

Volume XXI, Number 11

December 2014



December 2014

This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is a panel from an altarpiece painted by Master Francke in 1424. It is oil on a wood panel, measuring 35x39". It was originally painted for the Thomas à Becket Altar in Canterbury Cathedral in England, although it now hangs in the Kunsthalle in Hamburg, Germany.

This is an unusual portrayal of the Nativity, in that the infant Jesus is being tended by angels rather than by the Blessed Virgin, who in this painting is simply looking on adoringly. This is clearly a symbol of the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, as the rays emanating from the Holy Infant are reminiscent of those of a Monstrance, which is a holy vessel that holds the Blessed Sacrament for adoration. The banner is the medieval way of showing a "speech bubble." It says, "Dominus meus et Deus meus," "My Lord and my God," which are the words spoken by St. Thomas (the doubter) when Jesus showed him his wounds. Worshipers traditionally speak these words when the Host is elevated at the Consecration in the Mass.

The panel is more symbolic than graphically representative of the Nativity. We see only the heads of the animals at the manger. People knew in those days that the stable would have been a cave rather than a shed, and the rocks in the near background represent this. Behind them we see a bucolic pastoral scene with the shepherds tending their flocks on the right. Behind that is a field of red ground studded with gold stars. This is a device originated by the Master of Trebon,

and was used by many artists of the time to represent a peaceful state. Here it represents the approach to heaven, whence God sheds his blessing on the event. In the foreground is unwelcoming, barren sandy ground, representing the harsh unwelcoming world into which Jesus was born.

Little is known of many of the medieval masters, among whom is Master Francke. He was a North German Gothic painter and a Dominican friar. He is also known as Frater ("Brother") Francke. His first name is unknown, but we do know that he was born about 1380 in either the Lower Rhine region or in Zutphen in the Netherlands. One document refers to him as Fratre Francone Zutphanico ("Brother Frank of Zutphan"). His style indicates that he was trained as an illuminator and painter in northern France or the Netherlands. He later worked in Münster, but by 1424 at the latest he had joined St. John's Priory in Hamburg. He died about 1440, probably in Hamburg, where he was living at the end of his known career.

Little of his work survives, of which the finest are two altarpieces. One is the altarpiece at Canterbury, of which only a part survives, now displayed in Hamburg. The other is the Santa Barbara altarpiece, which was originally painted for the Cathedral of Santa Barbara in Kalenti, Finland, and now is in the Helsinki art museum.

Francke was almost entirely forgotten after his death until the end of the 19th century, when he was rediscovered and newly appreciated.

A Word from the Editor

(Reprinted from the September, 2014 Epistle)

Although the term propaganda is usually used with the implication of promoting false information, in fact it simply means the propagation of ideas and values. This is not necessarily bad. Josef Goebbels, Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, often repeated the axiom that if you say anything frequently enough and forcefully enough, people will come to believe it even when it is patently false. If this is correct, as most experts say it is, then couldn't we say the same thing about propagating the truth? We're all familiar with the old gospel hymn "I Love to Tell the Story." This is essentially what preaching the gospel is all about telling the story over and over again. The abysmal ignorance that is so common in young people today is the result of our failure to tell the story and not only the story of Jesus, but also the stories of our history, our politics, our roots and our values.

Today there is a plethora of special-interest lobbies—women's lib, abortion/pro-life, gay rights, progun/anti-gun, ethno-racial interests, and so on and on. These all shout out their messages "loud and clear," and they have gained support that far outweighs the actual number of people directly involved in these interests. While many on the other sides whine about the strength of these movements, their voices are often not heard. We hear both sides of the prolife/pro-abortion debate because both sides are equally vocal. On the other hand, in Canada and several European

countries a preacher can be imprisoned for a hate crime if he preaches that sodomy is sinful (a similar bill failed in Congress by only a narrow margin a couple of years ago), yet practicing sodomites represent only a tiny portion of the population.

We are failing to tell the story. That story is not always popular, and when we tell it we are often accused of being exclusionary, judgmental, demanding and "not nice." Well, the Faith once and for all time deposited with the Apostles is often exclusionary, judgmental, demanding and not nice. It is Good News, but to obtain the benefit of that good news we must conform to it, and that is often uncomfortable and even painful. Remember when you ask, "What would Jesus do?" that turning over tables and whipping moneychangers out of the temple is not outside the realm of possibilities. That is why the gospel is so often hated. The truth is hateful to those who hate the truth.

