left them when he ascended into heaven. They were confused, frightened, and unsure what to do next. Suddenly, as Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit descended on them and filled them not only with the wisdom, strength and courage to carry on, but also with a clear understanding of what Jesus had taught them over the past three years. They were imbued with the ability to clarify and develop that Faith with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is why Pentecost is usually called the Birthday of the Church. It is also why Peter, who shortly before had been as confused and frightened as all the rest, could go out and face that enormous hostile crowd and preach a sermon so powerful that thousands were converted (Acts 2:14ff). As Shavuoth celebrates the first-fruits of Judaism with the giving of the Law, so the Christian Pentecost celebrates the first-fruits of the Christian Faith with the birth of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Even today the dream of every religious Jew is to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem at least once in his life. The Seder, the Passover meal, is usually closed with, "*L'shana haba'ah b'Yerushalayim*" (לשנה הבאה בירושלים), "Next year in Jerusalem."

² Most of them had no place to stay, and camped outside the city walls on the Mount of Olives. This is where Jesus stayed with his disciples.

ST. JAMES' PARISH NOTICES

from Hiram Patrenos, Parish Administrator

Parish Directory

Copies of the updated Parish Directory are available on the table in the vestibule. If, as you are using your directory you discover an error, please give the corrected information to Hiram Patrenos by e-mail at patrenoj@bellsouth.net, or in writing. The Parish Directory will be updated again in January.

Altar Flowers

Volunteers are needed to provide Altar Flowers. A signup chart is located in the vestibule. For more information, please speak with Carolyn Patrenos.

A Touch of Trivia

Anyone who has ever visited Rome or has watched a “toga opera” on TV or in the movies is familiar with the acronym SPQR. It stands for *Senatus Populusque Romanus*, “The Roman Senate and People” Most people are unaware that the Roman Senate, unlike ours, had no legislative authority. They could not enact law—all they could do is recommend it. A Senatorial Decree was simply an announcement that they had discussed some issue, and the majority believed that it should become law. This in no way means they were powerless—they could appoint many political offices, assign military commands, control all governmental spending, and even declare war. They simply could not make laws. When they recommended a law, it was then put to the people by the Tribunes for a vote. This was far from democratic, however. Only citizens (a rather limited number of males) had a vote, and the electoral system was legally rigged to be strongly in favor of the upper classes. After the collapse of the Republic in the first century BC, however, this was only show. The emperor, even though he went through the motions of using the Senate and people, mad all the decisions and all the laws.

Richard R. Losch+

July Birthdays . . .

- 6 Madelyn Mack
- 7 Meredith Underwood Shah
- 8 Cameron Baldwin
- 13 Chris Thompson
- 14 Lindsey Moore Thompson
- 16 Carl Sudduth
- 27 Ethel Garth Scott
- 29 Mira Muñoz



. . . and Anniversaries

- 8 Charles & Linda Muñoz



August Birthdays . . .

- 8 Garland Scott
- 12 Harris Marks
- 25 Joe Moore



. . . and Anniversaries

- 27 Mitesh & Meredith Shah



**GOD BLESS
AMERICA**

Hellenic and Hellenistic

The word Hellenic and all its cognates refer to Greece, and they are most often used regarding ancient Greece. The ancient Greek name for Greece is *Hellas* (Ἑλλάς)¹, and the Greeks called themselves *Hellenes* (Ἕλληνες). In fact, there was no nation called Greece or Hellas in ancient times. It was rather a number of independent and often warring Greek-speaking city-states in the eastern Mediterranean. There were many dialects, but the language was essentially the same for all of them. The dialect that we usually associate with ancient Greek literature is Attic Greek. This was the form spoken in Attica, the capital of which was Athens. For most modern people, when we think of ancient Greece we think first of Athens and Sparta, and perhaps for Bible-readers, Corinth. Alliances and conflicts between these city-states were very fluid, although belligerence between Athens and Sparta went on for centuries. On the other hand, warring city-states would often unite against a common enemy such as Persia, and then be at each other's throats again as soon as that war was over. In time, Athens became the strongest of all the Greek states, with Sparta as her only major threat. Athens' focus was on philosophy and learning, but she also eventually controlled most of the Greek international trade because of her advantageous geographical location. This gave her hegemony over many of the other Greek states. Sparta, on the other hand, was single-mindedly focused on war and military discipline. Everything was subordinate to the military, even marriage, the family and the individual. They were probably the best warriors in history, but their culture and society left a great deal to be desired. For example, every new-born was examined to determine whether it had the potential to become a warrior or to bear warriors. If not, the baby was killed.

