



# FC

## Forward in Christ

*The magazine of Forward in Faith North America.*

*\$30 Annual Subscription*

*\$200 Bundle Subscription*

Vol. 8 No. 1

December, 2015

***Merry Christmas!***

*Also in this issue:*

*God Loves You*

*Homecoming, Healing and Hope*

*The Gift of Unity*

*Santa Doesn't Come For Me*



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# In the News

**Jihad Terror:** ISIS affiliated Muslim terrorists killed over 120 people and wounded many more in savage attacks across central Paris in November.

French President, Françoise Hollande, declared a state of emergency and vowed to “annihilate” those responsible. Subsequently, massive raids were conducted by police throughout France, leading to multiple arrests and at least one armed stand-off with Jihadis, in which several terrorists were shot. French air and naval assets have been deployed in the ongoing fight against ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

Christian leaders from around the world have condemned the attacks, with Pope Francis calling them “inhuman” and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow calling for “repentance.”

*Forward in Christ* urges your prayers on behalf of the victims of Islamic terror around the world and for the conversion of Muslims to faith in Christ.

**CofE Bishop Prays to a New God:** Rachel Treweek, the new bishop figure of the Diocese of Gloucester, told the U.K.’s Guardian that she no longer prays to God as “he,” although she sometimes forgets.

According to the Guardian, “She personally prefers to say neither ‘he’ nor ‘she’, but ‘God’. ‘Sometimes I lapse, but I try not to.’”

Christians believe that God has revealed himself in masculine terms and, in Christ, as a man. We have to ask, what deity is Treweek praying to?

**TEC Tanks, ACNA Grows:** According to the latest figures, the Episcopal Church (TEC) continues its long decline.

From 2010-2014, the small but wealthy denomination lost 241 churches, 189,000 members, and 82,000 persons in average Sunday attendance.

In contrast, The Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) grew by 248 churches over the same period and gained 10,000 new members. Average Sunday attendance grew modestly, from 69,197 in 2009, to 71,664 in 2014, making it comparable to the Anglican Church of Canada.

**Archbishop Duncan Retires:** Archbishop Duncan announced his retirement, effective June 2016, in November, stating, “It has seemed to me like the work I was called to do is as complete as it can be. I believe that this is a very good moment for me to let go and to pass the chief pastor’s crozier to another, just as we have largely passed diocesan leadership, both clergy and lay, from one generation to another. The years of conflict, and of course correction, within the Body of Christ are past for now. The challenge ahead is one of strengthening the Church for discipleship and evangelization in a hostile and needy nation and world.”

ACNA’s Archbishop, Foley Beach, commented, “As its first Primate, Archbishop Duncan led the Anglican Church in North America through critical stages of its formation, and we will be forever grateful for his years of courageous, servant leadership. Please join me in praying for the Diocese

of Pittsburgh as it seeks God’s will for its next bishop, and for Archbishop Duncan and his wife Nara as God leads them in this next season of life.”

**Church of Iceland Loses its Conscience:** The Church of Iceland has scrapped its freedom of conscience clause, ending the right of clergy to refuse to solemnize same-sex marriages. The resolution introduced by the Rev. Guðrún Karls Helgudóttir overturned a 2007 statement by the annual Church Council, the Kirkjuþing, that held the “freedom of clergy in these matters must be respected.” However Ms. Helgudóttir argued that it was now time to “take things the whole way and place no limits on human rights.” The conflict between religious freedom and human rights must always be “decided in favor of human rights,” she argued. As state employees Church of Iceland clergy should not be allowed to place their conscience above the law. On 28 October 2015 the 29 member Kirkjuþing endorsed the resolution. -- *Anglican Ink*.

**Episcopal Dean Blesses Abortion Clinic:** A group of clergypersons blessed a Cleveland abortion clinic in October, on the initiative of a Methodist minister, Laura Young. The blessing was carried out by the lesbian Dean of Cleveland’s Episcopal Cathedral, Tracy Lind.

“Bless this building,” prayed Lind, “May its walls stand strong against the onslaught of shame thrown at it. May it be a beacon of hope for those who need its services.”

Young heads up the Ohio chapter of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), an enthusiastic supporter of the taxpayer funded abortion giant, Planned Parenthood, which was praised by the group for doing “God’s work.”

What part of doing God’s work does selling baby parts to biotech firms fall under, and for that matter, what “God” is the RCRC working for?

Pray for life.

**FiFUK Transitions:** At its November 2015 National Assembly, at the Church of St Alban the Martyr, Holborn, Forward in Faith UK completed an important transition. The organization’s primary role in future will be as a support structure for The Society of S. Wilfrid and S. Hilda.

*Forward in Christ* wishes FiFUK well in its new role.

**Primates Meeting:** Conservative GAFCON primates, representing the great majority of the Anglican Communion, have agreed to attend a Primates meeting, called by the Archbishop of Canterbury, in January. ACNA Archbishop, Foley Beach, has been invited, as has the Episcopal Church (TEC) and the Anglican Church of Canada. (ACoC).

**Merry Christmas!** *Forward in Christ* wishes all its readers a merry and joyful Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of Christ and the coming of peace, love, and salvation into the world.

# The Paris Massacre

*A statement by Archbishop Mouneer Anis*

Once again, the world has been shocked by acts of unspeakable violence and brutality. Once again, the world mourns with the families and friends of victims of tragedy. Once again, the world searches for meaning and hope in the terrible wreckage left in the wake of such dehumanizing hatred, senseless bloodshed, and unparalleled loss.

In this time of grief, it is all too easy to see the path the world has laid out for us. It is the path of retributive justice, of reciprocate hatred, of fear and anger. This is the way the world moves; the way governments, militaries, and judicial systems function. But it is at this critical time that we must ask ourselves what our role must be in the aftermath of such tragedy.

The best we can possibly do is to look to the most enduring response to violence and death that there is. The death by crucifixion of Jesus Christ, some two thousand years ago. Unjust powers, motivated by anger and fear, murdered the very incarnation of God. What became of this greatest travesty? God forged it into the greatest triumph over evil that Creation has yet seen. And what of the one who became the victim in our place? "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

In the very darkest hour, Jesus called upon God for forgiveness. We see this message in his teachings, and then echoed in his living and his dying. Profound forgiveness. Profound mercy. Profound grace.

In 2006, an armed man entered a one-room Amish schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. He shot ten girls between 6 and 13 years old, five of whom died, and then committed suicide. The response of the Amish community was swift. Within hours of the shooting, an Amish neighbor had visited the family of the gunman and offered comfort and forgiveness. Standing by the body of his murdered granddaughter, a grandfather told several young boys "We must not think evil of this man." Some 30 of the Amish community attended the



funeral of the assailant, and one of the few outsiders permitted to the funeral of one of the Amish girls was the man's widow.

I sometimes wonder at the capacity of humankind for such forgiveness, but then I realise that I am merely wondering at God's grace. I look back to the earliest words of the Bible and find that in Genesis 1:27 we were created in the image of God and that in verse 31 God saw everything that had been made and "it was supremely good."

And, even though much has happened since God set those mighty intentions into play, I hold God's words close from 2 Corinthians 12:9 "My grace is enough for you, because power is made perfect in weakness." And in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

Perhaps it is in the darkest hours that the light shines out the brightest, that the vision of the kingdom is clearest, no matter how distant. The path to that kingdom is never so clearly laid, but the vision is there. It is a vision of all nations streaming forward, all division cast aside, all conflict passed, Jew and Gentile together.

So today I mourn for all the victims of this unthinkable violence. I mourn for their family. And their family is this world. Every last person is their neighbor. Every last person is a victim of this tragedy—violence is indeed an evil which harms both victim and per-

petrator. I pray for the citizens of Paris, for the country of France, for Europe, for every country the world over, as they bow their heads from the weight of death and useless violence as it continues to visit itself upon brother after brother, sister after sister. I pray for healing, for forgiveness, and for hope in the hearts of the affected families. Wrong has been done, and there is not one person on this world who is not a victim of it.

And I pray that through it all, the goodness of God will continue to shine through. The goodness that was there at the moment of creation, that was created anew in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and that continues to be created as the kingdom of heaven struggles forth in the darkest of times and places.

I pray for forgiveness. I pray for grace. I pray for peace.

✠

*The Most Rev. Dr. Mouneer Hanna Anis is Archbishop of the Episcopal/Anglican Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa and Primate of the Episcopal/Anglican Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East.*

# Merry Christmas!

*By Fr. Lawrence Bausch*

When Christians began to celebrate the birth of Jesus near the end of December, we were partying alongside an already festive pagan culture. Many peoples throughout the ancient world were accustomed to celebrating the “birth of the sun” at the winter solstice and the yearly promise of the returning of light was anticipated on the darkest day of the year in a kind of wild hopefulness. This feast was celebrated with such customs as the exchanging of gifts, the freeing of servants, and the closing of schools, with much merry-making.

In many ways, Christians today are in a similar situation; celebrating the birth of Jesus in the midst of a culture which has adopted our religious holy day and turned it into a festive “holiday season” during which a spirit of “peace and good will” is extended to all, with the conventions of gift giving, time off from work and school; with much merry-making.

What is the difference between the meaning of Christmas and the time-honored values of hope for the future, expressions of kindness, and commitment to relieve the hardships of others? Perhaps the best way to highlight the difference is to hear again the angel’s words as recalled in St. Luke’s Gospel: “I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11)

We Christians celebrate not merely the promises of light which this world extends (and takes away), nor merely our highest and most unselfish intentions (which do not remain consistent), but the arrival and promised help of a Savior who offers to redeem us from our limitations and open to us the place of everlasting light:

*Mild He lays His glory by,  
born that we no more may die,*

*born to raise us from the earth,  
born to give us second birth.  
Risen with healing in His wings,  
Light and life to all He brings,  
Hail the Son of Righteousness!  
Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace!*

(Hymn #87, 1982 Hymnal, verse 3)

As we see increasing animosity towards traditional Christian teaching and practice, may we retain our focus on Christ, first and foremost. And, may we strive to be joyful witnesses to the Gospel of Salvation in Christ for the sake of those we know who have not yet received Him.



*Fr. Lawrence Bausch is President of FiFNA and Rector of Holy Trinity, Ocean Beach, San Diego, California.*

## *Support The Ministry of Forward in Christ!*

Dear Friends,

I am sure that all of us appreciate the value of *Forward in Christ*. We read it for our own benefit, and we share it with others. It is both informative, attractive and above all, it proclaims the Faith once delivered by Christ to the Apostles.

I would like to extend an offer to you to help us to both continue and also expand the unique ministry of our magazine by considering a complete or partial sponsorship of an issue. You may wish to do this as a way of celebrating a special event such as an ordination or wedding, or an anniversary. It could also be done in memorial of someone, in gratitude for an event or blessing, or simply in support of orthodox Anglicanism itself.

We will advertise your sponsorship and its intent in the magazine, which in turn will give our readers the opportunity to join in your prayer.

The cost of a full issue of *Forward in Christ* is over \$4000. Please prayerfully consider your support of this magazine’s ongoing ministry.

With every blessing for a joyful Christmas,

The Rev. Canon Lawrence D. Bausch, President, Forward in Faith North America.

*Please contact the FiFNA office at 1-800-225-3661, or email [julia.smead@fifna.org](mailto:julia.smead@fifna.org), to support this magazine’s ministry of proclaiming the Faith once delivered by Christ to the Apostles.*

# God Loves You

## *A Christmas message from Bishop Jack Iker*

In a wonderful Prayer Book collect, we acknowledge before God that “we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves.” This, in a nutshell, is the human condition – we need God’s help. We cannot save ourselves, much less any one else! We cannot save our family or loved ones – try as we might.

We cannot save the world about us or even our church – though we may wish we could. We need a Savior to deliver us from sin and death, for without His divine assistance, we are bound by our faults, our failures, and our mortality. Without His grace, we are hopeless and are headed to eternal separation from Him.

The good news of Christmas speaks directly to this dilemma. God has provided a Savior for us – Jesus Christ the Redeemer! He alone has the power to save us and help us, heal us, and deliver us. This is the joyful proclamation of the Christ-Mass that goes out to all people, for all time – the message of an

angel: “I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people: for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11)

This is what gladdens our hearts and lifts our spirits at this special time of the year. This is what gives us hope for the future. God’s love has acted to save us and redeem us, and to give us the gift of eternal life with Him. Whatever our discouragements and fears, this is the message that gives us hope and promise for the days ahead.

This is the Light that shines upon us in our moments of darkness.

Christmas is not about what we can do - or should do - or even want to do. Christmas is about what God has done and continues to do, in His saving love for us. It is not something we deserve, nor is it anything we can make happen. It is pure gift – pure grace – pure love! We can only receive it with a thankful heart; it is deliverance from bondage

and darkness and death, for all eternity.

St. Augustine of Hippo spoke of this marvelous Christmas gift when he wrote to his diocese some 1600 years ago: “God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love!” He loves each one of us as He loves His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

He loves you as much now, as He ever will!

Merry Christmas, dear people of faith - God loves you!



*The Rt. Rev. Jack Iker is the Bishop of Fort Worth, Texas.*

# Merry Christ-mass!

*Worship the Prince of Peace*

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# Christian Identity

*Bishop Ray Sutton reflects on the birth of Christ and our rebirth as Christians*

I had a coach in college who would give every player on the team a nickname. He called the second name the team name. I remember one time he explained that the team name was our identity on the team regardless of what people called us when we weren't with the team. On one occasion he mentioned that we have two identities, one as a player and one as person. I remember one of the other players asking the coach if he meant that as a player we weren't a person.

The coach didn't answer, he just said that the point of our life on the team was to be a player. And he stressed that the new team name's identity was to take over all the others. I think that was the first time I realized the power of a name, especially a second name introducing a second identity taking over the first.

The Gospel passage for one of the Sundays of Christmas introduces us to the lesson of two names, two identities, with one purpose. The lesson of two names and identities comes to us in the passage via a group who was among the first to witness the newborn Christ Child in Bethlehem. In fact, these individuals are in every crèche scene. I'm referring to the shepherds.

Luke says this of the shepherds, "And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child." (Luke 2:15-17)

The shepherds had two identities but one singular purpose. They were shepherds, but they were in service as shepherds for the newborn king. This new purpose of serving the Christ Child was consistent with the kind of unique shepherds they were. They were not standard shepherds, even before Christ was born.

A Messianic Jewish scholar named



Alfred Edersheim points out that there was a special tower in north Bethlehem referred to in Scripture that unlocks the dual role of the shepherds that kept sheep there. The Prophet Micah predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem at the "tower of the flock" (Micah 5:2; 4:8), which in Hebrew is Migdal Eder. So in Bethlehem there was this special tower. Specifically this was a tower for shepherds to watch their sheep. And importantly, at the base of the tower was a room or cave where sheep were to be birthed. Important to note: the sheep around Bethlehem were not ordinary sheep, hence the shepherds were not regular shepherds.

Edersheim points out that the sheep at Bethlehem were for the singular purpose of being used in the sacrifices at Jerusalem. They were therefore to be without blemish, which is why there was so much care surrounding the birth of the sheep - thus making certain that they qualified for temple sacrifice. This was the context in which Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Perhaps the birthing cave or room at the foot of the tower was the stable where Jesus was born.

