

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

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December 2015

This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is “The Nativity” by Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556?). In the history of religious art, paintings of the birth of Jesus and its related events are more numerous by far than any other theme, including the Crucifixion and Resurrection. This is not a typical nativity painting, in that there is a crucifix (the suffering Christ) on the wall. Many nativity scenes have a cross or a symbol of it somewhere in the painting, but a crucifix is rare. Also, instead of the traditional angels in the scene, two *putti* are hovering over it, and rather than paying attention to the birth they seem to be consulting some kind of document. It probably represents the Old Testament prophecies of the birth of the Messiah. Instead of the traditional manger, Christ is lying in a woven wicker basket, reminiscent of the basket that saved Moses. The object at the base of the basket appears to be a scarab (a large beetle) on bread loaf. The scarab is an ancient symbol of rebirth, so here it would represent the Resurrection. Two doves represent both peace and the Holy Spirit, and in the background is the bucolic pastoral scene that is so common in Renaissance paintings.

Lorenzo Lotto was born in 1480 in Venice, where he received his early training. Although extremely talented, he lived at the time of the flowering of the Italian Renaissance, when the competition among great artists was fierce. Unable to compete with Titian for commissions, he chose to work outside of Venice. He is recorded in Treviso in 1503, then in the Marches, and finally in Rome about 1508. From 1513-1525 he lived in Bergamo in Tuscany, where he painted a number of altarpieces. He returned to Venice in 1526, although he was absent from there more often than he was present. In 1552 he retired to a Franciscan monastery in Loreto, where he lived as a lay oblate. He died there in 1556 or 1557.

Lotto was a prolific painter. Almost all his paintings were portraits or religious themes. He kept a diary and account book that records all his paintings from 1538 until his death.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

The 1960s was an era that is said to have opened many doors to let fresh air into our culture. To some extent this is true. Unfortunately, however, along with fresh air the opening of these doors also let in a great stink. We have been trying ever since to keep the fresh air and yet get rid of the stink. That stink is not only the sexual depravity that is pouring over us, but even more destructively the self-centeredness of the “me society.” Little did anyone realize when Frank Sinatra sang “I Did It My Way” how destructive the long-term implications of that philosophy would be.

Ever since the early 1960s there has been a discussion among Church leaders as to whether the Christian Church should be formally known as “The People of God” or “The Mystical Body of Christ.” While both terms are equally valid from a theological point of view, the difference in their implications in common usage is huge. The term People of God implies an earthly organization whose primary focus is on God. While this may be true in some limited sense, the Church is not an earthly organization. It is a mystical institution spanning all creation, which includes the people on earth. When we talk about the People of God we have to remember that this includes *all* the people of God: the Church Militant (those on earth who are combatting evil), the Church Expectant (the dead who are being prepared to enter the full glory of heaven) and the Church Triumphant (all the Saints of God who are with him in heaven). Unfortunately, the term People of God does not immediately bring this to mind for most people. It tends to bring us to put soup kitchens and good works before the overcoming of sin and disobedience. If we fail to recognize this and focus only on the Church on earth, we are ignoring the most important and vital part of the

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One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, which is to keep souls out of Hell and get them into Heaven.

On the other hand, when we use the expression The Mystical Body of Christ, we are immediately reminded that we are part of a mystical spiritual institution that includes the earthly Church, but also mystically binds us through the sacraments to Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, and to all the saved. As baptized Christians we are more than just people on earth serving a heavenly God. We are eternally bound to him and united with him through Christ's Incarnation. The difference between the phrases The People of God and The Mystical Body of Christ may be only semantic, but what each phrase immediately brings to mind is crucial to our thinking. When we focus on earthly good works it is easy to forget the danger of sin and the importance of righteousness. When we focus on salvation, the good works will follow naturally.

When we speak of the small-c church we are talking about a building or a congregation; but when we speak of the capital-C Church we are talking about something that pervades the whole of creation and has changed it for eternity. The difference between the meaning of church and Church is huge. In the same way, the difference between The People of God and The Mystical Body of Christ is not only huge, it is universal. We must never forget that we are not an association with an altar, that simply remembers and honors Christ's sacrifice; we are, as Saint Paul has told us, the Body of Christ, which eternally participates in that sacrifice every time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist. This is not to be taken lightly.

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 as well as pruning and cleaning up the shrubbery. We appreciate their hard work and generosity!

Hiram Patrenos

Annual Parish Meeting

Our Annual Parish Meeting will be held on Sunday, December 6th 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 Mary Helen Jones and Barry Green-Burns whose terms expire December 31st. Mrs. Jones and Dr. Green-Burns will not be eligible for re-election for one year.