Tell the story over and over again, not just with your voice, but more importantly, in the way you live. When people don't like the truth, just keep saying it anyway. When people don't seem to be listening, just keep saying it anyway. It may make you unpopular and may even hurt you, but just keep saying it anyway. Most of the saints were not particularly popular, either—but they are in heaven, and because of them lot of other people are also saints. Tell the story.

Father Rick Losch+

Be Wordly Wise Fanatic

We hear this word frequently these days, usually in the negative context of Islamic extremism or of cults like the Westboro Baptist Church. It can be used as either a noun or an adjective, applied to one who is filled with excessive and closed-minded passion.

The word's original root is the Latin fanum, "temple." Ancient Rome was filled with cults of various gods, and they vied with the public baths as the social centers for most of the people. On a regular basis the worshipers of a particular god would meet in their god's temple for a sacrifice and ritual communal meal. Sometimes they would work themselves into a frenzy, and in that state they believed that they were in a religious trance inspired by the god. They were said to be fanaticus, "templed," meaning "filled with a prophetic spirit." In the late 17th century a group of Huguenots (French Protestants) known as Camisards revolted in response to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The French called them fanatiques, religious zealots, a Francicization of the Latin fanatici. The word quickly came into English colored by the French use, but with the broader meaning of anyone with extreme views on any matter. Our word "fan" (as in "admirer") derives from this.

The word also came into Spanish very early as *fanático*, but with the softer meaning of "fan," as in *fanático futbol*, "football (soccer) fan.".

Richard R. Losch+

Enjoying Advent

It may seem unusual to think of enjoying a penitential season, but that is exactly what penitential seasons are for. Through penitence we strengthen our relationship to God and his Church, and this automatically brings us joy. While joy and having fun go hand in hand, they are not the same thing. Having fun means finding pleasure in something, but if that pleasure does not bring us joy then it is fleeting and can be ultimately destructive. The purpose of penitence is not to examine ourselves to find out how terrible we are. Rather, it is to discover how we can improve ourselves through God's forgiveness and his gifts of strength and wisdom.

Despite being a penitential season, Advent can be a season of great fun. There is a host of wonderful ancient traditions, many of which have unfortunately become corrupted into an early observance of Christmas, thus diluting the significance of both seasons. The preparations of the Advent wreath and of the manger scene are wonderful Advent teaching tools for children. The Feasts of St. Nicholas and St. Lucy, the patron saints of school children, have been smothered and sentimentalized by their secular avatar, Santa Claus.

The observance of Advent as a spiritual and physical preparation for Christmas rather than as a simple advance celebration of the season can not only be a lot of fun, but also will enhance the joy of Advent as well as of Christmas.

Evening Prayer and Parish Christmas Party

December's Evening Prayer will be on Wednesday, December 17th, at 6:00 p.m. A Parish Christmas Party will follow at the home of Ernest and Rosalie Dew on Highway 28 East. You are asked to bring your favorite hors d'oeuvre and beverage. For more details, please speak with Hiram Patrenos.

Hiram Patrenos

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 pansies and new azaleas in the prayer garden as well as pruning and cleaning up the shrubbery. We appreciate their hard work and generosity!

Hiram Patrenos

Every Member Canvass

We have begun our annual Every Member Canvass. Pledge cards have been mailed to all members and 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, P.O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470. Please return your card no later than Sunday, December 7th.

Hiram Patrenos

Annual Parish Meeting

Our Annual Parish Meeting will be held on Sunday, December 7th, 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 Joe Moore and Rosalie Dew, whose terms expire December 31st. Mr. Moore and Mrs. Dew will not be eligible for re-election to the Vestry for one year.

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);
- be frequent and regular in worship attendance;
- support the work of St. James' by an annual pledge to the operating budget;
- 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 Mary Helen Jones and Barry Green-Burns, whose terms expire on December 31, 2015, and Ethel Scott and Roy Underwood whose terms expire on December 31, 2016.

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 forenvelopes 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, 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 donation of \$40.00 for memorials. The publication deadline for inclusion in the Christmas bulletin is Sunday, December 21st. Your donation is tax deductible.

Hiram Patrenos

Special Services for Advent and Christmas

On December 21st, 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 at King's College, Cambridge and celebrated there annually since 1918. This service was adapted from an order drawn up by E. W. Benson, who was later the 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 and gloves, and wear casual clothes.