So the shepherds around Bethlehem had two identities. They were shepherds, but they were specifically

shepherds in service of the Temple. Their second identity as temple shepherds took over their purpose of shepherding. A second identity was to dominate the first. God's identity was to govern their other identity, which brings us to the conclusion of our passage, to a statement that drives home further a second, Divine identity taking over the first.

St. Luke concludes the shepherd segment with the following words, "And when eight days were completed before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb" (Luke 2:21). This is the second name referred to for our Lord in this passage. The first one mentioned by the angels is the "Christ the Lord" (2:11). This is His Divine Name. The second name is "Jesus," His Human Name. Thus, our Lord importantly is referred to with two names in this passage. The second name, Jesus, means God saves. This was the purpose of His Life. So it is with us.

Since baptism in the New Testament completes, fulfills and in some sense takes over what circumcision accomplished in the Old Testament, the same practice of naming a child at baptism continues. But think about it. A person is born with a family name.

At circumcision in the Old Testament, and Baptism in the New Testament, a second name is given. In the Church, we call the first name the Christian name. In these two names we find two identities subsumed under one purpose.

And thus, as we approach Christmas and the beginning of a new year, we are reminded of the two identities we have as people of God. We have our natural identity and we have our spiritual identity. Both, though, are to come together in serving the Lord with

one purpose. Who we are in Christ is to take over our first identity just like those special shepherds at the birth of Jesus. The problem, however, with two names and two identities is the potential to live a double life. As children of the Lord we walk in two kingdoms, the world out there and the world of God's realm, the Church.

As we enter a new year, let us resolve to live with greater singleness of purpose under the banner of whom we became at baptism. Let us live a singular commitment to Jesus

regardless of where we are. May our two identities merge into the one purpose of walking faithfully in Christ in 2016.

FC

*Bishop Ray Sutton is Bishop Coadjutor in the Diocese of Mid-America of the Reformed Episcopal Church and Dean of Ecumenical Affairs for ACNA.*

## Santa Doesn't Come For Me

*By Bishop Keith Ackerman*

Years ago my wife and young children and I took a trip to Montreal in Canada, to visit our son's Godfather, a priest, who had been the Rector of my "home parish" St. Mary's Church in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh. The priest had left Pittsburgh, and with a new graduate degree in Social Work, worked closely with the homeless in a difficult part of Montreal as part of a parish outreach ministry. Those who are hungry and homeless do not care very much about which Church or Denomination feeds them or finds a place for them to sleep. A great blessing for my family, and for me, is that our son's Godfather did not have enough room in his small house, so we stayed at one of the Homeless Shelters during our stay in Montreal.

As one might expect, the furnishings were very spartan, and the food was very basic French Canadian. The lay couple who maintained the Shelter - he an Englishman and she a French Canadian - lived a very simple life. Indeed, when I celebrated Mass in the chapel, maintained by the Roman Catholic Church, it was the simplest and most basic chapel I had ever seen. Certainly each day the population would change, and every day was a new day to meet new people.

The couple told us that they had been childless, and one day a small child was left on their door step. They took her in, loved her, and adopted her. The couple couldn't wait until Christmas so that they could share their love for Jesus and the joy of Christmas cel-



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eborations. They quietly bought humble presents with their meager income, and wrapped them for their little girl. They told her stories about the first Christmas, and then told her about the exciting arrival of Pere Noel who would come on Christmas Eve.

On Christmas Day the excited couple awakened early and waited for their daughter to come running down the steps. They had replayed the scene in their minds for months, and they waited. They listened and heard their young daughter humming very softly in her room, and they ascended the steps of the shelter, to see if their daughter was alright. They shouted, "It's Christmas (Pere Noel) Santa Claus has come." The daughter smiled and did not move, continuing to hum a Christmas carol. Finally the couple couldn't wait any longer and once again they said, "Santa has come!" The little girl turned to them and with a sweet smile said. "I know, Mommy and Daddy, but Santa doesn't come for me."

I suspect that most of us have an opinion about the commercialization of Christmas. We see Christmas movies where no one ever talks about going to church, and we hear phrases such as "we aren't doing Christmas this year," or "I don't do Christmas anymore." What do they mean? Do they mean that no Christ Mass will be celebrated this year? Do they mean that December 25 will be removed from the Calendar. Of course not. They often mean that the wonderful (and sometimes odd) festivities surrounding a period of time in November and December will not occur.

Indeed, for them, perhaps, Santa isn't coming this year.

For many homeless and hungry people, Christmas is a depressing thought, and, like Thanksgiving, is often the only time when people think about them. Still Jesus' birthday will be celebrated, but if we brought someone into our homes and shared Christmas movies with them, would they know whose birthday it was?

Perhaps for those who set up for "Christmas" festivities, for those who call themselves Christians, it is a good time to look at our homes and ask the question, "If someone who had never heard of Jesus were to walk into my house would they determine quickly what the significance of this Season is?" Would they find Jesus?

I still think about that little girl in Montreal, and wonder what she taught her children. Once she figured that Santa does come for her, did she remember seeing the love of Jesus shining through her parents? Their love for her was overwhelming, but their love for Jesus was even greater. For after they shared their small gifts with their daughter, they led her into a large room where a large group of people waited... ready to receive their gifts... gifts that would not be discarded, but the gifts of knowing that they could and were loved and valued. They celebrated Christmas.

FC

*Bishop Keith Ackerman is the retired Bishop of Quincy and FiFNA's Ambassador for Anglican and Ecumenical Affairs.*

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*Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us.  
Let us become divine for his sake, since he for ours became [human].  
He assumed the worst that he might give us the better; he became poor that we through his poverty might be rich; he took upon himself the form of a servant that we might receive back our liberty; he came down that we might be exalted; he was tempted that we might conquer; he was dishonored that he might glorify us; he ascended that he might draw us to himself, who were lying low in the fall of sin.*

*Let us give all, offer all, to him who gave himself a ransom and reconciliation for us.*

*St. Gregory of Nazianzen*

# Homecoming, Healing & Hope

## *St. Luke's, East Aurora, New York*

St. Luke's Anglican Church in East Aurora, (greater Buffalo) New York, was founded in 2003 by six local families who were led by the Holy Spirit to leave their TEC parish due to radical innovations within that denomination. Early on, they met on Sundays in one family's living room for Morning Prayer, and decided upon the name of St. Luke's for their new parish.

Within a matter of weeks, the pastor of First Baptist Church of East Aurora extended an invitation for the families to share First Baptist's church building for Anglican worship services. St. Luke's still conducts services and other activities at the First Baptist location due to the gracious hospitality of that host church.

In February of 2004 the Very Rev. Michael William R. Stott, affectionately known as "Father Bill", became the founding rector of St. Luke's. Soon after, bylaws were adopted, a Vestry was formed, and St. Luke's became affiliated with the Anglican Province of America. Upon Father Bill's retirement from active oversight of St. Luke's, the Rev. Seth Brooker was called to be St. Luke's second rector, beginning his ministry in November of 2009.

Early in 2010, the parish voted to join the Missionary Diocese of All Saints in the Anglican Church in North America. Through the process of Appreciative Inquiry, led by Father Brooker, St. Luke's vestry adopted its church motto, "Homecoming, Healing and Hope" in Christ.

With the assistance of gifted and dedicated assisting clergy, including The Rev. Pascal Fermo, Rev. Danny Hart, Deacon Vincent Coppola and the late Father Lyle Lampkin, St. Luke's ministries and outreaches have been greatly blessed and enriched in God's service.

Believing the classic 1928 Book of Common Prayer to be the "perfect balance of Word and sacrament", (v. Quentin Morrow's *Why '28 in '01?*) St. Luke's uses this beautiful, balanced and Biblical form of worship every Sunday, accompanied with traditional hymnody from the 1940 Hymnal as well as contemporary hymns and songs. St. Luke's seeks to embody the reformed Catholicism of classical Anglicanism through reverent, heart-felt liturgy and an evangelical approach to preaching and teaching.

An average Sunday at St. Luke's will find multiple generations filling the pews for the 9:00 AM service. The parish is blessed with an abundance of young children, some of whom stay in the nursery while others attend the service with their parents. Some parishioners travel from as far as an hour away to attend. One newer family said that they chose St. Luke's because it is one of the few churches in Western New York that offers both traditional worship and sound biblical teaching.

St. Luke's has been blessed in being able to support a number of outreach ministries and projects that is out of proportion to its size. These include a bi-monthly Eucharist at an area nursing home, Lenten offerings for Anglican Relief & Development, making blankets for nursing home residents, a yearly Thanksgiving food drive for the Buffalo City



Mission and the annual Glory Tree ministry during Advent which collects gifts and necessary items for needy families. This year's Advent projects include a major fundraising drive to benefit Samaritan's Purse, collecting baby items for a local crisis pregnancy center and making hats and booties for a local hospital NICU. Particularly near and dear to the parish's heart is supporting the Magdalene Project in Niagara Falls which brings the Gospel to street prostitutes and disadvantaged youth. This support includes an annual back-to-school backpack drive and monthly financial support.

The parish has shared its faith with East Aurora and the surrounding communities by hosting a yearly Blessing of the Animals at the local dog park and has held two blessing services for first responders.

The members of St. Luke's are also firm believers in the power of prayer and have an active intercessory Prayer Group ministry which collects prayer requests from near and far. In the past year special services of prayer have been held for the persecuted Church. The Prayer Group also hosts an annual Soup Supper and a Prayer Breakfast to share their ministry with the wider parish family.

In October, 2015, Fr. Brooker was called to a new ministry in Alaska. St. Luke's is currently searching for its next Rector to shepherd them and lead them in fulfilling the Great Commission. Clergy who are interested in applying for the position may send a letter of interest and C.V. to Search Committee Chairman Mr. Tom Forrest, at [tforrest@verizon.net](mailto:tforrest@verizon.net), or to the church at 591 Porterville Road, East Aurora, NY 14052. A copy of the parish profile is available on the ACNA job board or from Mr. Forrest.

St. Luke's hopes to continue to be a beacon showing the light and love of Christ to a world consistently more secular and self-involved.



*The Rev'd Seth Brooker is Rector of St. Luke's Anglican Church, East Aurora, New York.*

# Lasting Love

By Fr. Gene Geromel

On my first visit to Westminster Abbey I couldn't wait to visit the final resting place of Henry V. It is my favorite Shakespearean play. When my parish church, St. Bartholomew's, paid off its loan to buy back our property from the Episcopal Church our choir sang *Non Nobis Domine*: Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name give the praise. It was a reminder that our victory was ultimately a gift from God. It happened because of the faith of parishioners and the generosity of those outside the parish, especially from Forward in Faith members. But back to the Abbey.

On the six-hundredth anniversary of the battle of Agincourt there were many articles about the Chantry Chapel above Henry the Fifth's coffin. On my many visits to the Abbey no one ever came up to me and said, "See here Yank, you look like a Shakespeare fan, do you know that if that door were open you could climb the steps and visit a chapel where a Mass is to be said for the soul of the good prince and king?" It wasn't until there were articles about the Chantry Chapel that I ever heard about it. "Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay, who twice a day their wither'd hands hold up toward heaven, to pardon blood; and I have two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests sing still for Richard's soul." This is what Henry did for the soul of the man his Father killed.

My first thought was, "I want to see it." My second thought was, "Do you think they would let us say Mass there for Henry's soul?" My last thought was more mundane, practical and blunt, "What did they do with the money?" When you leave money for Masses to be said, it should be spent for Masses for the Dead. Obviously, the answer to the last question is: the Reformation and the dissolution of the monasteries and chantries.

Here in the American church we would refer to such things as endowments or an endowment fund. I once visited a parish in New Hampshire where the church, parish hall and rectory were paid for by a woman whose son was killed in the First World War. The gift was with the understanding that every year a Mass was to be said for her son's soul.

When we think of endowments we think of the past. My parish was built because of an endowment, and so were several others in the county. A man named Charles Barth set aside money in one endowment fund to build family churches where there would be regular Sunday service. He then set up an endowment to support those parishes until they could become independent. (When I came to the parish they had a perpetual list of the dead to be read at All Soul's day. His name was not on the list. It is now.) I have been here nearly thirty-two years and he died long before me, therefore he is spoken of in the past tense. Yet, he thought of the future.

I know many despair of the future of the church and in particular, their parish. I hear people say we only have twenty years and this or that parish will be out of business.

Well, what are you doing about it? When Henry V was troubled by the fact that his Father shed royal blood he did good works and had Masses said. If you are concerned



Henry V

about your parish's future, enough at least that you express opinions about its viability in twenty years, when was the last time that you invited someone to church? Do you tithe?

I remember a very faithful parishioner, who spoke of tithing frequently, tell me that in their last job they made six figures. My first thought was I don't remember hearing that our pledges ranged from \$525 to \$9,000 to \$10,000. Often, we think pledging and tithing are synonymous.

Along these lines is a simple question: Is the church in your will? Twice in my ministry I remember parishioners who were single, retired and owned a home. Both had nephews who were their only relatives and with whom they had terrible relationships. Because neither of them had a will, guess where their estate went? Yet, if one of them had remembered the church in their will our endowment would have doubled in size.

The first person who remembered our church in their will was Harriet Morrison. She came to our church a couple of years after I arrived. She was a disabled veteran. She found friendship, worship she enjoyed and spiritual sustenance in our parish. When she died she divided her estate in four parts: One part for each child and one part for the church.

On the other hand, I have had people who have been members of the church for many years who made no mention of the church in their will. Who tell me how well-off their children are financially, "I never made in any given year what my children make." The same time they praise their children's financial success they lament the future of the church. Somehow they see no connection, no opportunity, no gift from God.

This Christmas, consider your gift to Christ, in His body, the Church.



Fr. Gene Geromel is Rector of St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church in Swartz Creek, Michigan.

# Thinking Out Loud

By William Murchison

What a relief! Donald Trump, in an unprecedented measure of religious outreach, proposes the possibility of a Starbucks boycott, to protest – I have to admit, the theology kind of disintegrates here -- to protest the color of this year's coffee cups, which are unadorned red, you see, and lack reindeers and snowmen and the appurtenances of a modern Christmas; and which give Dr. Trump the notion that Starbucks doesn't really care about Christmas.

To this level the Christmas wars plummet: the idea being, I guess, that if Starbucks kept the reindeer on the coffee cups, the spiritual regeneration of America would seem likelier than it does at present. And... oh, let's drop it.

Not because reindeer and the like properly belong to the Christmas milieu many of us associate with the comfortable post-World War II context into which a weary America sank gratefully. A culture's chosen symbols matter, of course, but not so much as to preclude Starbucks' choosing any color, including puce, in which it wants to present Grande Cappuccino.

At the same time, small things often tell, or especially enhance the narrative of, large stories; in this case, the story of the culture's growing disaffection from Christianity.

This fall, the Pew Research Center's U. S. Religious Landscape Study gives our once-fertile terrain a color more like brown than dark green.