To be eligible for nomination and election, one must:

- be an active confirmed communicant in good standing at St. James' (communicants' names are printed in bold type in the parish directory);
- be frequent and regular in worship attendance;
- support the work of St. James' by an annual pledge;
- be willing and able to attend Vestry meetings and perform the work expected of a Vestry Member. (Vestry meetings are normally scheduled on a bi-monthly basis on a weekday at 5:15 p.m. or after Sunday services. Members' schedules and obligations are taken into consideration as much as possible when meetings are scheduled.)

Other members of the Vestry are Ethel Scott and Roy Underwood, whose terms expire December 31, 2016, and Madelyn Mack and Hiram Patrenos whose terms expire December 31, 2017.

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 Christmas. 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, President, St. James' Altar Guild, Post Office Box 399, Livingston, Alabama 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 publication deadline for inclusion in the Christmas bulletin is Sunday, December 20th. Your donation is tax deductible.

Hiram Patrenos

Special Services for Advent and Christmas

On December 20th, the 4th Sunday of Advent, at 11:00 a.m. we will have as our service the “Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols” as developed and celebrated at King’s College, Cambridge annually since 1918. This service was adapted from an Order drawn up by E.W. Benson, who was later Archbishop of Canterbury.

Immediately following the Lessons and Carols Service, the Altar Guild and volunteers will decorate the church for Christmas. A light lunch will be provided for those assisting with the work. Volunteers should be sure to bring their hand clippers, gloves and wear casual clothes.

Please Note: *Our celebration of Christmas will begin on Christmas Eve with our traditional Christmas service at a new time this year - 5:30 p.m. Father Losch will be the celebrant and our nursery will be open for this service. Immediately following the service we will have our parish Christmas party in the parish house. You are asked to bring your favorite hors d’oeuvre and your favorite wine to share.*

Hiram Patrenos

Sunday School for Advent and Christmas

Sunday School for children and adults will meet each Sunday through December 13th but *will not meet* on December 20th and 27th. Sunday School will resume on Sunday, January 3rd.

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. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to St. James’. Cards may be placed in the alms basins or mailed to T. Raiford Noland, Treasurer, St. James’ Church, Post Office Box 446, Livingston, Alabama 35470. Please return your card no later than Sunday, December 6th.

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 con-

tributions, we were able to contribute \$750.00 and we hope to be able to make an even more generous gift this year. 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 is Sunday, December 6th.

Hiram Patrenos

Be Wordly Wise

Repetitious and Redundant

A number of English expressions are repetitious, in that a word or syllable in them is redundant. A couple of phrases that come to mind immediately are shrimp scampi and sugar candy (an expression used more commonly in the South).

The Italian word for shrimp is *gamberetti*, but large shrimp or prawns are *scampi*. Thus if you order jumbo shrimp scampi you are ordering large shrimp large shrimp.

The phrase sugar candy comes from the Old French *sucre candi*. *Sucre*, sugar, derives from the Medieval Latin *succar*, sweet. This in turn came from the Latin *succarum*, which is akin to the Arabic *suggar*. The Arabs probably got the word from the Romans, as the Romans had considerable trade with the Arabs. The Latin word derives from the Sanskrit *sakara*, sweet. The Arabic *qand* means crystallized sugar, and *qandi* means made with sugar or sugared. Sugar candy, then, is sugar made with sugar, sugared sugar, or candied sugar.

Individual words can also contain redundant syllables, although most of these words are considered incorrect to start with. One that is common today is *irregardless*. *Regardless* means without regard, and the prefix *ir-* negates the word. Thus *irregardless* means not without regard, or therefore with regard. This is akin to "I could care less," which really means "I care." The correct expression is "I couldn't care less," which means that I care so little that I could not care less.

Repetitious comes from repeat, which derives from the

Latin *re-*, again, and *petere*, to seek. To repeat, then, is to seek again. Redundant derives from the Latin *redundare*, to overflow. This in turn comes from *re-*, again, and *undare*, to surge or to flow in waves. Many of our expressions, especially our idiomatic ones, often drown us in redundancy.