Our celebration of Christmas will begin on Christmas Eve with our traditional "Midnight Mass" at 11:00 p.m. Fr. Hatchett will officiate. Our Nursery will be open for this service.

Hiram Patrenos

Sunday School

Sunday School for children and adults will meet each Sunday through December 21st but will not meet on December 28th. Sunday School will resume on Sunday, January 4th.

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 \$750, 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. 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 7th.

Hiram Patrenos

Offering

When we think of an offering in an ecclesiastical sense, the first thing that comes to mind is tithing or putting money in the collection plate. The proper term for this is offertory rather than offering, and it consists of a great deal more than simply the giving of money. In the Holy Eucharist, the offertory is the preparation of the bread and wine to be consecrated as the Body and Blood of Christ. It is at this time that the collection of money is also taken up. This collection, however, represents far more than digging into people's pockets in order to get money to support the Church.

In the early days of the Church the people would bring bread and wine with them to the Mass. This was collected at the offertory to be used for the Sacrament.¹ What was left over was used as a meal called a love feast. It was something of a potluck lunch known as the *Agape*, which is a Greek word for love. All the food that was left over after the *Agape* was then taken out and distributed to the poor.

As the Church grew in size this became impractical, and the offertory became gifts of money. The round wafers used today symbolize coins. Money is a token of labor, so in effect the people offer themselves—their labor—in the form of money. They then receive it back in the shape of a coin, blessed and consecrated as the Body and Blood of Christ. They give

of themselves and through Christ are united with him in the Blessed Sacrament. This is the meaning of the word "communion"—the union together.

The very meaning of "offering" is enriched if we consider the Hebrew word for it, *qurban* (קורבן). Its root is q-r-b (קרב). There are many Hebrew words with the same root, and if we explore them we can discover some fascinating shades of meaning that we might otherwise never notice. The Hebrew word for "to offer sacrifice" is lehaqrib (להקרב), while "to draw near" is *lehitqereb* (להתקרב). In speaking of family connections, the phrase that we translate "relative" or "kinsperson" is *qrob mishpachah* (קרוב– משפחה), implying one who is drawn near to us. In modern Hebrew, the word for "telescope" (a device that draws something far away nearer to us) is maqrebet (מקרבת).

When we make an offering, then, we are drawn nearer to the object of our offering—in the case of the Eucharist, to Christ. When Jesus offered himself to the Father for us on the cross he drew his humanity—and thus us—nearer to God.² When we make an offering, then, we are drawing ourselves nearer to God. We need to remember that, and not consider it to be simply our support of the Church in the way that our country club dues support the club. "Bring offerings, and come into His courts" (Ps. 96:8).

¹ In some churches today lay people bring the bread and wine up from the congregation, symbolizing the ancient practice of having the members of the congregation supply them.

² Remember the old hymn "Nearer my God to thee, nearer to thee, / E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me."

Roman-Judean Friendship

The Hasmonean Dynasty in Judea was established by the revolt of Judas Maccabeus¹ in the second century BC, when the Maccabees overthrew the Seleucid (Syrian) oppressors and regained Jewish independence for the first time since the fall of Judah to the Babylonians in 584 BC. Jews still celebrate this annually in the festival of Hanukkah. Several ancient historians, including Flavius Josephus, refer to a "friendship" between Rome and Judea after the Maccabean revolt. In ancient parlance, "friendship" between nations clearly implies diplomatic ties if not outright treaties.

At the time of Judas, Rome was still a republic. It controlled most of Italy, but had not yet begun its expansion into a massive empire.² The Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires were political descendants of Alexander the Great's empire, with the Seleucids controlling most of the Middle East and the Ptolemies controlling North Africa and the Baltic regions.³ Both were aggressive empires looking to expand. While Alexander had never

moved to the west to capture Rome, the Romans knew that his descendant empires were always a threat. There is no hard evidence that the Romans directly assisted the Maccabees in their revolt, but there is no question that they were delighted by it and probably encouraged it. Several passages in the Books of the Maccabees in the Apocrypha indicate that there was a friendship between Rome and the Hasmoneans. Unfortunately, this friendship may have brought about the fall of Judea into Roman control.

In 69 BC the Hasmonean queen Salome Alexandra died, leaving the brothers John Hyrcanus II and Judas Aristobulus II as rival claimants to the throne. To make a long and very complicated story short, in 63 BC they appealed to Pompey the Great to decide who should rule. Pompey had recently defeated the rest of the Seleucid Empire, securing it for Rome. He set up Aristobulus as a puppet king, but because of his ambitious and stupid moves, Pompey deposed him and put Rome in full charge of Judea. Eventually Marc Antony appointed Herod the Great to be the king.