Those whom we have learned over the last few years to taxonomize as the "nones" make up 23 percent of the population, according to Pew. This includes atheists, agnostics, and people who say their religion doesn't amount to much. Secular convictions are gaining strength. "Consistent evidence," say the Pew researchers, shows the "nones" becoming less religious. Among this category, believers in God are just 61 percent vs. 70 percent in 2007. "Only 27 percent of the 'nones' are absolutely certain about God's existence, down from 36 percent in 2007." Meanwhile a third of the religiously unaffiliated say Godamighty,

there's no God, period (my own gloss on the matter).

The other side of the coin, according to Pew, is that religious commitment among the already committed isn't falling off. We're not gaining recruits, but the front lines are holding. For now. Without substantial recruits, the religious ranks thin through processes decreed by God himself – debility and death.

Another implication for the future of religion needs taking account of. The sagacious religion reporter Terry Mattingly, in conversation with the religion researcher John Green, of the University of Akron, learns that "a large, separate, truly secular subculture in the American population" is provisionally in formation. Many of today's young people, Green says, defy the old trend of straying from the church early on but returning to it in order to marry and raise children. "Maybe," he tells Mattingly, "more and more Americans are never going to get married and they're never going to have kids and settle down." The implications of such a cultural shift are enormous.

Marriage and family, despite their standing in the civil culture of J.P.'s, marriage licenses, compulsory education, and so forth, are religious institutions at bottom: their structure religious, their aims and ends religious. Without the elements of pledges to God and of marital disciplines that emphasize longevity of relationship and the faithful, loving care of children, there is little purpose to marriage. Might as well shack up, as we used to say in a less PC world than this one, and engage in combinations of any kind, including, naturally, homosexual and lesbian combinations. Big deal. Who cares? Abortion is an obvious part of the program: kids if you want 'em, "pregnancy terminations" if your contraceptive equipment plays you false.

Back to Dr. Trump. It's no wonder, perhaps, that Starbucks feels no special recognition, even of a debased sort, is due its coffee cups. The Starbucks constituency, generally regard-




ed as hip and with-it (as well as blessed with cash), likely fills and tosses the company's cups without a thought for the season's sacred pedigree.

Does that mean the angels in the skies over Bethlehem might better have spared their vocal chords and the shepherds the labor of hastening to the side of a manger where lay, in swaddling clothes, the Son of God? I think many know it means nothing of the sort.

A once-familiar point needs rehearsing and rehearing. The Christian faith is no contrivance of a brilliant human workshop, wringing sobs of appreciation from human admirers. The faith doesn't need the "nones." All right – that sounds brutal. The Christian faith wants them, yearns for them, prays for their reconciliation with the Savior of the World. But nonetheless, the faith points to arrangements – Christian marriage, for instance – that exceed in worth any that the "nones," however artfully counseled, could come up with.

Which is where the Church comes in, now as always. We remember the Church, surely. We remember what the Church does to put flesh on the stark bones of grudging belief. Not when Starbucks does it. No -- when the Church does it, laying aside internecine lawsuits, "social justice" obsessions, Millennium Development Goals, and accommodations of all sorts with the notion of heaven as the great political

rally in the sky. The same sky from which the glory of the Lord shone as an angel proclaimed the birth of a Savior. Funny coincidence. 

William Murchison is an author and journalist. He lives in Dallas, Texas.

# The Gift of Unity

By Shane Schaetzel

Christmas season is a time for giving. On Christmas Day, December 25 in the West, it is traditional to exchange gifts. For some, the giving goes on well into the Christmas season. A growing number of Christians are beginning to observe the traditional twelve days of Christmas again, extending family get-togethers and dinner with friends out from December 25 through January 6. Of course there are always religious celebrations, wherein during the holy sacrifice of the Mass, we are all reminded of the ultimate gift God gave to humanity in the form of his Son Jesus Christ.

It is right and proper for Christians to extend their Christmas celebration, as we are beginning to see again, and in doing so they bless the world around them with a much needed, extended, and non-commercialized Christmas cheer!

Perhaps one of the greatest, and often overlooked, gift of Christmas is a sign of unity that Christians have in the West. Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist or Pentecostal; we all celebrate the birth of our Lord on December 25 -- the Feast of the Nativity. Dates may seem trivial to some, but such simple things go a long way toward promoting unity among Christian believers.

When I was growing up as a Baptist, and then later as an Evangelical adult, I never once questioned the date for Christmas. It was always December 25. It was printed right there on the calendar. Isn't it wonderful that this date is so agreed on, that even secular calendar-makers acknowledge it? Sure, many of them acknowledge the Orthodox Christmas too, usually falling on January 7, but those same calendars just mark the Western date of December 25 as 'Christmas', and for centuries this has been a visible sign of unity among a much divided Western Christianity.

Later, as I approached thirty, I



The Mass

became an Anglican, and it was from an Anglican pulpit I heard my priest say that Anglicanism is in many ways a church of Christmas. Now I don't know exactly what he meant by that, but I certainly liked the idea, and at least in my local parish, that definitely seemed to be the case. We went all-out on the 'hanging of the greens' during Advent. Christmas decoration was a serious business, and the whole parish was involved. The midnight Mass was almost obligatory, or at least it seemed that way, and I have to say that our priest did a very fine job of making the celebration special. I used to bring my Evangelical sister to the Midnight Mass, and she loved it.

So now as a Catholic, years later, it seems fitting to me that a copy of *Divine Worship: The Missal*, will be presented as a gift to Pope Francis on the first Sunday of Advent in 2015, preparing the way for the Christmas season of giving. This liturgical text is a compilation of the Anglican Patrimony, which comes to us from the Book of Common Prayer, along with other texts held in common between Anglicanism and Catholicism, some of them going back to the pre-Tridentine era.

It is the product of a joint effort between the Vatican, and the Pope's

personal ordinariates for groups of Anglicans, created by the 2009 apostolic constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus*. The resulting *Anglicanae Traditiones* commission developed this missal after determining what aspects of the Anglican Patrimony nourished Catholic faith and ecclesial unity. The liturgy has been approved for use in all ordinariate parishes as of the first Sunday of Advent, and will henceforth be considered another "use" or form of the Roman Rite.

Currently, the Roman Rite has two forms. The first is the Ordinary Form (*Novus Ordo* or Missal of Pope Paul VI) which is commonly celebrated in vernacular languages in Catholic parishes all over the world. The second is the Extraordinary Form (*Vetus Ordo* or Missal of Saint Pius V, sometimes called the "Tridentine Mass" having developed from the Council of Trent in the 16th century), commonly known as the "Traditional Latin Mass" and still celebrated in various places throughout the Western world.

So, on the first Sunday of Advent in 2015, the Roman Catholic Church will adopt *Divine Worship: The Missal*, a whole new form of the Roman Rite, which will contain some elements even more ancient than the Traditional Latin

Mass. Divine Worship will then become the form of liturgy used primarily by the Pope's personal ordinariates for groups of Anglicans. However, the liturgy itself is fully part of the Roman Rite, which means that all Catholics can attend it, as well as meet their Sunday obligation at a parish that celebrates it.

While this new form of the Roman Rite will be exclusively used in ordinariate parishes, and ordinariate parishes will be the primary celebrants and guardians of this wonderful liturgy, the previous pope (Benedict XVI) suggested that these liturgical texts would be a gift to the entire Catholic Church. The fact that any Roman Catholic can attend such liturgies seems to fulfil this intention.

What has clearly happened is something wonderful. Divine Worship: The Missal, along with other elements of the Anglican Patrimony, have been given as a gift to the Roman Catholic Church. In turn, Rome gives them as a gift not only to Catholics who come

from Anglicanism, but to Anglicanism in general, as a sign of realized and completed ecumenical unity. Within the ordinariates, the goal of ecumenism has been fully realised, perhaps not entirely the way the Oxford Fathers envisioned over a century ago, but it is unity nonetheless.

Anglicans have been united with Rome, but not absorbed by Rome. Instead, the Vatican has recognized the value of the Anglican Patrimony, and adopted it as part of its own liturgical heritage and rite. Henceforth, from now and ever more, the Anglican Patrimony has left its mark on the Roman Catholic Church, and Rome has accepted this gift with affection and gratitude. In exchange, Rome now offers the West a threefold liturgical Roman Rite: Ordinary, Extraordinary and Ordinariate.

How will this gift of Divine Worship be received in the rest of the Anglican world not yet in full ecumenical union with Rome? That remains to be seen.

We know from historical experience that some Anglican communities have been accustomed to using the Ordinary Form Roman Missal as part of their liturgical celebrations. Will a similar development occur with Divine Worship? Again, this is unknown and remains to be seen. What we do know is that Divine Worship: The Missal, has become a gift of unity within the Roman Catholic Church, and it will forever change the face of Roman Catholicism as we know it. A new ecumenical paradigm now exists, and this is Rome's gift of unity back to the Western world.

FC

*The views expressed in this article are the author's own.*

*Shane Schaezel is an author and freelance writer. He is the creator of FullyChristian.Com, a blog of apologetics and random musings from a Catholic in the Ozarks.*

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# Magnificent Magi

*The Magi, seekers of the Incarnation, by Br. Ned Gerber*

It was a moment of dramatic tension and crafty diplomacy. The aged, paranoid King Herod – ruling only with Rome’s support – was meeting secretly with mysterious magi from the East. We don’t know their exact origin; many think they were Persian or Parthian. But Parthians had chased Herod from Palestine before, and their cavalry was fearsome. So, why were these priestly aristocrats really in Jerusalem? They must have travelled with a caravan of guards and servants and were clearly rich. Missler thinks they had “all imaginable oriental pomp, accompanied by cavalry to ensure safe penetration of Roman territory”[18]. They sought one who was born “King of the Jews”! [19] – not one who would become so later. The hymn *We Three Kings* also testifies to this [10]: “Born a King on Bethlehem plain.” Thus, the magi sought a descendant of the great King David. Herod knew he could not compete with that. His father was Idumean (Edomite) and his mother Arabian [19]. And since the Jewish people mostly hated Herod, he could not ignore any group that wished to honour a (supposed) offspring of the traditional Jewish Royal Family.

Herod replied with feigned sincerity. Of course, he wanted to honour this “king” as well. But with pressing affairs of state, he needed more time and information. And if this meeting occurred in late 5 or early 4 BC, the loathsome condition from which Herod would die must already have been at work inside his diseased body. (*Josephus says his symptoms included ulcerated entrails, convulsions, stench and gangrene in his privy parts, all seen as part of the divine punishment for his evil [11][29].*) Yet, Herod must have tried to maintain dignity amidst the incense and marble of his palace. It was difficult, having murdered his wife and two sons already. He would at times find himself wandering about, plaintively calling out for his dead spouse, “Mariamne?” Nevertheless, he left the Magi to confirm details of this new birth and report back to him. And then, he would do whatever was necessary.

## EXEGETICAL ISSUES

The beauty and drama of the real story of the Incarnation far surpasses the cheap sentimentality of a commercial Christmas with its “Seasons Greetings” and *Frosty the Snowman*. The visit of the magi (traditionally “wise men”) is an essential part, and a noble example for all of us. They were Gentiles from afar with little knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures. They had likely heard of a promised Messiah via the writing of Daniel, especially after he was made “chief” of Babylon’s wise men (Dan. 2:48) and then honoured by the Persians, too. But most of all, they had obeyed the prompting of God’s Spirit, following the extraordinary sign of a “star”, and then also heeded the later warning that God gave in a dream (Matt. 2:12). (*The Greek word for star – aster – covers many celestial bodies including comets and planets. Skeptics say a star that leads men to Bethlehem is impossible. But surely, did not the Shekinah Glory of God do this for nearly 40 years in the wilderness with Israel, in the pillar of cloud and*



*fire?)*

Modern scholars may denigrate this text as legendary. Little is known of the magi, and the account occurs in only one of the four Gospel narratives. Yet, so does the account of the angels appearing to the shepherds, and the story of the woman at the well, etc. Shall all these be denigrated, too? In secular history, there are many events taken as fact - such as the wars of Julius Caesar - for which we have only one extant source, but they are accepted.

Actually, the ancient caste or class of magi is attested by various authors, including the visit of Tiridates I from Armenia to Emperor Nero (AD 66), with a group of other magi [23][28] Tiridates himself was a Mithraic Priest, and thus one the magi, too. MacArthur notes that the “ruling body in the Parthian-Persian Empire at this time was much like the Roman Senate [but] composed entirely of magi”[17].

ASK (Associates for Scriptural Knowledge) have compiled helpful background data on the magi of the late Roman Republic and Early Empire. They note the testimony of both Cicero and Plutarch; magi were the ones instructing kings and princes in the East. (Cf. Strabo, XVI.762 and Cicero, *De Divin*, I.41.) If so, this may help explain how the magi would be willing to meet privately with King Herod. But sadly, Church Fathers like St. Jerome and St. Augustine translated the term magi as just “magicians” [5], which cast a shadow over the entire class.

Compounding this is the modern dilemma of knowing only a little about the Parthians [14]. Their empire was not very centralised, and several languages were in use at the same time including local tongues, Greek and Persian. This – plus a lack of surviving records – makes it hard to construct a comprehensive history.

We don’t know the exact number of magi who visited the young child, Jesus, in the “house” that the Holy Family lived in then. Three became traditional, probably due to the three gifts – but per Calvin [2], Chrysostom was said to think

there were 14. Personal names like Caspar (Gaspar) don't appear until ca. the 8th century, and are likely legendary. But the visit of the magi themselves to Bethlehem is in Holy Scripture. There is no good reason to doubt its veracity. For those who insist that Matthew simply concocted the story from other accounts or legends, R.T. France has a good reply: "A church which soon found itself in serious conflict with astrology is not likely to have invented a story which appears to favour it." [7 – pg. 81.]

In the Middle Ages, magi devotion reached a peak [1]. Relics were supposedly sent from Constantinople to Milan, and then to Cologne Cathedral (12th century). Such superstition is not pleasing to God; but the true piety of the magi offers a powerful role model.

In further support, Josephus and Tacitus [12, 26] note a widespread belief that a great leader would arise from Palestine. Of course, Roman historians thought such a prediction must be fulfilled by one of their own because of their military success. For example:

*There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated for men coming from Judaea to rule the world. This prediction, referring to the emperor of Rome – as afterwards appeared from the event – the people of Judaea took to themselves. (Suetonius [25])*

But, Biblical prophecy disagrees. Moses said the great, coming Prophet or Leader must be "like me from among your own brothers" (Deut. 18:15), which clearly rules out Mohammad. Balaam's prophecy is often cited, too, since it says, "A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel." (Num. 24:17). But Old Testament texts that vaguely reference "kings" with gifts are poor exegesis. The magi were rarely kings, though that mistaken idea goes all the way back to Tertullian [27]. However, through respected counsel in the Parthian-Persian Empire they influenced kings, and may well have been "king-makers".