Macedon was a large Greek city-state in the northwest that was considered backward, uncultured and barbarian by most of the other Greek states. In the 4th century BC its king, Philip II,

¹ In modern Greek, it is more often called *Hellada* (Ἑλλάδα).

was enamored of the Attic (Athenian) culture. He determined to bring it to Macedon, while at the same time unifying his people and making them a strong military power. He brought the Athenian philosopher Aristotle to Macedon to tutor his son. The history of Macedonian expansion is well beyond the scope of this article, but suffice it to say that in an amazingly few years Philip and then his son Alexander (“the Great”) ended up conquering most of the known world, spreading the Attic language and culture all the way from Egypt to western India. Hereafter we will call then the Greek language and culture.

It may seem paradoxical, but one of the reasons that Alexander’s conquered peoples adopted the Greek language and culture so readily is that he made no attempt to force them on them. His method of governing was to let these peoples continue governing themselves in much the same way as they had been doing all along, changing things only when it was necessary to do so. In the process, he had Greeks show them better ways of doing things, and often they found the Greek way better and adopted it. The result was that the Greek culture slowly seeped into the local one, forming a new culture that was essentially the old one strongly influenced by the Greek. This process, known as Hellenization, produced a unique culture that was essentially the old one richly enriched by the Greek, known as a Hellenistic culture. This must be distinguished from a Hellenic culture, which is one that is essentially Greek.

This is not to imply that the people always accepted these changes easily. Often the leaders did, because by cooperating with Alexander they kept their power and wealth (and sometimes their lives), but the common people and usually the religious leaders (especially the priests in the hundreds of temples) did not. They were rigidly bound to their ancient traditions, and did not accept change easily. This was especially true in Egypt and Judah. In Egypt there were Egyptians and there were Greeks, and except in high places neither had much to do with the other. When Alexander established the city of Alexandria in Egypt, it was clearly a Greek city in which some Egyptians

lived. Even though it became Egypt's capital, it was so different from the rest of Egypt that the Romans often called it Alexandria beside (*iuxta*) Egypt, rather than Alexandria in (*in*) Egypt.¹

The Jews likewise resisted Hellenization, and this caused a good deal of trouble there. As elsewhere, many of the leaders adapted to it to save their wealth and power, but faithful Jews strongly rejected it. Much of Hellenistic culture was directly a violation of the Jewish Law, and the faithful would have no part of it. To make matters worse, many of the young people found the relaxed and often libertine Greek culture more attractive than the stern restrictions of the Law. For example, pork, which the Torah forbids, was a popular meat among the Greeks, and many young Jews tried it and discovered that they liked it. Also, the Greeks loved athletic contests, but they were performed in the nude, and nudity was abhorrent to the Jews. On top of that no one with an "imperfect" body was allowed to participate, as this would be offensive to the gods. Many Jewish young men wanted to participate, but the Greeks considered circumcision to be an imperfection and would not allow them to take part.² All of this caused a serious rift between the faithful traditional Jews and the "Hellenized" Jews, most of whom were of the aristocracy and were thus the leaders of Judah.

When Alexander died in Persia in 323 BC he left no heir, and had not designated a successor. Although most scholars agree that it is only legend, it is said that as he was dying his generals asked him to whom the empire should go. He said, "To whomever is strong enough to take it." This resulted in decades of warfare between his generals, with two eventually taking most of it and establishing two warring empires. The

¹ Alexander established new cities all over his empire and named most of them Alexandria, so each was known as Alexandria in [Country].

² Greek medicine, especially surgery, was far more advanced than we often imagine. Greek surgeons developed a method of skin grafting to "undo" circumcision, leaving so little scarring that it was almost undetectable. Needless to say, this was considered a blasphemous abomination by the faithful Jews, although many young men chose to undergo it.

Ptolemaic Empire, based in Alexandria, ruled Egypt and a portion of the southwestern Middle East; and the Seleucid Empire, based in Antioch (Syria), ruled the rest of the Middle East. In 63 BC the Seleucid Empire, which had been crumbling for a century, fell to Pompey the Great. The Ptolemaic Empire ended with the death of Cleopatra VII (Antony's Cleopatra) in 30 BC, when Egypt became a province of Rome.¹

Even though Rome had never been conquered by Alexander, it can also be considered Hellenistic.² The Romans were greatly enamored of Greek culture, so much so that for a brief period in the 1st century BC no self-respecting Roman could consider himself decently educated unless he was fluent in Greek with a flawless Attic accent, and could liberally quote from Homer and the Athenian philosophers.³ Many aristocrats spoke Greek in their homes, using Latin only to speak to menials and for official state occasions.