There is a legend that there was a bronze tablet in the temple of Mars Ultor in Rome that honored the Roman-Judean relationship. The temple served as the foreign office of Rome, the equivalent of a State Department. This tablet later hung in the Church of San Basilio, which was built on the ruins of the temple after Rome became a Christian empire in the 4th century AD. Classical Roman inscrip-

¹ The Hasmonean Dynasty was so called because Judas Maccabeus and his brothers were of the house of Mattathias bar-Hasmon, who first started the revolt.

² By the end of the second century BC the republic was beginning to crumble. A century of dictatorships and civil wars would collapse it into a monarchy with the accession of the first emperor, Octavian Augustus.

³ Ptolemaic Egypt did not become part of the Roman Empire until after the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra.

tions were frequently used as decoration in mediaeval Christian churches. The fact that it was bronze instead of stone lends it a particular significance. Allegedly the tablet made several highly complimentary references to Judas Maccabaeus. He was also highly regarded by Christians in the Middle Ages, which is why the tablet would have been displayed in the church. Throughout the Middle Ages historians took this tablet as proof of a friendly relationship between Rome and the Hasmoneans. Unfortunately the bronze tablet has disappeared, and for centuries most historians believed that it was simply a myth that had arisen from a stone inscription. Recent research, however, has all but proved that the tablet did indeed exist. Although the tablet itself has not been found, the Israeli historian Dr. Linda Zollschan has presented arguments for its existence that are so compelling that they have turned the world of classic historical research down. Now most accept its existence and believe that it confirms the scriptural claims of an alliance between Rome and the Hasmoneans.

Richard R. Losch+

"It has been said, 'Time heals all wounds.' I do not agree. The wound remains. In time the mind, protecting its sanity, covers it with scar tissue and the pain lessens. But it is never gone."

Rose Kennedy

We are not meant to change God's message. God's message is meant to change us.

The House of David

For decades scholars have debated over whether David really existed or was a purely legendary "King Arthur" figure loosely based on one or more historical characters. Although there are countless non-biblical documents that refer to his descendants, until recently there were none that mentioned the name of David himself. About 20 years ago, however, a stela¹ was found in northern Israel at Tel Dan.² It was an Assyrian inscription dated about 830 BC, about 150 years after the reign of David. It boasts of the defeat of Israel and Judah by King Hazael of Aram-Damascus (Syria) (2 Kg. 12-13). In the inscription Hazael claims to have killed both Jehoram, King of Israel, and Ahaziahu, King of "the House of David." This is obviously Ahaziah, King of Judah, and it clearly authenticates the Bible's account of the story. It also authenticates the Bible's claim that the kings of Judah were direct descendants of David, thus verifying that there was such a person as David.

If you happen to be traveling to New York in the near future, the stela is on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the exhibit *From Assyria to Iberia: The Dawn of the Classical Era*. The exhibit will be there through January 4, 2015.

¹ A stela is an upright stone bearing an inscription, usually of a religious or historical nature.

² In ancient Israel Dan was the northernmost city. Beer-Sheba was the southernmost, thus the expression "from Dan to Beer-Sheba" meant the entire reach of the realm.

Sacrifice and Forgiveness

Christianity is by no means the only religion that teaches forgiveness, but it is unique in that it is the only one that offers it as a sacrament. Forgiveness of sin is one of the primary foundation stones of Christianity. It was for that reason that Christ took humanity upon himself and came into the world, and for that reason that he gave us the Holy Eucharist ("This is my Blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins").

Islam teaches that Allah is merciful, but there is no formal ritual for being absolved of sin. Muslims simply rely on Allah's being aware of their repentance and thus being merciful and compassionate.