An open issue thus remains, "How did the magi understand the meaning of the 'star' itself?" We will probably never know for sure – revelation in a dream is possible. Yet, there is an astounding text in Dan. 9:24-26 that – adjusted for variation in the Jewish/Julian Calendars – yields a date for disclosure of the Messiah that falls close to Palm Sunday's triumphal entry. (*This article cannot do justice to such a vital reference. But Isaac Newton said the validity of all Biblical prophecy could be proven by it. It does not give an exact date for Christ's birth. But, one can see why keen observers would be alert as its time drew near*) [4][13].

#### MEETING THE YOUNG CHRIST.

There is confusion – in art and poetry, and among commentators – about differences in the Lukan/Matthean narratives. This should not alarm us. Luke describes the birth in a stable, when a tiny infant appeared. Matthew describes later events, after Joseph/Mary apparently made early plans to stay in Bethlehem. The Greek for their home then was *oikia* (house). And the young Jesus was described as a *paidion* (a small child, but perhaps not yet a toddler). Justin Martyr wrote that Jesus was born in a cave that served as a stall for cattle and donkeys, beneath an inn on the side of a hill (cited by [20]). If so, moving into even a small house would have been a real improvement, and might have occurred soon after the birth.

In his poem, *The Three Kings*, Longfellow wrote, "The little child in the manger lay" [15] – but he was off by maybe four-twelve months. Herod told his assassins to kill all male babies in the Bethlehem area that were up to two years old. He surely allowed a margin for error, but after carefully ascertaining the date of the appearance of the "star", he knew the child would be older now. After all, it had taken time for the magi to organise their expedition, which probably journeyed up the Fertile Crescent, then down along the coast to the Jewish capital city, where the magi expected the birth to be well-known. (*Some say the "star" might have been a supernova, but how such a phenomenon could lead men to Bethlehem is unclear. As Ross notes, neither the Indians nor the Chinese – who kept careful records of the heavens – record any such celestial event at this time* [24].)

The magi also may have come from somewhere east of Babylon, where many Diaspora Jews were living. They had an idea of a great Jewish King, but did not know about Micah 5:2, which specified the place where Christ would be born. Yet, Jewish Scribes easily quoted it. The magi also fell into Herod's scheming clutches with innocent naiveté, although his cruelty was well known in Palestine. A very distant point of origin would thus make a lot of sense.

In his poem, *The Magi*, T. S. Eliot wrote, "this Birth was hard and bitter agony for us" [6]. But in Matthew, the magi had extreme joy when the "star" reappeared. (*In a sense, it was the death of the old dispensation as Eliot said, but they were still truly exhilarated to witness it.*) In fact, Church Historians note that the joyful observation of Epiphany (6 January) was fixed in the ecclesiastical calendar before our Christmas (25 December). Epiphany commemorates the manifestation of Christ with more than just the magi, but they are still a vital part.

#### AFTERMATH.

The horrific murders that followed were the result of the deranged Herod's furious anger. They caused St. Matthew to cite the words of Jeremiah, when he wrote of "Rachel weeping for her children" (Jer. 31:15). That originally referred to Jews sent into captivity, but Rachel was an iconic Mother of Israel, and may have been buried near Bethlehem, too. In any





case, this is an instance of prophecy fulfilled on multiple levels. The calling of the boy, Jesus, back from Egypt is another. A calling of God's "son" from Egypt was first described by Hosea, but that referred to the entire nation. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus Himself is par excellence the representative of God's People.

In God's providence, the magi - majestic in both caste and comprehension - escaped Herod, like the Holy Family. We don't have details, but they may have returned by travelling around the south end of the Dead Sea, then north, to the east of the Jordan. They vanish from history but not from our hearts and minds.

#### APPLICATION.

Calvin noted how little guidance the magi had. Yet, they still acted. In contrast, we have so much Biblical knowledge and are yet "so cold in our inquiries after him!" [2] Other profound lessons can be gained from this wonderful story, as we ponder the Incarnation today.

First: The Magi sought far more than academic knowledge. They came to pay homage - though Matthew probably wants us to read it as "worship". They gave costly gifts, but also their personal fealty. Yet, how often are we spiritually aloof in doctrinal self-righteousness?

Second: The Magi (and others) paid a price. We don't know if they all arrived safely home. But even if they did, others suffered in the outworking of

the great miracle of the Incarnation. To this day, the Church observes the Feast of the Holy Innocents on 29 December, though it is probable that only about 20 children were killed - nowhere near the 14,000 estimated in the Byzantine tradition [9]. Scholars think the local population of the Bethlehem Area was about 1,000, though 20 is still a brutal massacre. The entire saga is a flashback to the death of Hebrew children during the time of the infant Moses. (*Some scholars consider Moses to be an early "type" of the Christ, too. But, we should be careful in our exegesis since Matthew does not draw out this comparison, as he does various other Old Testament fulfilments.*)

The Holy Family were refugees in Egypt for at least a short time. Philo says [*Flaccus* 43] that Alexandria alone had a million Jews. Egyptian Jews also compiled the *Septuagint*, so it was a logical destination. Still, it was a dangerous trek and a deeply disturbing adjustment for a new family with a young child. After returning, there was a shift back to Nazareth, too. It was an earlier home for Joseph and Mary, but had only about 500 people per Osborne [22], who cites J. Strange. Yet, there was still danger and turmoil for perhaps a couple years.

In counselling, we sometimes meet those who despairingly ask, "Doesn't God realise how terrible tyrants like Hitler, Idi Amin or Stalin can be?" Yes, He does. The wicked Herod, and his awful judgement, prove this. But as sinful humans, we must still face the effects of evil in our world ever since

the Fall. We see others pay a price (as innocent bystanders) when Christians flee ISIS in Syria or Iraq. We must honestly ask, "Will we also be willing to pay such a price, if it is demanded from us in the wealthy and comfortable West?"

Third: The Magi were most unlikely worshippers. They "didn't fit in". Early writers remind us of that, like Ignatius of Antioch - (cited in [22]). And magi at times did use dark practices from astrology or magic. (The English "magic" comes from *magos* or *magus*, the singular form of the original term.) Acts 8:9-24 gives a tragic example in Simon, who practiced both "sorcery" and "magic". But to apply such a judgment indiscriminately is superficial.

Careful scholarship shows heavenly study was refined to a science in the ancient Near East, especially in Babylonia [7]. As with alchemy, valid scientific progress did occur at times. Alchemic discoveries included anaesthetics from herbs, the isolation of sodium sulfate and nitric acid, and possibly gunpowder in China. [16]. Astrological progress also occurred, even without modern telescopes or computers, and despite overtones of superstition. Astrologers tracked celestial events occurring centuries apart, and detailed mathematics were used to plot orbital paths. In contrast to this, Jerusalem Scribes were confident that they "fitted" God's plan. But as various scholars have noted, these Scribes could not be bothered to travel two hours to Bethlehem to see if a remarkable event had indeed occurred. Are we, too, tempted to smugness?

Fourth: The Magi had eyes of Faith. What did they expect to find after following a brilliant, celestial guide? Surely not an impoverished peasant home with perhaps a 14 or 15-year-old woman and a tradesman? Yet, they still presented Him gifts, and gave homage.

Origen [21] is the first to try and give meaning to gold (for a king), frankincense (for a God - used in some Biblical offerings), and myrrh (for a mortal - perhaps for use in a future burial?) We rarely see the last two now. The Greek-English Lexicon of Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker says both are resinous gums. And the whole scene

reminds us of the words of Jesus:

*I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 8:11-12)*

We may criticise the magi for various things. Yet surely, they were able to worship “in spirit and in truth” to some degree, and such people the Father seeks. Even contemporary Jews saw that Persian (Zoroastrian) priests leaned toward monotheism with a focus on Ahura Mazda, and also noted that the Persian religion did not construct false idols.

Will we, blessed with so much more spiritual insight, worship in spirit and in truth this Christmas?



This article is part of a series, *Biblical Wellsprings, Encouraging Evangelical and Catholic Exegesis*.

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## NOTES

The magi (and Matthew) knew the excitement of God’s grace breaking through. As a result, this story has a vivid interjection in Greek in several places – *idou*. But, it is left untranslated. The 1984 NIV (used here) does not explain why, though this version is usually quite good. The same interjection is rendered “Behold” in Rev. 22:7. Hagner [9] says *idou* is a “favourite device” of Matthew, and thus translates Matthew 2:9, to give one example, as follows:

“And, when they had listened to the King [Herod], they departed. And look, the star which they had seen in the eastern sky kept going before them . . .”

That “look” is *idou* [8], which may also be rendered as “see” The present verb tense is used by Matthew in like manner. It draws us into the action as if we were actually there, too.

But, will we feel joy and excitement in this Incarnation Season? Or, are such heartfelt



emotions no longer considered “proper” during technically precise liturgies?

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# God the Father is not Beyond Gender

*Fr. Gavin Ashenden replies to Rachel of Gloucester*

The newly appointed bishop of Gloucester, has had to ask the Queen not to write to her as a Reverend Father in God. She returned the document addressed to her. The scribes have not caught up yet. She is not a Father. This has been the time-honoured way of addressing Christian bishops down the ages, but it stops now for the Church of England.

But Rachel Treweek of Gloucester has gone further and said it is not just her gender that is in the frame after her appointment, but God's. She does not choose to address God as "He."

*"Instead of using either 'He' or 'She' to describe God, Bishop Treweek said she prefers simply to use the word 'God'.*

*"Sometimes I lapse, but I try not to," she told The Observer, reigniting a long-running debate in the Church of England about inclusion and gender equality. She added: "I am not in the business of wanting to offend anyone, but I do want to gently challenge people."*

Does this matter?

If you are a Christian who says the creed, this will matter beyond measure.

In the creed we believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

The movement to ordain women as bishops and priests takes its inspiration from feminism and from a piece of cultural Marxism that has infused Western culture, egalitarianism. What happens to the faith and the Church when you impose this secular creed on it?

Firstly, the Church breaks – it fragments even further and becomes less 'one' than ever before. This movement has divided the Church across the world.

It has become less holy. This movement sees itself driven by its own concept of justice. Purity has morphed into justice.

It has become less catholic. What was true at all times and in all places is no longer so. This movement does not spring from the lived tradition of the world-wide church; rather it confronts and subverts it.

It makes the Church less apostolic. This is not the teaching or the practice of the Apostles.

So the ordination of women assaults the credal integrity of the Church theologically.

But does it have any other spiritual implications other than confronting Christian tradition and breaking the Church of England and Anglicans who accept it, from their apostolic roots?

There has not been very much theological argument over the last forty years. Assuming the notion of equality to be a given, the argument has been simplistic: "If men can be ordained why can't women?"

Part of the incoherence of the Church of England is that some parts of it believe in the practice of the apostolic Church in the office of bishops, successors to the Apostles, who presided over the Eucharist in the place of the risen Christ, and some don't. This lack of coherence in a theology of episcopacy, priesthood and ministry has made discussion

more obtuse and complex. The 'why can't women' argument finds its most comfortable home in the protestant context of ministry involving doing things. But episcopacy and its derivative priesthood are more about ontology than they are about doing, though they comprise both.

The office of bishop and priest has been understood from the earliest roots of the Church as acting in *imago Christi*, the image of Christ. This played a part in the chain of revelation where Christ told he has had come to reveal the Father to us.

Inevitably we are then faced with asking theological questions about gender and whether the fatherhood of God is an intrinsic part of the nature of God.

Bishop Rachel reminds us that men and women together are made in the image of God. This is certainly true. But can one simply stop theologically there, or is there more to be said?

She goes further herself. She wants us to stop addressing God as 'He'. This has the effect of placing her in conflict with Christ. He tells us that we both can and should address God as 'He' and in particular as our father.

So the consecration of bishop Rachel and other women as bishops assaults the creeds, and the teaching of bishop Rachel contradicts Christ.

Was any of this theological development taken in conjunction with the historic branches of apostolic Christianity, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches? No. They were ignored. When they begged those parts of Anglicanism that pursued this course to think again, and beware of the consequences of driving irremediable wedges into the body of Christ, they were still ignored.

For many faithful Christians that would settle the integrity of the matter. But there are other questions to be asked as part of the task of discernment. These questions are not only theological, in the conceptual sense, but also requires discernment, to help us work out what the spiritual dynamics are. Test the spirits, advises St John.

It is no great surprise that the progressives who have pushed this change on the Church are more comfortable with a socialist view of the world than a scriptural view. The socialist view carries it with the hope the earth can be modified so that with some improvements in the human condition and human nature, it becomes more like heaven.

Scripture, and in particular the Gospel of John, see the world as primarily being under the influence of the evil one, and being engaged in a permanent assault on the church, the kingdom of heaven and those who follow Christ. It is the aim of evil to assault and break down the paradigms and patterns of God's creation.

Christians should be particularly wary then when they adopt values of the world and secularism. But as well as testing the spirits, we can test the fruit.

If we fast-forward a little to the conflict over gay marriage, what we find is that the weapon of equality that was used to change the church's practice over ordination, has been used to change the way in which men and women

relate in marriage.

The interdependence of men and women, and their coming together to act as co-creators with God of humanity, is one of the basic building blocks of God's creation on earth. But under the influence of equality, husbands and wives have been replaced and reduced by the more functional de-gendered category of 'partners'.

The central characteristic of men and women making babies together has been distorted so that in the context of gay partnerships, it requires three people to make them. There is the surrogate and then either two men or two women. The child no longer knows where it has come from. One of its natural parents is excluded. Its identity is hidden from it in order to shore up the non-fertile gay partner's place in the family.

Equality has gone further and acted as fuel for the movement to transition one's gender. In the face of the given biology of birth, a new idea has taken root, that sexuality is fluid. It is not binary at all, but simply on a scale that stretches out between two poles, and one can occupy whatever part of that scale one identifies with. This is the next summit in the project that it is we who choose what we want to be by an act of gender identification. What in the past would have raised suspicions of mental adjustment in the face of biological reality, has now become a victim to raw wish-fulfillment. If this is what or who you want to be, no one can or should stop or contradict you. In the scales of pride on one side and humility on the other, this fails the tests of spiritual integrity.

The patterns of God's creation, his making of humanity into men and women has been attacked and diluted by an assault on gender and identity that goes to the roots of the paradigms we are given in Genesis.

At what point does the Church wake up and say 'an enemy has done this' as the farmer said when he found weeds planted where there should have been fruitful crops? (Matt 13.28).

Gay 'marriage' becomes the celebration and institution of the biologically sterile and the psychologically narcissistic. It is the celebration of sameness rather than difference. It takes the patterns of humanity that revelation celebrates, and muddles them beyond recognition. Who suffers? Those who refuse to accept these revisionist categories in the face of an increasingly fascist body politic, but also the children who have an experience of their natural parents denied to them.

But also, of course, there is the issue of the integrity of the Scriptures.

The implications of equality are far reaching.

#### THE INTEGRITY OF JESUS AS THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON

If Jesus was wrong about God being our Father, as bishop Rachel of Gloucester tells her flock and her public, then he may have been wrong about other things. If he was culturally limited in a way that bishop Rachel has risen above, then his limitations may show in other areas.