We remind you again that Hellenic means things specifically Greek, while Hellenistic means things influenced by the Greek language and culture. Western civilization is deeply rooted in the culture of ancient Rome. The Roman culture, especially during the Late Republic and the Principate, was strongly influenced by Greek culture. This influence extended into diet, clothing, art, architecture, politics, religion, and even language. In fact, scholars frequently refer to it as the Greco-Roman culture. It may not be accurate to refer to it officially as Hellenistic, but it certainly had a strong Hellenic flavor.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ It had been a vassal kingdom of Rome's, however, since the reign of Cleopatra's grandfather, Ptolemy X.

² There is little doubt that if Alexander had lived, he would eventually have set his eyes on the west.

³ Gaius Marius, Julius Caesar's uncle by marriage, grew up in Arpinum in northern Italy. He was of an aristocratic Roman family and was fluent in Greek, but he spoke it with a slight Italian accent. He was scorned by the Roman aristocracy as a "country bumpkin with no Greek." He had the last laugh, however, being elected Consul for a record seven times.

Gematria

No, Gematria is not an ancient Roman city. 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, which is the belief that there is a mystical, magical or divine connection between numbers and their relationship to people, places or 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), etc., where Α=1, Β=2, Γ=3, Δ=4, etc. It is unclear whether the numerical values were assigned 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 is interesting to note that there was no letter for zero, which was a concept that ancient mathematicians had no yet grasped.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 Gematrians 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). The Hebrew word used for Jacob's ladder is *sulam*⁴ (סלם). Its numerological value is 130.⁵ The Hebrew for Sinai (סיני) also has

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

² That is where we get the word alphabet.

³ Arabic mathematicians discovered zero and how to work with it.

⁴ In English *sulan* sounds like it might be related to *shalom*, "peace," but in Hebrew the words are spelled quite differently (שלום and סלם).

⁵ *Sanekh* (ס)=60, *lamedh* (ל)=30 and *mem* (מ)=40. Remember that there are no vowels in the ancient Hebrew alphabet.

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, denoted 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 the 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. He would have calculated his Gematria in Aramaic or Hebrew. In both, Nero Caesar is *Neron Kesar* (נרון קסר). The numerological value of that name is 666, identifying Nero, the great enemy of Christians, as the Anti-Christ, the great enemy of God.

Like both numerology and astrology, Gematria can be fun, but we should not take it too seriously. It can be entertaining, especially for people who love solving puzzles, but it can also slip easily into a "conspiracy theory" mentality.

(Redacted from the September, 2014 "Epistle.")

Richard R. Losch+

Live Long and Prosper

In September 1966 the sci-fi series *Star Trek* was first aired, launching a pop-culture phenomenon that is still strong today. There are very few people that are not familiar with the famous greeting, "Live long and prosper," that is accompanied by its equally famous hand gesture that is the Vulcan equivalent to a handshake. Many are not aware, however, that it is rooted in ancient Jewish tradition.



Leonard Nimoy played Spock, the Vulcan First Mate on the starship Enterprise. Early in the second season he was supposed to greet the Vulcan leader t'Pol. In the script this involved grasping each other's forearm at the elbow. Nimoy, who was noted for "getting into" the roles he played, said that

this would not be consistent with the Vulcans' intense dislike of physical contact. Instead, he ad-libbed with the hand gesture and the phrase, "Live long and prosper." The director loved it, the viewers loved it, and a legend was born.

Nimoy was raised an Orthodox Jew, and remained dedicated to his faith all his life. One of the most common ancient Jewish greetings is *Shalom aleikem*, (שָׁלוֹם עֲלֵיכֶם), "Peace be with you."¹ In the voluminous rabbinic commentaries known as the Midrashim, *shalom* means much more than just tranquility. It means what Saint Paul called the Peace of God which passes all understanding, and is associated with long life and prosperity. "Live long and prosper" is a valid interpretation of its meaning, and Nimoy was fully aware of that.