Richard R. Losch+

The Borders of the Promised Land

The Bible tells us, “The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, ‘Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever’” (Gen. 13:14-15). Linguists describe Hebrew as a very “physical” language—a huge amount of its syntax, phrases and vocabulary is tied directly to the land or to human activity. This passage in Hebrew clearly defines the boundaries of the ancient land promised to Abram.¹ Adding *-ah* (ה-) to a Hebrew word means “in the direction of,” as we add *-ward* (as in eastward or skyward). Abram, standing on the mountain, could see great distances in all directions. He looked north (*tzafonah*, צפונה), south (*negvah*, נגבה), east (*kedmah*, קדמה) and west (*yamah*, טמה). Abram looked north, *tzafona*, to the Zaphon Mountain in southern Syria, which was the ancient northern border of Israel; he looked south, *negvah*, to the Negev desert, the southern border; he looked east, *kedmah*, to the legendary garden (*kedem*) that was east of Eden (Gen. 2:8); and he looked west, *yamah*, to the sea (*yam*). Those four points identified the borders of ancient Israel, and to some extent those of modern Israeli borders. To this day, 3500 years later, the Hebrew words for north, south, east and west, wherever they may actually point to on the planet, still refer to those four ancient geographical locations in Palestine.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Abram’s name was not changed to Abraham until Sarai (afterwards Sarah) conceived Isaac (Gen. 17:5ff.).

The Subtle Meanings of Words

One of the reasons I love language so much is that many words have subtle shades of meaning that often cast a whole new light on the meaning of the sentence in which they are used. Sometimes the implications of the word are not in the word itself, but are generated by the way the writer uses it. Hebrew scholars have been aware this for millennia in their study of the Bible, recognizing that the original writers chose their words very carefully, sometimes even with regard to the shape of the letters that spell them. A perfect example of this is found in the opening word of the Book of Genesis.

In most translations of the Bible the books are named according to their content or author. For example, Genesis means Creation, Exodus means Leaving, and Leviticus means Of the Levites (the lawgiving tribe of priests). In the Tanakh¹ (the Hebrew Bible), however, the books are identified by their first word. The first word of what we call Genesis is *Bareshith* (בראשית), which means Beginning, and is usually translated “In the beginning.” In the Tanakh, then, the name of the first book of the Bible is *Bareshith*.

This word *Bareshith*, although usually translated “In the beginning,” means more than just that. It implies not only the starting of an event or activity, but also that this event or activity continues after it is started—it is not a once-and-for-all event, but something that is brought into being and then is ongoing. God brought creation into being, and has been working with it ever since.

For centuries Jewish scholars have maintained that it is significant that the Bible begins with the letter *B* (ב, *beth*). It is the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, not the first, signifying that while we can know much about the creation, we cannot fully grasp the true beginning, which is the mind of

¹ The word Tanakh (תנ"ך) is an acronym made up of the first letters of *Tora* (תורה, Teaching), *Nevi'im* (נביאים, Prophets) and *Khetuvim* (כתובים, Writings).

God. To start with the first letter, *A* (א, *alef*),¹ would signify that we can know everything there is to know from its first cause, and that is not so.² The ancient rabbis argue very plausibly that this particular word, *Bareshith*, was intentionally and carefully chosen and was not a mere casual selection.

Jesus said, “I am the *Alpha* and the *Omega* [the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet], the beginning and the end.” He actually spoke Aramaic and would have used the Aramaic (Hebrew) alphabet, not the Greek. He would have said, “I Am the *Alef* and the *Tav* [the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet].” Using the phrase “I Am” (Ex. 3:14, Jn. 8:58) and using the letter *Alef* instead of *Beth* would have been immediately spotted by the scholars among his listeners as a declaration of his divinity.

Another aspect of starting with the letter *B* is based on the shape of the letter itself. Remembering that Hebrew is written from right to left, the letter *beth* (ב) is closed on the right and open facing to the left. The rabbis point out that from creation forward (looking to the left) everything is open to us, but what goes before it is closed and cannot be known. Also, according to many rabbis since the early Middle Ages, the fact that the *beth* is open on one side signifies that while creation had a beginning, it is open-ended—it is an on-going activity of God. Whether or not this was intentional,³ it opens up a great opportunity for meditation on creation, God’s role in it,

¹ The Hebrew alphabet has no vowels. *Alef* is not actually a vowel, but a silent letter that indicates that a vowel would follow it.

² For all our scientific acuity, we have no idea what happened before the Big Bang. It is interesting to note that the very words Big Bang begin with a *B*. Coincidence? Perhaps.

³ The rigidly orthodox believe that God dictated every word of the Tanakh to the various scribes who wrote it down, and that he carefully chose each and every word that he used. Many Christians also believe this, although most scholars today believe that the Bible was inspired by God but not dictated literally, and they reject the Divine Dictation theory.

and our relationship to creation and to God.