In TEC, the Episcopal Church in America, these implications have been allowed to run their course for the last forty years or so. If equality is the key concept, it is hard not to apply it to other matters. It is not easy to maintain that Jesus was unique, that Scripture is unique if in every



*The Trinity*

other sphere of life you bow down to the idol of equality. Soon the implication of relativity comes to the surface and works its way through the whole conceptual system. Jesus becomes one teacher among many; the Church one agency among many; salvation eroded as a concept. After all, if Jesus is not the unique Son of God come to save the world from its sins and a broken relationship with the Father, then what does he become?

The concept of the equality erupts from a new Arianism. Its Jesus is less than the only begotten Son of God; he is a 'creature with insights'. Salvation becomes meaningless; heaven and hell no longer pertain. There is no hell or judgement to be saved from. The ordination of women, the raising up of equality as the new divine principle, the breaking of the apostolic patterns, takes us to a place which the Church has been before.

Athanasius was the bishop who spent his life fighting with the first outbreak of Arianism. Arius' Jesus was a Jesus who was less than the incarnate Word; less than the unique only begotten Son of God; made rather than begotten. Athanasius saw that if this change in the nature of Christ that the new heresy proposed succeeded, the whole structure of the faith and the integrity of the Gospels would collapse.

We face the same threat today with the ordination of women, the muddling of gender and the elevation of "equality" over the teaching of Jesus.



Mary, Theotokos

## THE REVELATION OF GOD AS FATHER

Does the fatherhood of God matter anyway?

We have been lured into the misapprehension of looking at the universe through the eyes of Feuerbach and others like him. It was Feuerbach who persuaded European public opinion that by means of projection, we take our longing for God and project it onto a black cosmic canvas, and by means of this psychological self-delusion claim to have found a god created in our image.

CS Lewis offers us the antidote to this. He reminds us that all other religions outside the Judaeo-Christian experience are “made up” religions. That is, they were invented by their practitioners. To that extent Feuerbach’s critique may have some resonance.

But the unique aspect of the Judaeo-Christian revelation is that it comes from the outside and happens to people. It originates from the outside, not the inside. The experience of the transcendent God burst upon the prophets, as they in turn burst upon the people, saying “thus saith the Lord.”

The implications of this for projection are that they reverse the whole process. Instead of us projecting our identity onto God as a blank cosmic canvas, he projects his identity onto us, turning us from the blank canvas of

the animal into his children.

Gender is not theologically neutral at this point. Masculinity plays a role.

Unlike all the other religions of the world, there were within Judaism no goddesses

Nor were there any hermaphrodite deities; nor were there any priestesses. So one has to ask why not?

Why was Judaism marked out from all the other religious narratives of the world in this way? The answer appears to be that masculinity was an essential element of revelation.

Unlike all the other religions, God the Father – “Yahweh- I am that I am” was wholly transcendent. He did not emerge from within the universe, but was utterly distinct from it. The universe, the earth, all creation emerged from nothing – and was completely dependent on him. Masculinity connects to this, too.

A number of theologians have made the link between our experience of our own biology and theological ideas. Where gods are feminine, they are linked with fertility and the earth. The feminine is the fertile. It is inextricably linked with creation.

In the Old Testament, the great religious apostasy that the prophets were sent to rescue the people of God from, was the worship and placating of the feminine in the form of fertility goddesses; the Canaanite high places.

Masculinity become linked with the Creator, transcendence rather than

immanence.

Lewis continues to remind us that we use masculinity only because that is how God speaks of himself. In his paper *Priestesses* (p 237) he writes:

*“Christians think that God Himself has taught us how to speak of Him. To say that it does not matter is to say either that all the masculine imagery is not inspired, is merely human in origin, or else that, though inspired, it is quite arbitrary and unessential. And this is surely intolerable: or, if tolerable, it is an argument not in favour of Christian priestesses [or changes in biblical gender language but against Christianity. It is also surely based on a shallow view of imagery. Without drawing upon religion, we know from our poetical experience that image and apprehension cleave closer together than common sense is here prepared to admit; that a child who has been taught to pray to a Mother in heaven would have a religious life radically different from that of a Christian child. And as image and apprehension are in an organic unity, so, for a Christian, are human body and human soul.”*

Lewis’ point is that religious experience that places the feminine and the motherhood at the centre of its narrative looks very different from the Judaeo-Christian revelation.

Lewis addresses both the issue of projection and those who can’t tell the difference between biology and gender.

*“Everyone must sometimes have wondered why in nearly all tongues certain inanimate objects are masculine and others feminine. What is masculine about a mountain or feminine about certain trees? Ransom has cured me of believing that this is a purely morphological phenomenon, depending on the form of the world. Still less is gender an imaginative extension of sex. Our ancestors did not make mountains masculine because they projected male characteristics into them. The real process is the reverse. Gender is a reality, and a more fundamental reality than sex. Sex is, in fact, merely the adaptation to organic life of a fundamental polarity which divides all created beings. Female sex is simply one of the things that have feminine gender; there are many others, and Masculine and Feminine meet us on planes of reality where male and female would simply be meaningless. Masculine*

*is not attenuated male, nor feminine attenuated female. On the contrary, the male and female or organic creatures are rather faint and blurred reflections of masculine and feminine. Their reproductive functions, their differences in strength and size, partly exhibit, but partly also confuse and misrepresent, the real polarity.” (Perelandra p.200)*

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Father of Jesus is indeed therefore masculine. He is beyond sex, but not beyond gender. He is more like a Father than he is like a Mother, though Jesus, Mother Julian and St Anselm all felt free to use feminine and maternal imagery to augment and to amplify the kind of Father he is.

#### THE SPIRIT

St Paul tells us that those who experience the Holy Spirit find themselves calling out—Abba—father, dad. This leap of intimacy from the soul to the Father lies at the heart of the Christian experience. It is inconceivable that any person whose life is rooted in the Spirit would want to do anything but celebrate and amplify it. It is hard to know what to say to a bishop who wants to quench the experience of the Holy Spirit, and depersonalize this experience by replacing the intimacy, trust and love of “Abba” to the impersonal, vacuous and neutral concept of ‘God’. The drawing near of the Godhead to the soul takes place in a dynamic of increasing trust and love which is predicated on knowing the Creator as Father, the Saviour as Son, and the Spirit as the Comforter and strengthener who points to Jesus and Father. Strip out masculinity from this intimacy, and you are left with no Father, no Son and the Spirit whose promptings and leadings you refuse to recognise.

#### MARY THEOTOKOS

For many in the protestant compartment of the Church there is an obvious lack of the feminine. Turning their back on the third Council of Ephesus where St Mary was recognized as ‘theotokos’, the essential complementarity of the economy of salvation was diminished. In the refusal to recognise the role that Mary as Godbearer continues to play in the endless apparitions that stir the Church into fresh repentance

and deeper prayer, there is of course the danger of evacuating the role of the feminine from the Church. But the answer to the quest for a better balance between the genders in the narrative of salvation is to balance Adam and Eve, made in the image of God, with Jesus the Saviour and Mary theotokos. At the beginning of John’s Gospel, Jesus’ first miracle takes place as a response to her intercession. If we have to choose between the intercessions of the Mother of God and the Mother of the Church, whose obedience and humility are in proportion to the honour promised her by the angels, and the innovation of women bishops who take it upon themselves to diminish Jesus and his revelation of the Father, which should we choose?

#### DISCERNMENT

From what source do we trace the denial of Jesus as Saviour and ikon of the Father? Scripture tells us “from the father of lies.” From what source do we find the authority and integrity of Scripture denied and belittled? The same place. From what source do we find the unity, the holiness, the catholicity and the apostolicity of the Church distorted and diminished. The same place.

The movement born in Marxism, idolizing equality, confusing gender, undermining marriage, depriving children of true parenthood through politicized surrogacy, rebuffing the Holy Trinity, quenching the Spirit, prioritizing the relative over the objectivity and sanctity of revelation, - comes from the wrong spiritual source.

There is one further test. When orthodox theology on gender is placed in the public sphere, it seems to immediately evoke bile and hatred from the progressive and the heterodox. In order to divert attention from their own hatred, anger and pride, the opposing spirits seem to clamour

in their rage, accusing the orthodox of hate crime and bigotry.

St John advised us to “test the spirits to see if they are of God” (1 John 4.1.) Jesus said, by their fruits you shall know them. The fruits of this progressive diminished Christianity do not lead to a penitent, renewed and converting church, but rather pride, indiscriminating inclusivity, and a secular epistemology.

For some Anglicans it took the inevitable development of the idea of equality in the implementation of gay marriage before the implications of this new heresy was obvious. Others saw it earlier as the pro-women bishops lobbyists made concord with the gays rights lobby to help deliver gay marriage once some women had achieved the goal of women in the episcopate. Equality between the genders in the episcopate could not be separated conceptually or strategically from equality for gay partnerships with marriage.

It has now become obvious that the Anglican community has reached a parting of the ways. Bishop Rachel’s attempt to redirect the language of Jesus and the Holy Spirit help show us why.

There comes a point, and for many of us it is already here, where communion is breached by the assault on the integrity of Scripture and tradition in the name of the idols of egalitarianism, feminism, and relativism.

In the end, it is Scripture and the creeds that divide us. Bishop Rachel and those who appointed her and follow her are on one side of the divide; and the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church is on the other.



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Shane Schaezel is an author and freelance writer. He is the creator of *FullyChristian.Com*, a blog of apologetics and random musings from a Catholic in the Ozarks.

## 16 Magnificent Magi

Br. Ned Gerber, OSB, is Prior of the Anglican Benedictines of Christ the King. He has worked for many years in Government Healthcare, and with Hospitals run by the Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of Charity and other Church Ministries. Ned is the V.P./Treasurer of Forward in Faith International (Australasia).

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The Rev. Canon Dr. Gavin Ashenden lives in Jersey, in the United Kingdom.

*This month's cover is The Holy Night, by Correggio, early 16th Century.*

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# In the News

**Jihad Terror:** ISIS affiliated Muslim terrorists killed over 120 people and wounded many more in savage attacks across central Paris in November.

French President, Françoise Hollande, declared a state of emergency and vowed to “annihilate” those responsible. Subsequently, massive raids were conducted by police throughout France, leading to multiple arrests and at least one armed stand-off with Jihadis, in which several terrorists were shot. French air and naval assets have been deployed in the ongoing fight against ISIS in Syria and Iraq.

Christian leaders from around the world have condemned the attacks, with Pope Francis calling them “inhuman” and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow calling for “repentance.”

*Forward in Christ* urges your prayers on behalf of the victims of Islamic terror around the world and for the conversion of Muslims to faith in Christ.

**CofE Bishop Prays to a New God:** Rachel Treweek, the new bishop figure of the Diocese of Gloucester, told the U.K.’s Guardian that she no longer prays to God as “he,” although she sometimes forgets.

According to the Guardian, “She personally prefers to say neither ‘he’ nor ‘she’, but ‘God’. ‘Sometimes I lapse, but I try not to.’”

Christians believe that God has revealed himself in masculine terms and, in Christ, as a man. We have to ask, what deity is Treweek praying to?

**TEC Tanks, ACNA Grows:** According to the latest figures, the Episcopal Church (TEC) continues its long decline.

From 2010-2014, the small but wealthy denomination lost 241 churches, 189,000 members, and 82,000 persons in average Sunday attendance.

In contrast, The Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) grew by 248 churches over the same period and gained 10,000 new members. Average Sunday attendance grew modestly, from 69,197 in 2009, to 71,664 in 2014, making it comparable to the Anglican Church of Canada.

**Archbishop Duncan Retires:** Archbishop Duncan announced his retirement, effective June 2016, in November, stating, “It has seemed to me like the work I was called to do is as complete as it can be. I believe that this is a very good moment for me to let go and to pass the chief pastor’s crozier to another, just as we have largely passed diocesan leadership, both clergy and lay, from one generation to another. The years of conflict, and of course correction, within the Body of Christ are past for now. The challenge ahead is one of strengthening the Church for discipleship and evangelization in a hostile and needy nation and world.”

ACNA’s Archbishop, Foley Beach, commented, “As its first Primate, Archbishop Duncan led the Anglican Church in North America through critical stages of its formation, and we will be forever grateful for his years of courageous, servant leadership. Please join me in praying for the Diocese

of Pittsburgh as it seeks God’s will for its next bishop, and for Archbishop Duncan and his wife Nara as God leads them in this next season of life.”

**Church of Iceland Loses its Conscience:** The Church of Iceland has scrapped its freedom of conscience clause, ending the right of clergy to refuse to solemnize same-sex marriages. The resolution introduced by the Rev. Guðrún Karls Helgudóttir overturned a 2007 statement by the annual Church Council, the Kirkjuþing, that held the “freedom of clergy in these matters must be respected.” However Ms. Helgudóttir argued that it was now time to “take things the whole way and place no limits on human rights.” The conflict between religious freedom and human rights must always be “decided in favor of human rights,” she argued. As state employees Church of Iceland clergy should not be allowed to place their conscience above the law. On 28 October 2015 the 29 member Kirkjuþing endorsed the resolution. -- *Anglican Ink*.

**Episcopal Dean Blesses Abortion Clinic:** A group of clergypersons blessed a Cleveland abortion clinic in October, on the initiative of a Methodist minister, Laura Young. The blessing was carried out by the lesbian Dean of Cleveland’s Episcopal Cathedral, Tracy Lind.

“Bless this building,” prayed Lind, “May its walls stand strong against the onslaught of shame thrown at it. May it be a beacon of hope for those who need its services.”

Young heads up the Ohio chapter of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (RCRC), an enthusiastic supporter of the taxpayer funded abortion giant, Planned Parenthood, which was praised by the group for doing “God’s work.”

What part of doing God’s work does selling baby parts to biotech firms fall under, and for that matter, what “God” is the RCRC working for?

Pray for life.

**FiFUK Transitions:** At its November 2015 National Assembly, at the Church of St Alban the Martyr, Holborn, Forward in Faith UK completed an important transition. The organization’s primary role in future will be as a support structure for The Society of S. Wilfrid and S. Hilda.

*Forward in Christ* wishes FiFUK well in its new role.

**Primates Meeting:** Conservative GAFCON primates, representing the great majority of the Anglican Communion, have agreed to attend a Primates meeting, called by the Archbishop of Canterbury, in January. ACNA Archbishop, Foley Beach, has been invited, as has the Episcopal Church (TEC) and the Anglican Church of Canada. (ACoC).

**Merry Christmas!** *Forward in Christ* wishes all its readers a merry and joyful Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of Christ and the coming of peace, love, and salvation into the world.

# The Paris Massacre

*A statement by Archbishop Mouneer Anis*

Once again, the world has been shocked by acts of unspeakable violence and brutality. Once again, the world mourns with the families and friends of victims of tragedy. Once again, the world searches for meaning and hope in the terrible wreckage left in the wake of such dehumanizing hatred, senseless bloodshed, and unparalleled loss.

In this time of grief, it is all too easy to see the path the world has laid out for us. It is the path of retributive justice, of reciprocate hatred, of fear and anger. This is the way the world moves; the way governments, militaries, and judicial systems function. But it is at this critical time that we must ask ourselves what our role must be in the aftermath of such tragedy.