Judaism also has no formal rite of absolution, although the Hebrew Scriptures, especially the Prophets and the Psalms, are rife with assurances that God is merciful and will forgive the sins of those who repent. There are several rituals associated with this, the most important being the annual solemn Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), which follows the celebration of the New Year (Rosh Hashanah). There is also the Jubilee (Jobel, יובל) that takes place every forty-nine or fifty years. On the Jubilee, slaves are to be freed, all debts are forgiven, and people are required to forgive all who have offended them. The assurance is given that God will forgive the sins of all the faithful who observe this law.²

The Holy Eucharist is the most important of all the gifts that Jesus gave his Church. Why then did he wait until the very end, the evening before his death, to give it? It appears to me that everything else that Jesus did during his ministry was preparation for the events³ that began with the Last Supper and concluded with his death and resurrection. The reason for that is that this was the giving and sealing of the New Covenant—a Covenant with God that supersedes all others. He said that when her instituted the Eucharist: "This is my Blood of the New Covenant."

Although the Greek word for covenant used in the New Testament is diatheke ($\delta \iota \alpha \theta \dot{\eta} \varkappa \eta$), the Aramaic (and

there should be no plowing or planting. This is symbolic of reliance on God's providence and mercy, and is required in the Law (Lev. 25:8-13). There is little in biblical history to indicate that it was actually observed to any significant degree, although some very conservative Jews, especially in Israel, do still observe it.

¹ The Jubilee is the year at the end of the seventh of the seven-year agricultural cycles (the *Shemita*), and there is dispute as to whether it is the last year of the 7th cycle, making it the 49th year, or the year following the last cycle, making it the 50th year. The *Shemita* requires that for 6 years a portion of the harvest should be set aside and saved, and on the 7th year

² This is implied in the Lord's Prayer when we say, "Forgive us our trespasses as (i.e. to the extent that) we forgive those who trespass against us."

³ One could say the event rather than events. Everything from the giving of the Holy Eucharist through the Resurrection is so intricately interwoven that no part of it can be separated from the rest.

Hebrew) word that Jesus would have used is *brit* (ברית). Brit was originally a political term for a written contract between a king and his subjects. It was usually signed in blood as a token of its importance, and as a reminder that to violate it meant death. A *brit* was so binding that violation of it meant death, whether the violator was a subject or the king himself. The king's violation of a *brit* could mean his overthrow, which in ancient times would also have meant his death. A *brit* was serious business.

From the time of Abraham all the covenants with the Hebrews (and later the Israelites) were sealed with blood. The covenant with Abraham was symbolically sealed with his obedience to the command to sacrifice Isaac, and then in reality with the blood of the ram that God supplied in place of the boy (Gen. 22:2ff.). The Mosaic Covenant was sealed at the foot of Mount Sinai when Moses sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on the people (Ex. 24:8).

On the night before the Israelites left Egypt they sacrificed lambs and sprinkled the blood on their doorposts (Ex. 12:7). That night was sanctified as the annual commemoration that today we call the Passover. Each year at Passover observant Jews, at the ritual dinner called the *Seder*, eat lamb.

This is symbolic of the sacrificial lamb that was offered every Passover in the Temple in Jerusalem until its destruction by the Romans in a.D. 70. Christians call Jesus the Paschal (Passover) Lamb in recognition of his sacrifice of himself on the cross at the time of Passover. The shedding of his blood and the giving of it to his people in the Eucharist is the seal of the new and final *Brit*, the New Covenant. The Church teaches us that the shedding of his blood in sacrifice was for our redemption—that is, for the forgiveness of sin.

As we mentioned above, a *brit* was as binding on the king as on his subjects. As Paul so often reminds us, God is as good as his word, and we can rely on his honoring his Covenant. As Moses led the Israelites out of servitude to Pharaoh and sealed the covenant with blood, Jesus led mankind out of servitude to sin and sealed the final covenant with his own blood. Jesus, however, was not just another Moses on a grander scale. He is the Son of God, and his sacrifice of himself to atone for mankind's sin is the greatest gift that he could offer. It had to be the last act of his physical presence on earth, and was irrevocably bound to his giving of his Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

When we celebrate the Holy Eucharist, therefore, we are not merely re-enacting the Last Supper. We are binding ourselves to the sacrifice of Christ in the New Covenant through his Body and Blood. It is the union together with God and one another.

¹ Many modern Jews, because of the influence of Yiddish, pronounce the *t* with a slight sibilance, making it sound like a soft *s* (much as *t* is pronounced in northwestern England). It sounds like they are saying *bris*. The circumcision of a Jewish boy is an affirmation of the Mosaic Covenant, and thus is called a Bris.



SAINT JAMES'
EPISCOPAL CHURCH

JAMIE by Richard R. Losch

PAGEANT RENEARSAL
TODAY
3:00 PM

"Jamie, how come the shepherds
were in the fields washing
their socks by night?"



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

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