From very early on, rabbis also discussed the second word of Genesis, *bara* (בָּרָא), which is usually translated “created.” Written Hebrew has no vowels, and it was not until the 8th century AD that dots and small marks were inserted to indicate the vowels.¹ The selection of vowels was based on the oral tradition of the reading of the Scriptures. At that time and still to this day some rabbis argue that the word should not be *bara*, “created,” but *boro*, “was creating.”² This emphasizes that creation is an ongoing event, not a one-time activity.³

One of the joys for Jewish biblical scholars is the detailed analysis of the Bible, which often even involves long discussions about the meaning and implications of a single word. This has gone on for millennia, and has resulted in a wealth of insights into biblical passages. To be of any value, of course, such study must be of the Bible in its original language, which for the Old Testament is Hebrew.⁴ While this analysis is a peculiarly rabbinic discipline, Christianity has been inestimably enriched by the intellectual wealth it has produced.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ This is vowel pointing is called *Niqqud*. It was developed by a group of rabbis in the city of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee in the 8th century, so it is also known as Tiberian vowel pointing.

² It is usually written בָּרָא, although some say it should be בְּרָא.

³ This is consistent with Christian theology, which teaches that creation is a continuing event. For example, there is new creation every time a baby is conceived, a seed germinates or a cell divides.

⁴ Except for the books of Daniel and Ezra and a few other passages in the Old Testament, which were written in Aramaic. This is a Syrian language that is very similar to Hebrew and is written with the Hebrew alphabet. It was the common language of the Jews after the return from the Babylonian Exile, and was the language Jesus spoke. In modern Israel Hebrew, not Aramaic, is spoken. There are a few places in the Middle East where Aramaic is still spoken, but ISIS is trying to wipe them out.

The Location of the Temple

One of the most disputed spots in Palestine is the Temple Mount, on which currently stands the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque (often incorrectly called the Mosque of Omar). This is also where Solomon's, Zerubbabel's and Herod's temples stood. There is absolutely no question that Zerubbabel rebuilt on the ruins of Solomon's temple, and Herod replaced Zerubbabel's temple in the same spot.¹ The only question is exactly where that spot was.

The Temple Mount has been a hotspot ever since East Jerusalem fell under Israeli control in 1967. While Israel controls the city, they agreed to allow the Temple Mount to remain in Muslim hands. This was a peace move, because to try to control it would mean controlling the third most sacred spot in Islam (Mecca and Medina in Arabia being the first two).² Any attempt to take control of it would unquestionably trigger a Middle Eastern war with Israel. As recently as this fall Israel has reaffirmed that it has no intention of seizing control of the Temple Mount, even though Palestinian propaganda has claimed such an intent and has used it to incite riots and terrorist acts in Jerusalem. Jews are not allowed to enter the mosque, and at times have not even been allowed onto the plaza that surrounds it. Even when they are allowed to go into the plaza they are not allowed to pray there, and are subject to arrest if they are found doing so. There is a wealth of archaeological material under the Mount, and there are many entrances to the tunnels under it that do not even require going onto the plaza. Notwithstanding, the Muslim authorities for-

¹ Most historians consider Zerubbabel's temple to have been a restoration of the ruins of Solomon's, not a replacement. Herod's temple, on the other hand, was built by tearing down the old temple and replacing it with a new and grander one. Thus the era of Solomon's and Zerubbabel's temples is known as the First Temple Era (c. 960-20 BC), and Herod's as the Second Temple Era (20 BC-70 AD).

² It is the most sacred spot to Jews and Christians, because it is the spot where the Temple stood, and where Jesus was tried by the Sanhedrin.

bid any archaeological research there, and have even excavated some areas and destroyed the relics that were found. The common accusation is that they do not want anything found that could justify the Jews' claim that they were there first. It is believed that the Ark of the Covenant was hidden in the complex network of tunnels that lies under the Temple Mount either when the Assyrians attacked in 740 BC or when the Babylonians attacked in 587. Many believe it is still there. The last thing the Muslims want is the discovery of the Ark, because it would validate Jewish history.

On October 8, 2015 an article by Rick Gladstone in the *New York Times* ignited a firestorm of criticism. He wrote that it has never been “definitively” answered whether the temples ever actually stood on the Temple Mount. Many Muslim sympathizers jumped on this, claiming that the Jews therefore had no claim to the Mount, and should continue to be excluded from it. With the exception of a tiny number who “have a dog in the fight,” however, scholars universally agree that Solomon's, Zerubbabel's and Herod's temples stood on the Temple Mount, the only point of contention being as to exactly where.¹ Even with this minor disagreement, the vast majority agrees that in all three temples the Holy of Holies, the most sacred part of the temple, stood on the sacred rock over which the Dome of the Rock now stands. Many believe that this was the spot where Abraham bound Isaac for sacrifice,² and most believe that it was Araunah's threshing floor that David bought as a place to build the temple. He was not

¹ On October 9 the *Times* printed a retraction, stating that the only question is where on the Temple Mount the three temples stood. Unfortunately the damage was done, and the screaming continues. Gladstone's attempt at political correctness has done untold damage.