The best we can possibly do is to look to the most enduring response to violence and death that there is. The death by crucifixion of Jesus Christ, some two thousand years ago. Unjust powers, motivated by anger and fear, murdered the very incarnation of God. What became of this greatest travesty? God forged it into the greatest triumph over evil that Creation has yet seen. And what of the one who became the victim in our place? "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

In the very darkest hour, Jesus called upon God for forgiveness. We see this message in his teachings, and then echoed in his living and his dying. Profound forgiveness. Profound mercy. Profound grace.

In 2006, an armed man entered a one-room Amish schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. He shot ten girls between 6 and 13 years old, five of whom died, and then committed suicide. The response of the Amish community was swift. Within hours of the shooting, an Amish neighbor had visited the family of the gunman and offered comfort and forgiveness. Standing by the body of his murdered granddaughter, a grandfather told several young boys "We must not think evil of this man." Some 30 of the Amish community attended the



funeral of the assailant, and one of the few outsiders permitted to the funeral of one of the Amish girls was the man's widow.

I sometimes wonder at the capacity of humankind for such forgiveness, but then I realise that I am merely wondering at God's grace. I look back to the earliest words of the Bible and find that in Genesis 1:27 we were created in the image of God and that in verse 31 God saw everything that had been made and "it was supremely good."

And, even though much has happened since God set those mighty intentions into play, I hold God's words close from 2 Corinthians 12:9 "My grace is enough for you, because power is made perfect in weakness." And in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength."

Perhaps it is in the darkest hours that the light shines out the brightest, that the vision of the kingdom is clearest, no matter how distant. The path to that kingdom is never so clearly laid, but the vision is there. It is a vision of all nations streaming forward, all division cast aside, all conflict passed, Jew and Gentile together.

So today I mourn for all the victims of this unthinkable violence. I mourn for their family. And their family is this world. Every last person is their neighbor. Every last person is a victim of this tragedy—violence is indeed an evil which harms both victim and per-

petrator. I pray for the citizens of Paris, for the country of France, for Europe, for every country the world over, as they bow their heads from the weight of death and useless violence as it continues to visit itself upon brother after brother, sister after sister. I pray for healing, for forgiveness, and for hope in the hearts of the affected families. Wrong has been done, and there is not one person on this world who is not a victim of it.

And I pray that through it all, the goodness of God will continue to shine through. The goodness that was there at the moment of creation, that was created anew in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and that continues to be created as the kingdom of heaven struggles forth in the darkest of times and places.

I pray for forgiveness. I pray for grace. I pray for peace.

✠

*The Most Rev. Dr. Mouneer Hanna Anis is Archbishop of the Episcopal/Anglican Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa and Primate of the Episcopal/Anglican Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East.*

# Merry Christmas!

*By Fr. Lawrence Bausch*

When Christians began to celebrate the birth of Jesus near the end of December, we were partying alongside an already festive pagan culture. Many peoples throughout the ancient world were accustomed to celebrating the “birth of the sun” at the winter solstice and the yearly promise of the returning of light was anticipated on the darkest day of the year in a kind of wild hopefulness. This feast was celebrated with such customs as the exchanging of gifts, the freeing of servants, and the closing of schools, with much merry-making.

In many ways, Christians today are in a similar situation; celebrating the birth of Jesus in the midst of a culture which has adopted our religious holy day and turned it into a festive “holiday season” during which a spirit of “peace and good will” is extended to all, with the conventions of gift giving, time off from work and school; with much merry-making.

What is the difference between the meaning of Christmas and the time-honored values of hope for the future, expressions of kindness, and commitment to relieve the hardships of others? Perhaps the best way to highlight the difference is to hear again the angel’s words as recalled in St. Luke’s Gospel: “I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11)

We Christians celebrate not merely the promises of light which this world extends (and takes away), nor merely our highest and most unselfish intentions (which do not remain consistent), but the arrival and promised help of a Savior who offers to redeem us from our limitations and open to us the place of everlasting light:

*Mild He lays His glory by,  
born that we no more may die,*

*born to raise us from the earth,  
born to give us second birth.  
Risen with healing in His wings,  
Light and life to all He brings,  
Hail the Son of Righteousness!  
Hail, the heaven-born Prince of Peace!*

(Hymn #87, 1982 Hymnal, verse 3)

As we see increasing animosity towards traditional Christian teaching and practice, may we retain our focus on Christ, first and foremost. And, may we strive to be joyful witnesses to the Gospel of Salvation in Christ for the sake of those we know who have not yet received Him.



*Fr. Lawrence Bausch is President of FiFNA and Rector of Holy Trinity, Ocean Beach, San Diego, California.*

## *Support The Ministry of Forward in Christ!*

Dear Friends,

I am sure that all of us appreciate the value of *Forward in Christ*. We read it for our own benefit, and we share it with others. It is both informative, attractive and above all, it proclaims the Faith once delivered by Christ to the Apostles.

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The cost of a full issue of *Forward in Christ* is over \$4000. Please prayerfully consider your support of this magazine’s ongoing ministry.

With every blessing for a joyful Christmas,

The Rev. Canon Lawrence D. Bausch, President, Forward in Faith North America.

*Please contact the FiFNA office at 1-800-225-3661, or email [julia.smead@fifna.org](mailto:julia.smead@fifna.org), to support this magazine’s ministry of proclaiming the Faith once delivered by Christ to the Apostles.*

# God Loves You

## *A Christmas message from Bishop Jack Iker*

In a wonderful Prayer Book collect, we acknowledge before God that “we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves.” This, in a nutshell, is the human condition – we need God’s help. We cannot save ourselves, much less any one else! We cannot save our family or loved ones – try as we might.

We cannot save the world about us or even our church – though we may wish we could. We need a Savior to deliver us from sin and death, for without His divine assistance, we are bound by our faults, our failures, and our mortality. Without His grace, we are hopeless and are headed to eternal separation from Him.

The good news of Christmas speaks directly to this dilemma. God has provided a Savior for us – Jesus Christ the Redeemer! He alone has the power to save us and help us, heal us, and deliver us. This is the joyful proclamation of the Christ-Mass that goes out to all people, for all time – the message of an

angel: “I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people: for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11)

This is what gladdens our hearts and lifts our spirits at this special time of the year. This is what gives us hope for the future. God’s love has acted to save us and redeem us, and to give us the gift of eternal life with Him. Whatever our discouragements and fears, this is the message that gives us hope and promise for the days ahead.

This is the Light that shines upon us in our moments of darkness.

Christmas is not about what we can do - or should do - or even want to do. Christmas is about what God has done and continues to do, in His saving love for us. It is not something we deserve, nor is it anything we can make happen. It is pure gift – pure grace – pure love! We can only receive it with a thankful heart; it is deliverance from bondage

and darkness and death, for all eternity.

St. Augustine of Hippo spoke of this marvelous Christmas gift when he wrote to his diocese some 1600 years ago: “God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love!” He loves each one of us as He loves His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

He loves you as much now, as He ever will!

Merry Christmas, dear people of faith - God loves you!



*The Rt. Rev. Jack Iker is the Bishop of Fort Worth, Texas.*

# Merry Christ-mass!

*Worship the Prince of Peace*

**The Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth**

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# Christian Identity

*Bishop Ray Sutton reflects on the birth of Christ and our rebirth as Christians*

I had a coach in college who would give every player on the team a nickname. He called the second name the team name. I remember one time he explained that the team name was our identity on the team regardless of what people called us when we weren't with the team. On one occasion he mentioned that we have two identities, one as a player and one as person. I remember one of the other players asking the coach if he meant that as a player we weren't a person.

The coach didn't answer, he just said that the point of our life on the team was to be a player. And he stressed that the new team name's identity was to take over all the others. I think that was the first time I realized the power of a name, especially a second name introducing a second identity taking over the first.

The Gospel passage for one of the Sundays of Christmas introduces us to the lesson of two names, two identities, with one purpose. The lesson of two names and identities comes to us in the passage via a group who was among the first to witness the newborn Christ Child in Bethlehem. In fact, these individuals are in every crèche scene. I'm referring to the shepherds.

Luke says this of the shepherds, "And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child." (Luke 2:15-17)

The shepherds had two identities but one singular purpose. They were shepherds, but they were in service as shepherds for the newborn king. This new purpose of serving the Christ Child was consistent with the kind of unique shepherds they were. They were not standard shepherds, even before Christ was born.

A Messianic Jewish scholar named



Alfred Edersheim points out that there was a special tower in north Bethlehem referred to in Scripture that unlocks the dual role of the shepherds that kept sheep there. The Prophet Micah predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem at the "tower of the flock" (Micah 5:2; 4:8), which in Hebrew is Migdal Eder. So in Bethlehem there was this special tower. Specifically this was a tower for shepherds to watch their sheep. And importantly, at the base of the tower was a room or cave where sheep were to be birthed. Important to note: the sheep around Bethlehem were not ordinary sheep, hence the shepherds were not regular shepherds.

Edersheim points out that the sheep at Bethlehem were for the singular purpose of being used in the sacrifices at Jerusalem. They were therefore to be without blemish, which is why there was so much care surrounding the birth of the sheep - thus making certain that they qualified for temple sacrifice. This was the context in which Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Perhaps the birthing cave or room at the foot of the tower was the stable where Jesus was born.

So the shepherds around Bethlehem had two identities. They were shepherds, but they were specifically

shepherds in service of the Temple. Their second identity as temple shepherds took over their purpose of shepherding. A second identity was to dominate the first. God's identity was to govern their other identity, which brings us to the conclusion of our passage, to a statement that drives home further a second, Divine identity taking over the first.

St. Luke concludes the shepherd segment with the following words, "And when eight days were completed before His circumcision, His name was then called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb" (Luke 2:21). This is the second name referred to for our Lord in this passage. The first one mentioned by the angels is the "Christ the Lord" (2:11). This is His Divine Name. The second name is "Jesus," His Human Name. Thus, our Lord importantly is referred to with two names in this passage. The second name, Jesus, means God saves. This was the purpose of His Life. So it is with us.

Since baptism in the New Testament completes, fulfills and in some sense takes over what circumcision accomplished in the Old Testament, the same practice of naming a child at baptism continues. But think about it. A person is born with a family name.



At circumcision in the Old Testament, and Baptism in the New Testament, a second name is given. In the Church, we call the first name the Christian name. In these two names we find two identities subsumed under one purpose.

And thus, as we approach Christmas and the beginning of a new year, we are reminded of the two identities we have as people of God. We have our natural identity and we have our spiritual identity. Both, though, are to come together in serving the Lord with

one purpose. Who we are in Christ is to take over our first identity just like those special shepherds at the birth of Jesus. The problem, however, with two names and two identities is the potential to live a double life. As children of the Lord we walk in two kingdoms, the world out there and the world of God's realm, the Church.

As we enter a new year, let us resolve to live with greater singleness of purpose under the banner of whom we became at baptism. Let us live a singular commitment to Jesus

regardless of where we are. May our two identities merge into the one purpose of walking faithfully in Christ in 2016.

FC

*Bishop Ray Sutton is Bishop Coadjutor in the Diocese of Mid-America of the Reformed Episcopal Church and Dean of Ecumenical Affairs for ACNA.*

## Santa Doesn't Come For Me

*By Bishop Keith Ackerman*

Years ago my wife and young children and I took a trip to Montreal in Canada, to visit our son's Godfather, a priest, who had been the Rector of my "home parish" St. Mary's Church in the Oakland section of Pittsburgh. The priest had left Pittsburgh, and with a new graduate degree in Social Work, worked closely with the homeless in a difficult part of Montreal as part of a parish outreach ministry. Those who are hungry and homeless do not care very much about which Church or Denomination feeds them or finds a place for them to sleep. A great blessing for my family, and for me, is that our son's Godfather did not have enough room in his small house, so we stayed at one of the Homeless Shelters during our stay in Montreal.

As one might expect, the furnishings were very spartan, and the food was very basic French Canadian. The lay couple who maintained the Shelter - he an Englishman and she a French Canadian - lived a very simple life. Indeed, when I celebrated Mass in the chapel, maintained by the Roman Catholic Church, it was the simplest and most basic chapel I had ever seen. Certainly each day the population would change, and every day was a new day to meet new people.

The couple told us that they had been childless, and one day a small child was left on their door step. They took her in, loved her, and adopted her. The couple couldn't wait until Christmas so that they could share their love for Jesus and the joy of Christmas cel-



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eborations. They quietly bought humble presents with their meager income, and wrapped them for their little girl. They told her stories about the first Christmas, and then told her about the exciting arrival of Pere Noel who would come on Christmas Eve.

On Christmas Day the excited couple awakened early and waited for their daughter to come running down the steps. They had replayed the scene in their minds for months, and they waited. They listened and heard their young daughter humming very softly in her room, and they ascended the steps of the shelter, to see if their daughter was alright. They shouted, "It's Christmas (Pere Noel) Santa Claus has come." The daughter smiled and did not move, continuing to hum a Christmas carol. Finally the couple couldn't wait any longer and once again they said, "Santa has come!" The little girl turned to them and with a sweet smile said. "I know, Mommy and Daddy, but Santa doesn't come for me."

I suspect that most of us have an opinion about the commercialization of Christmas. We see Christmas movies where no one ever talks about going to church, and we hear phrases such as "we aren't doing Christmas this year," or "I don't do Christmas anymore." What do they mean? Do they mean that no Christ Mass will be celebrated this year? Do they mean that December 25 will be removed from the Calendar. Of course not. They often mean that the wonderful (and sometimes odd) festivities surrounding a period of time in November and December will not occur.

Indeed, for them, perhaps, Santa isn't coming this year.

For many homeless and hungry people, Christmas is a depressing thought, and, like Thanksgiving, is often the only time when people think about them. Still Jesus' birthday will be celebrated, but if we brought someone into our homes and shared Christmas movies with them, would they know whose birthday it was?

Perhaps for those who set up for "Christmas" festivities, for those who call themselves Christians, it is a good time to look at our homes and ask the question, "If someone who had never heard of Jesus were to walk into my house would they determine quickly what the significance of this Season is?" Would they find Jesus?

I still think about that little girl in Montreal, and wonder what she taught her children. Once she figured that Santa does come for her, did she remember seeing the love of Jesus shining through her parents? Their love for her was overwhelming, but their love for Jesus was even greater. For after they shared their small gifts with their daughter, they led her into a large room where a large group of people waited... ready to receive their gifts... gifts that would not be discarded, but the gifts of knowing that they could and were loved and valued. They celebrated Christmas.



*Bishop Keith Ackerman is the retired Bishop of Quincy and FiFNA's Ambassador for Anglican and Ecumenical Affairs.*

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*Let us become like Christ, since Christ became like us.  
Let us become divine for his sake, since he for ours became [human].  
He assumed the worst that he might give us the better; he became poor that we through his poverty might be rich; he took upon himself the form of a servant that we might receive back our liberty; he came down that we might be exalted; he was tempted that we might conquer; he was dishonored that he might glorify us; he ascended that he might draw us to himself, who were lying low in the fall of sin.*

*Let us give all, offer all, to him who gave himself a ransom and reconciliation for us.*

*St. Gregory of Nazianzen*

# Homecoming, Healing & Hope

## *St. Luke's, East Aurora, New York*

St. Luke's Anglican Church in East Aurora, (greater Buffalo) New York, was founded in 2003 by six local families who were led by the Holy Spirit to leave their TEC parish due to radical innovations within that denomination. Early on, they met on Sundays in one family's living room for Morning Prayer, and decided upon the name of St. Luke's for their new parish.