Shekinah (שְׁכִינָה) literally means "dwelling," as in a house or residence. In Jewish theology, however, it is used with a much more profound meaning. In the Bible it refers to the presence of God in the Tabernacle and the Temple, and it is also used to mean the dwelling of God within the faithful.² It also refers to the feminine attributes of God such as peace, nurturing, patience and love. At the conclusion of many Orthodox Jewish services, the rabbis pull their prayer shawls over their heads, extend their hands, and chant a benediction invoking the *Shekinah*. Their fingers are grouped to form the Hebrew letter *shin* (ש), the first letter of *Shekinah* and *Shalom*, thus forming what would become known as the Vulcan gesture. The *Shekinah* represents the glory of God, so the worshippers are supposed to cover their eyes. Nimoy, being a normal boy, often peeked. He saw that gesture many times as a boy, and almost instinctively used it when he ad-libbed that first Vulcan greeting.³

Richard R. Losch+

¹ This is how Jesus greeted the disciples when he appeared to them after the Resurrection (John 20:19).

² This is also an important Christian concept, and in many Christian prayers are found phrases such as "that he may dwell in us and we in him."

³ There is a delightful video clip of Leonard Nimoy explaining this. You can find it on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/DyiWkWcR86I>. (Yes, *tu.be*).

The Jewish Jesus

There is a subtle and often unrecognized anti-Semitism in many Christians that makes them very uncomfortable with the idea that Jesus really was a faithful Jew.¹ They argue that his constant challenges to the Scribes and Pharisees prove that he intended to introduce a new teaching that would overthrow and replace Judaism. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, he said, “Not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished” (Matt. 5:18).” He was a faithful Jew who lived and practiced the Law and his Jewish faith to the letter. He taught the fulfillment of Judaism, not the replacement of it. When he challenged the Pharisees he was not challenging Judaism, but their abuse of it. He was challenging the customs and traditions that they had introduced as additions to the Law, and that were nowhere mentioned in the sacred scriptures. For example, the Law forbids reaping on the Sabbath. It says nothing against plucking a few grains to eat when you are hungry, yet the Pharisees chastised Jesus for allowing his disciples to do so, accusing them of reaping (Mk 2:23ff). So it was also with his healing on the Sabbath. The Law allows work on the Sabbath to ease the suffering of an animal in pain, but the Pharisees claimed that his healing of the sick on the Sabbath was work and therefore a violation of the Law.

Jesus was not a Christian. There was no such thing until long after his death and resurrection. Even the name Christian did not exist until decades after that (Acts 11:26). Jesus was raised in a faithful Jewish household. Although it was in Galilee, the domin of the Samaritans, the region in which he and most of his disciples grew up was solidly Jewish. The gospels are clear that Mary and Joseph carefully observed the Law, as did Jesus.

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¹ The anti-Semitism is not always subtle. The late Joost de Blank, Archbishop of Cape Town, South Africa, told of a man he knew who had on his wall a classic picture of a blond, blue-eyed, Aryan Jesus. When de Blank convinced him that Jesus was a Jew, he renounced Christianity because he refused to worship a Jew. Such ignorant hatred is truly evil.

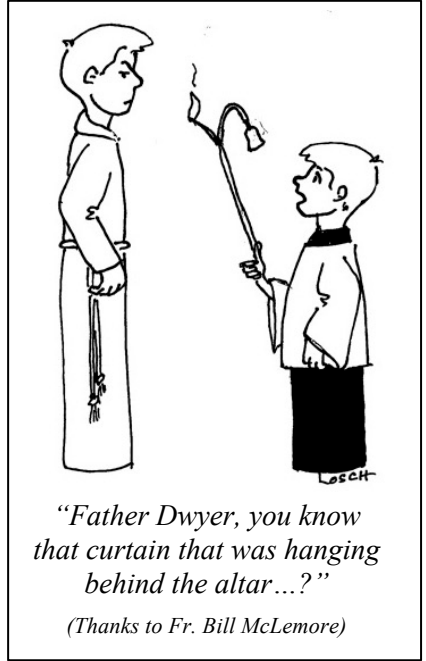
A Touch of Trivia

Among the trillions of stars in the universe, Sol, our sun, is as humdrum as a star can be. Cosmically, there is nothing special about it, yet from our point of view it is mind-boggling. Like all stars, it produces energy by fusing hydrogen atoms into helium atoms (it is essentially a super H-bomb). Every second it fuses about 600 million tons of hydrogen, converting about 4.6 million tons of matter into pure energy. It is 4.63 billion years old. This means that so far it has consumed 87 septillion (8.7×10^{25} , or 87 trillion trillion) tons of hydrogen, and it has lived a little less than half its life. The next time you feel important, don't be so sure.

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