² Islam teaches that it was Ishmael, not Isaac, whom Abraham bound for sacrifice. Muslims also believe that while Muhammad never visited Jerusalem, in a vision called the “Night Journey” he was miraculously taken there. From the sacred rock he rode into heaven where he met and conversed personally with Allah, and was then returned to Mecca that night.

allowed to build it because he was a man of war, but his son Solomon built it on that spot 40 years later. Nebuchadrezzar destroyed it in 587 BC, and Zerubbabel rebuilt it soon after the Jews returned from their exile in Babylonia in 538 BC. Herod tore it down and built his temple in its place starting in about 20 BC. He greatly expanded the area, and supported the expansion with a massive retaining wall, the largest portion of which was on the west side. This formed a huge plaza surrounding the temple, which is essentially the same plaza that now surrounds the al-Aqsa Mosque. When the Romans razed the temple in 70 AD, about all that survived was the plaza itself and the retaining wall. That is known today as the Western Wall, commonly called the Wailing Wall, where Jews have gone to pray for the past two thousand years.¹

In the recent Palestinian uprisings, a great deal of the terrorist activity has taken place around the Temple Mount. Many Palestinian leaders are agitating for a total expulsion of Jews from the Mount, including the Western Wall. This will not be allowed to happen, but the attempt could lead to a rapid escalation in the violence. There is also danger from a small cult of Jewish extremists who want to destroy the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock and rebuilt the temple on that spot. This is also supported by a handful of Christian extremists. Most Jews and Christians, however, condemn the idea. It is frightening to think of the repercussions if there should be any attempt to damage that beautiful ancient monument. There is great fear that if Iran or Syria should bomb Jerusalem and accidentally damage the mosque, Israel will be blamed, and it would ignite a war in the Middle East that could be one of the bloodiest in history.

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee” (Psalm 122:6).

Richard R. Losch+

¹ It is called the Wailing Wall because the mode of singing prayers by many Orthodox Jews sounds like wailing to unfamiliar ears. Also, many Jews ceremonially weep there for the destruction of the temple.

Why All the Hebrew and Greek?

I have been asked why I show the original when I refer to words in Hebrew and Greek. It is because several of our readers know these languages. If you do, seeing the original helps, and if not it does no harm to have it there. In many cases words look the same in translation, but especially in Hebrew are different in the original. For example, Abraham's brother, Lot's father, was Haran (הרן). Abraham and Lot left Ur and went to live in the city of Haran (חרן). That tiny difference in the first letter¹ makes the two words quite different, and in some cases can give words a completely different meaning.

Richard R. Losch+

Is It Wrong to Use Xmas for Christmas?

Many people get upset over the use of the expression Xmas because they consider it to be irreverent. In fact, it is nothing more than a shorthand form of Christmas. It is not an abbreviation, because an abbreviation is made up selected letters of the whole word, followed by a period, such as Blvd. for Boulevard. Neither is it an acronym, which is a word made up of the initials of a longer phrase, such as NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration). The X in Xmas is not the Roman letter *ex* (X). It is actually the Greek letter *chi* (X, ch), which is the first letter of Christ in Greek (*Christos*, Χριστός). In ancient times paper was very expensive, and Greek writers used many shorthand terms to save space. They usually consisted of two capital letters with a line over them to indicate that they were a shorthand symbol. A very common one was \overline{XP} , the Greek letters *chi* (ch) and *rho* (r), the first two letters of *Christos*. When I was taking notes in seminary I usually wrote \overline{X} for Christ. Writing Xmas is not technically incorrect, although it is better to avoid it because so many people dislike it. It is incorrect, however, to read it as “X-mas” (*ex-mas*). It should be pronounced “Christmas.”

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Hebrew is written from right to left, so the first letter is on the right.

A Touch of Trivia

Henry Winkler played the classic 1950s greaser The Fonz (Arthur Fonzarelli) in the smash 1974 TV show *Happy Days*. The series ran for 10 years. Thirty years later Winkler is still remembered most of all for that character. In 1970 he had turned down the leading role of Danny in the hit musical *Grease*. His reason? He didn't want to be typecast as a 1950s greaser.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



“Yes, you must give your report card to your parents, and no, you may not petition the Church for sanctuary.”



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