Within a matter of weeks, the pastor of First Baptist Church of East Aurora extended an invitation for the families to share First Baptist's church building for Anglican worship services. St. Luke's still conducts services and other activities at the First Baptist location due to the gracious hospitality of that host church.

In February of 2004 the Very Rev. Michael William R. Stott, affectionately known as "Father Bill", became the founding rector of St. Luke's. Soon after, bylaws were adopted, a Vestry was formed, and St. Luke's became affiliated with the Anglican Province of America. Upon Father Bill's retirement from active oversight of St. Luke's, the Rev. Seth Brooker was called to be St. Luke's second rector, beginning his ministry in November of 2009.

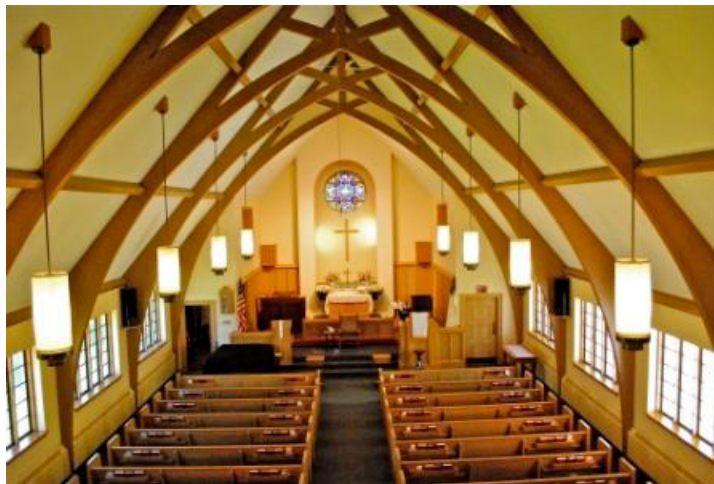
Early in 2010, the parish voted to join the Missionary Diocese of All Saints in the Anglican Church in North America. Through the process of Appreciative Inquiry, led by Father Brooker, St. Luke's vestry adopted its church motto, "Homecoming, Healing and Hope" in Christ.

With the assistance of gifted and dedicated assisting clergy, including The Rev. Pascal Fermo, Rev. Danny Hart, Deacon Vincent Coppola and the late Father Lyle Lampkin, St. Luke's ministries and outreaches have been greatly blessed and enriched in God's service.

Believing the classic 1928 Book of Common Prayer to be the "perfect balance of Word and sacrament", (v. Quentin Morrow's *Why '28 in '01?*) St. Luke's uses this beautiful, balanced and Biblical form of worship every Sunday, accompanied with traditional hymnody from the 1940 Hymnal as well as contemporary hymns and songs. St. Luke's seeks to embody the reformed Catholicism of classical Anglicanism through reverent, heart-felt liturgy and an evangelical approach to preaching and teaching.

An average Sunday at St. Luke's will find multiple generations filling the pews for the 9:00 AM service. The parish is blessed with an abundance of young children, some of whom stay in the nursery while others attend the service with their parents. Some parishioners travel from as far as an hour away to attend. One newer family said that they chose St. Luke's because it is one of the few churches in Western New York that offers both traditional worship and sound biblical teaching.

St. Luke's has been blessed in being able to support a number of outreach ministries and projects that is out of proportion to its size. These include a bi-monthly Eucharist at an area nursing home, Lenten offerings for Anglican Relief & Development, making blankets for nursing home residents, a yearly Thanksgiving food drive for the Buffalo City



Mission and the annual Glory Tree ministry during Advent which collects gifts and necessary items for needy families. This year's Advent projects include a major fundraising drive to benefit Samaritan's Purse, collecting baby items for a local crisis pregnancy center and making hats and booties for a local hospital NICU. Particularly near and dear to the parish's heart is supporting the Magdalene Project in Niagara Falls which brings the Gospel to street prostitutes and disadvantaged youth. This support includes an annual back-to-school backpack drive and monthly financial support.

The parish has shared its faith with East Aurora and the surrounding communities by hosting a yearly Blessing of the Animals at the local dog park and has held two blessing services for first responders.

The members of St. Luke's are also firm believers in the power of prayer and have an active intercessory Prayer Group ministry which collects prayer requests from near and far. In the past year special services of prayer have been held for the persecuted Church. The Prayer Group also hosts an annual Soup Supper and a Prayer Breakfast to share their ministry with the wider parish family.

In October, 2015, Fr. Brooker was called to a new ministry in Alaska. St. Luke's is currently searching for its next Rector to shepherd them and lead them in fulfilling the Great Commission. Clergy who are interested in applying for the position may send a letter of interest and C.V. to Search Committee Chairman Mr. Tom Forrest, at [tforrest@verizon.net](mailto:tforrest@verizon.net), or to the church at 591 Porterville Road, East Aurora, NY 14052. A copy of the parish profile is available on the ACNA job board or from Mr. Forrest.

St. Luke's hopes to continue to be a beacon showing the light and love of Christ to a world consistently more secular and self-involved.



*The Rev'd Seth Brooker is Rector of St. Luke's Anglican Church, East Aurora, New York.*

# Lasting Love

By Fr. Gene Geromel

On my first visit to Westminster Abbey I couldn't wait to visit the final resting place of Henry V. It is my favorite Shakespearean play. When my parish church, St. Bartholomew's, paid off its loan to buy back our property from the Episcopal Church our choir sang *Non Nobis Domine*: Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name give the praise. It was a reminder that our victory was ultimately a gift from God. It happened because of the faith of parishioners and the generosity of those outside the parish, especially from Forward in Faith members. But back to the Abbey.

On the six-hundredth anniversary of the battle of Agincourt there were many articles about the Chantry Chapel above Henry the Fifth's coffin. On my many visits to the Abbey no one ever came up to me and said, "See here Yank, you look like a Shakespeare fan, do you know that if that door were open you could climb the steps and visit a chapel where a Mass is to be said for the soul of the good prince and king?" It wasn't until there were articles about the Chantry Chapel that I ever heard about it. "Five hundred poor I have in yearly pay, who twice a day their wither'd hands hold up toward heaven, to pardon blood; and I have two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests sing still for Richard's soul." This is what Henry did for the soul of the man his Father killed.

My first thought was, "I want to see it." My second thought was, "Do you think they would let us say Mass there for Henry's soul?" My last thought was more mundane, practical and blunt, "What did they do with the money?" When you leave money for Masses to be said, it should be spent for Masses for the Dead. Obviously, the answer to the last question is: the Reformation and the dissolution of the monasteries and chantries.

Here in the American church we would refer to such things as endowments or an endowment fund. I once visited a parish in New Hampshire where the church, parish hall and rectory were paid for by a woman whose son was killed in the First World War. The gift was with the understanding that every year a Mass was to be said for her son's soul.

When we think of endowments we think of the past. My parish was built because of an endowment, and so were several others in the county. A man named Charles Barth set aside money in one endowment fund to build family churches where there would be regular Sunday service. He then set up an endowment to support those parishes until they could become independent. (When I came to the parish they had a perpetual list of the dead to be read at All Soul's day. His name was not on the list. It is now.) I have been here nearly thirty-two years and he died long before me, therefore he is spoken of in the past tense. Yet, he thought of the future.

I know many despair of the future of the church and in particular, their parish. I hear people say we only have twenty years and this or that parish will be out of business.

Well, what are you doing about it? When Henry V was troubled by the fact that his Father shed royal blood he did good works and had Masses said. If you are concerned



Henry V

about your parish's future, enough at least that you express opinions about its viability in twenty years, when was the last time that you invited someone to church? Do you tithe?

I remember a very faithful parishioner, who spoke of tithing frequently, tell me that in their last job they made six figures. My first thought was I don't remember hearing that our pledges ranged from \$525 to \$9,000 to \$10,000. Often, we think pledging and tithing are synonymous.

Along these lines is a simple question: Is the church in your will? Twice in my ministry I remember parishioners who were single, retired and owned a home. Both had nephews who were their only relatives and with whom they had terrible relationships. Because neither of them had a will, guess where their estate went? Yet, if one of them had remembered the church in their will our endowment would have doubled in size.

The first person who remembered our church in their will was Harriet Morrison. She came to our church a couple of years after I arrived. She was a disabled veteran. She found friendship, worship she enjoyed and spiritual sustenance in our parish. When she died she divided her estate in four parts: One part for each child and one part for the church.

On the other hand, I have had people who have been members of the church for many years who made no mention of the church in their will. Who tell me how well-off their children are financially, "I never made in any given year what my children make." The same time they praise their children's financial success they lament the future of the church. Somehow they see no connection, no opportunity, no gift from God.

This Christmas, consider your gift to Christ, in His body, the Church.



Fr. Gene Geromel is Rector of St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church in Swartz Creek, Michigan.

# Thinking Out Loud

By William Murchison

What a relief! Donald Trump, in an unprecedented measure of religious outreach, proposes the possibility of a Starbucks boycott, to protest – I have to admit, the theology kind of disintegrates here -- to protest the color of this year's coffee cups, which are unadorned red, you see, and lack reindeers and snowmen and the appurtenances of a modern Christmas; and which give Dr. Trump the notion that Starbucks doesn't really care about Christmas.

To this level the Christmas wars plummet: the idea being, I guess, that if Starbucks kept the reindeer on the coffee cups, the spiritual regeneration of America would seem likelier than it does at present. And... oh, let's drop it.

Not because reindeer and the like properly belong to the Christmas milieu many of us associate with the comfortable post-World War II context into which a weary America sank gratefully. A culture's chosen symbols matter, of course, but not so much as to preclude Starbucks' choosing any color, including puce, in which it wants to present Grande Cappuccino.

At the same time, small things often tell, or especially enhance the narrative of, large stories; in this case, the story of the culture's growing disaffection from Christianity.

This fall, the Pew Research Center's U. S. Religious Landscape Study gives our once-fertile terrain a color more like brown than dark green.

Those whom we have learned over the last few years to taxonomize as the "nones" make up 23 percent of the population, according to Pew. This includes atheists, agnostics, and people who say their religion doesn't amount to much. Secular convictions are gaining strength. "Consistent evidence," say the Pew researchers, shows the "nones" becoming less religious. Among this category, believers in God are just 61 percent vs. 70 percent in 2007. "Only 27 percent of the 'nones' are absolutely certain about God's existence, down from 36 percent in 2007." Meanwhile a third of the religiously unaffiliated say Godamighty,

there's no God, period (my own gloss on the matter).

The other side of the coin, according to Pew, is that religious commitment among the already committed isn't falling off. We're not gaining recruits, but the front lines are holding. For now. Without substantial recruits, the religious ranks thin through processes decreed by God himself – debility and death.

Another implication for the future of religion needs taking account of. The sagacious religion reporter Terry Mattingly, in conversation with the religion researcher John Green, of the University of Akron, learns that "a large, separate, truly secular subculture in the American population" is provisionally in formation. Many of today's young people, Green says, defy the old trend of straying from the church early on but returning to it in order to marry and raise children. "Maybe," he tells Mattingly, "more and more Americans are never going to get married and they're never going to have kids and settle down." The implications of such a cultural shift are enormous.

Marriage and family, despite their standing in the civil culture of J.P.'s, marriage licenses, compulsory education, and so forth, are religious institutions at bottom: their structure religious, their aims and ends religious. Without the elements of pledges to God and of marital disciplines that emphasize longevity of relationship and the faithful, loving care of children, there is little purpose to marriage. Might as well shack up, as we used to say in a less PC world than this one, and engage in combinations of any kind, including, naturally, homosexual and lesbian combinations. Big deal. Who cares? Abortion is an obvious part of the program: kids if you want 'em, "pregnancy terminations" if your contraceptive equipment plays you false.

Back to Dr. Trump. It's no wonder, perhaps, that Starbucks feels no special recognition, even of a debased sort, is due its coffee cups. The Starbucks constituency, generally regard-




ed as hip and with-it (as well as blessed with cash), likely fills and tosses the company's cups without a thought for the season's sacred pedigree.

Does that mean the angels in the skies over Bethlehem might better have spared their vocal chords and the shepherds the labor of hastening to the side of a manger where lay, in swaddling clothes, the Son of God? I think many know it means nothing of the sort.

A once-familiar point needs rehearsing and rehearing. The Christian faith is no contrivance of a brilliant human workshop, wringing sobs of appreciation from human admirers. The faith doesn't need the "nones." All right – that sounds brutal. The Christian faith wants them, yearns for them, prays for their reconciliation with the Savior of the World. But nonetheless, the faith points to arrangements – Christian marriage, for instance – that exceed in worth any that the "nones," however artfully counseled, could come up with.

Which is where the Church comes in, now as always. We remember the Church, surely. We remember what the Church does to put flesh on the stark bones of grudging belief. Not when Starbucks does it. No -- when the Church does it, laying aside internecine lawsuits, "social justice" obsessions, Millennium Development Goals, and accommodations of all sorts with the notion of heaven as the great political

rally in the sky. The same sky from which the glory of the Lord shone as an angel proclaimed the birth of a Savior. Funny coincidence. 

William Murchison is an author and journalist. He lives in Dallas, Texas.

# The Gift of Unity

By Shane Schaetzel

Christmas season is a time for giving. On Christmas Day, December 25 in the West, it is traditional to exchange gifts. For some, the giving goes on well into the Christmas season. A growing number of Christians are beginning to observe the traditional twelve days of Christmas again, extending family get-togethers and dinner with friends out from December 25 through January 6. Of course there are always religious celebrations, wherein during the holy sacrifice of the Mass, we are all reminded of the ultimate gift God gave to humanity in the form of his Son Jesus Christ.

It is right and proper for Christians to extend their Christmas celebration, as we are beginning to see again, and in doing so they bless the world around them with a much needed, extended, and non-commercialized Christmas cheer!

Perhaps one of the greatest, and often overlooked, gift of Christmas is a sign of unity that Christians have in the West. Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist or Pentecostal; we all celebrate the birth of our Lord on December 25 -- the Feast of the Nativity. Dates may seem trivial to some, but such simple things go a long way toward promoting unity among Christian believers.

When I was growing up as a Baptist, and then later as an Evangelical adult, I never once questioned the date for Christmas. It was always December 25. It was printed right there on the calendar. Isn't it wonderful that this date is so agreed on, that even secular calendar-makers acknowledge it? Sure, many of them acknowledge the Orthodox Christmas too, usually falling on January 7, but those same calendars just mark the Western date of December 25 as 'Christmas', and for centuries this has been a visible sign of unity among a much divided Western Christianity.

Later, as I approached thirty, I



The Mass

became an Anglican, and it was from an Anglican pulpit I heard my priest say that Anglicanism is in many ways a church of Christmas. Now I don't know exactly what he meant by that, but I certainly liked the idea, and at least in my local parish, that definitely seemed to be the case. We went all-out on the 'hanging of the greens' during Advent. Christmas decoration was a serious business, and the whole parish was involved. The midnight Mass was almost obligatory, or at least it seemed that way, and I have to say that our priest did a very fine job of making the celebration special. I used to bring my Evangelical sister to the Midnight Mass, and she loved it.

So now as a Catholic, years later, it seems fitting to me that a copy of *Divine Worship: The Missal*, will be presented as a gift to Pope Francis on the first Sunday of Advent in 2015, preparing the way for the Christmas season of giving. This liturgical text is a compilation of the Anglican Patrimony, which comes to us from the Book of Common Prayer, along with other texts held in common between Anglicanism and Catholicism, some of them going back to the pre-Tridentine era.

It is the product of a joint effort between the Vatican, and the Pope's

personal ordinariates for groups of Anglicans, created by the 2009 apostolic constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus*. The resulting *Anglicanae Traditiones* commission developed this missal after determining what aspects of the Anglican Patrimony nourished Catholic faith and ecclesial unity. The liturgy has been approved for use in all ordinariate parishes as of the first Sunday of Advent, and will henceforth be considered another "use" or form of the Roman Rite.

Currently, the Roman Rite has two forms. The first is the Ordinary Form (*Novus Ordo* or Missal of Pope Paul VI) which is commonly celebrated in vernacular languages in Catholic parishes all over the world. The second is the Extraordinary Form (*Vetus Ordo* or Missal of Saint Pius V, sometimes called the "Tridentine Mass" having developed from the Council of Trent in the 16th century), commonly known as the "Traditional Latin Mass" and still celebrated in various places throughout the Western world.

So, on the first Sunday of Advent in 2015, the Roman Catholic Church will adopt *Divine Worship: The Missal*, a whole new form of the Roman Rite, which will contain some elements even more ancient than the Traditional Latin

Mass. Divine Worship will then become the form of liturgy used primarily by the Pope's personal ordinariates for groups of Anglicans. However, the liturgy itself is fully part of the Roman Rite, which means that all Catholics can attend it, as well as meet their Sunday obligation at a parish that celebrates it.

While this new form of the Roman Rite will be exclusively used in ordinariate parishes, and ordinariate parishes will be the primary celebrants and guardians of this wonderful liturgy, the previous pope (Benedict XVI) suggested that these liturgical texts would be a gift to the entire Catholic Church. The fact that any Roman Catholic can attend such liturgies seems to fulfil this intention.

What has clearly happened is something wonderful. Divine Worship: The Missal, along with other elements of the Anglican Patrimony, have been given as a gift to the Roman Catholic Church. In turn, Rome gives them as a gift not only to Catholics who come

from Anglicanism, but to Anglicanism in general, as a sign of realized and completed ecumenical unity. Within the ordinariates, the goal of ecumenism has been fully realised, perhaps not entirely the way the Oxford Fathers envisioned over a century ago, but it is unity nonetheless.

Anglicans have been united with Rome, but not absorbed by Rome. Instead, the Vatican has recognized the value of the Anglican Patrimony, and adopted it as part of its own liturgical heritage and rite. Henceforth, from now and ever more, the Anglican Patrimony has left its mark on the Roman Catholic Church, and Rome has accepted this gift with affection and gratitude. In exchange, Rome now offers the West a threefold liturgical Roman Rite: Ordinary, Extraordinary and Ordinariate.

How will this gift of Divine Worship be received in the rest of the Anglican world not yet in full ecumenical union with Rome? That remains to be seen.

We know from historical experience that some Anglican communities have been accustomed to using the Ordinary Form Roman Missal as part of their liturgical celebrations. Will a similar development occur with Divine Worship? Again, this is unknown and remains to be seen. What we do know is that Divine Worship: The Missal, has become a gift of unity within the Roman Catholic Church, and it will forever change the face of Roman Catholicism as we know it. A new ecumenical paradigm now exists, and this is Rome's gift of unity back to the Western world.

FC

*The views expressed in this article are the author's own.*

*Shane Schaezel is an author and freelance writer. He is the creator of FullyChristian.Com, a blog of apologetics and random musings from a Catholic in the Ozarks.*

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# Magnificent Magi

*The Magi, seekers of the Incarnation, by Br. Ned Gerber*

It was a moment of dramatic tension and crafty diplomacy. The aged, paranoid King Herod – ruling only with Rome’s support – was meeting secretly with mysterious magi from the East. We don’t know their exact origin; many think they were Persian or Parthian. But Parthians had chased Herod from Palestine before, and their cavalry was fearsome. So, why were these priestly aristocrats really in Jerusalem? They must have travelled with a caravan of guards and servants and were clearly rich. Missler thinks they had “all imaginable oriental pomp, accompanied by cavalry to ensure safe penetration of Roman territory”[18]. They sought one who was born “King of the Jews”! [19] – not one who would become so later. The hymn *We Three Kings* also testifies to this [10]: “Born a King on Bethlehem plain.” Thus, the magi sought a descendant of the great King David. Herod knew he could not compete with that. His father was Idumean (Edomite) and his mother Arabian [19]. And since the Jewish people mostly hated Herod, he could not ignore any group that wished to honour a (supposed) offspring of the traditional Jewish Royal Family.

Herod replied with feigned sincerity. Of course, he wanted to honour this “king” as well. But with pressing affairs of state, he needed more time and information. And if this meeting occurred in late 5 or early 4 BC, the loathsome condition from which Herod would die must already have been at work inside his diseased body. (*Josephus says his symptoms included ulcerated entrails, convulsions, stench and gangrene in his privy parts, all seen as part of the divine punishment for his evil [11][29].*) Yet, Herod must have tried to maintain dignity amidst the incense and marble of his palace. It was difficult, having murdered his wife and two sons already. He would at times find himself wandering about, plaintively calling out for his dead spouse, “Mariamne?” Nevertheless, he left the Magi to confirm details of this new birth and report back to him. And then, he would do whatever was necessary.

## EXEGETICAL ISSUES

The beauty and drama of the real story of the Incarnation far surpasses the cheap sentimentality of a commercial Christmas with its “Seasons Greetings” and *Frosty the Snowman*. The visit of the magi (traditionally “wise men”) is an essential part, and a noble example for all of us. They were Gentiles from afar with little knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures. They had likely heard of a promised Messiah via the writing of Daniel, especially after he was made “chief” of Babylon’s wise men (Dan. 2:48) and then honoured by the Persians, too. But most of all, they had obeyed the prompting of God’s Spirit, following the extraordinary sign of a “star”, and then also heeded the later warning that God gave in a dream (Matt. 2:12). (*The Greek word for star – aster – covers many celestial bodies including comets and planets. Skeptics say a star that leads men to Bethlehem is impossible. But surely, did not the Shekinah Glory of God do this for nearly 40 years in the wilderness with Israel, in the pillar of cloud and*



*fire?)*

Modern scholars may denigrate this text as legendary. Little is known of the magi, and the account occurs in only one of the four Gospel narratives. Yet, so does the account of the angels appearing to the shepherds, and the story of the woman at the well, etc. Shall all these be denigrated, too? In secular history, there are many events taken as fact - such as the wars of Julius Caesar - for which we have only one extant source, but they are accepted.

Actually, the ancient caste or class of magi is attested by various authors, including the visit of Tiridates I from Armenia to Emperor Nero (AD 66), with a group of other magi [23][28] Tiridates himself was a Mithraic Priest, and thus one the magi, too. MacArthur notes that the “ruling body in the Parthian-Persian Empire at this time was much like the Roman Senate [but] composed entirely of magi”[17].

ASK (Associates for Scriptural Knowledge) have compiled helpful background data on the magi of the late Roman Republic and Early Empire. They note the testimony of both Cicero and Plutarch; magi were the ones instructing kings and princes in the East. (Cf. Strabo, XVI.762 and Cicero, *De Divin*, I.41.) If so, this may help explain how the magi would be willing to meet privately with King Herod. But sadly, Church Fathers like St. Jerome and St. Augustine translated the term magi as just “magicians” [5], which cast a shadow over the entire class.

Compounding this is the modern dilemma of knowing only a little about the Parthians [14]. Their empire was not very centralised, and several languages were in use at the same time including local tongues, Greek and Persian. This – plus a lack of surviving records – makes it hard to construct a comprehensive history.

We don’t know the exact number of magi who visited the young child, Jesus, in the “house” that the Holy Family lived in then. Three became traditional, probably due to the three gifts – but per Calvin [2], Chrysostom was said to think



there were 14. Personal names like Caspar (Gaspar) don't appear until ca. the 8th century, and are likely legendary. But the visit of the magi themselves to Bethlehem is in Holy Scripture. There is no good reason to doubt its veracity. For those who insist that Matthew simply concocted the story from other accounts or legends, R.T. France has a good reply: "A church which soon found itself in serious conflict with astrology is not likely to have invented a story which appears to favour it." [7 – pg. 81.]

In the Middle Ages, magi devotion reached a peak [1]. Relics were supposedly sent from Constantinople to Milan, and then to Cologne Cathedral (12th century). Such superstition is not pleasing to God; but the true piety of the magi offers a powerful role model.

In further support, Josephus and Tacitus [12, 26] note a widespread belief that a great leader would arise from Palestine. Of course, Roman historians thought such a prediction must be fulfilled by one of their own because of their military success. For example:

*There had spread over all the Orient an old and established belief, that it was fated for men coming from Judaea to rule the world. This prediction, referring to the emperor of Rome – as afterwards appeared from the event – the people of Judaea took to themselves. (Suetonius [25])*

But, Biblical prophecy disagrees. Moses said the great, coming Prophet or Leader must be "like me from among your own brothers" (Deut. 18:15), which clearly rules out Mohammad. Balaam's prophecy is often cited, too, since it says, "A star will come out of Jacob; a sceptre will rise out of Israel." (Num. 24:17). But Old Testament texts that vaguely reference "kings" with gifts are poor exegesis. The magi were rarely kings, though that mistaken idea goes all the way back to Tertullian [27]. However, through respected counsel in the Parthian-Persian Empire they influenced kings, and may well have been "king-makers".

An open issue thus remains, "How did the magi understand the meaning of the 'star' itself?" We will probably never know for sure – revelation in a dream is possible. Yet, there is an astounding text in Dan. 9:24-26 that – adjusted for variation in the Jewish/Julian Calendars – yields a date for disclosure of the Messiah that falls close to Palm Sunday's triumphal entry. (*This article cannot do justice to such a vital reference. But Isaac Newton said the validity of all Biblical prophecy could be proven by it. It does not give an exact date for Christ's birth. But, one can see why keen observers would be alert as its time drew near*) [4][13].

#### MEETING THE YOUNG CHRIST.

There is confusion – in art and poetry, and among commentators – about differences in the Lukan/Matthean narratives. This should not alarm us. Luke describes the birth in a stable, when a tiny infant appeared. Matthew describes later events, after Joseph/Mary apparently made early plans to stay in Bethlehem. The Greek for their home then was *oikia* (house). And the young Jesus was described as a *paidion* (a small child, but perhaps not yet a toddler). Justin Martyr wrote that Jesus was born in a cave that served as a stall for cattle and donkeys, beneath an inn on the side of a hill (cited by [20]). If so, moving into even a small house would have been a real improvement, and might have occurred soon after the birth.

In his poem, *The Three Kings*, Longfellow wrote, "The little child in the manger lay" [15] – but he was off by maybe four-twelve months. Herod told his assassins to kill all male babies in the Bethlehem area that were up to two years old. He surely allowed a margin for error, but after carefully ascertaining the date of the appearance of the "star", he knew the child would be older now. After all, it had taken time for the magi to organise their expedition, which probably journeyed up the Fertile Crescent, then down along the coast to the Jewish capital city, where the magi expected the birth to be well-known. (*Some say the "star" might have been a supernova, but how such a phenomenon could lead men to Bethlehem is unclear. As Ross notes, neither the Indians nor the Chinese – who kept careful records of the heavens – record any such celestial event at this time* [24].)

The magi also may have come from somewhere east of Babylon, where many Diaspora Jews were living. They had an idea of a great Jewish King, but did not know about Micah 5:2, which specified the place where Christ would be born. Yet, Jewish Scribes easily quoted it. The magi also fell into Herod's scheming clutches with innocent naiveté, although his cruelty was well known in Palestine. A very distant point of origin would thus make a lot of sense.

In his poem, *The Magi*, T. S. Eliot wrote, "this Birth was hard and bitter agony for us" [6]. But in Matthew, the magi had extreme joy when the "star" reappeared. (*In a sense, it was the death of the old dispensation as Eliot said, but they were still truly exhilarated to witness it.*) In fact, Church Historians note that the joyful observation of Epiphany (6 January) was fixed in the ecclesiastical calendar before our Christmas (25 December). Epiphany commemorates the manifestation of Christ with more than just the magi, but they are still a vital part.

#### AFTERMATH.

The horrific murders that followed were the result of the deranged Herod's furious anger. They caused St. Matthew to cite the words of Jeremiah, when he wrote of "Rachel weeping for her children" (Jer. 31:15). That originally referred to Jews sent into captivity, but Rachel was an iconic Mother of Israel, and may have been buried near Bethlehem, too. In any





case, this is an instance of prophecy fulfilled on multiple levels. The calling of the boy, Jesus, back from Egypt is another. A calling of God's "son" from Egypt was first described by Hosea, but that referred to the entire nation. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus Himself is par excellence the representative of God's People.

In God's providence, the magi - majestic in both caste and comprehension - escaped Herod, like the Holy Family. We don't have details, but they may have returned by travelling around the south end of the Dead Sea, then north, to the east of the Jordan. They vanish from history but not from our hearts and minds.

#### APPLICATION.

Calvin noted how little guidance the magi had. Yet, they still acted. In contrast, we have so much Biblical knowledge and are yet "so cold in our inquiries after him!" [2] Other profound lessons can be gained from this wonderful story, as we ponder the Incarnation today.

First: The Magi sought far more than academic knowledge. They came to pay homage - though Matthew probably wants us to read it as "worship". They gave costly gifts, but also their personal fealty. Yet, how often are we spiritually aloof in doctrinal self-righteousness?

Second: The Magi (and others) paid a price. We don't know if they all arrived safely home. But even if they did, others suffered in the outworking of

the great miracle of the Incarnation. To this day, the Church observes the Feast of the Holy Innocents on 29 December, though it is probable that only about 20 children were killed - nowhere near the 14,000 estimated in the Byzantine tradition [9]. Scholars think the local population of the Bethlehem Area was about 1,000, though 20 is still a brutal massacre. The entire saga is a flashback to the death of Hebrew children during the time of the infant Moses. (*Some scholars consider Moses to be an early "type" of the Christ, too. But, we should be careful in our exegesis since Matthew does not draw out this comparison, as he does various other Old Testament fulfilments.*)

The Holy Family were refugees in Egypt for at least a short time. Philo says [*Flaccus* 43] that Alexandria alone had a million Jews. Egyptian Jews also compiled the *Septuagint*, so it was a logical destination. Still, it was a dangerous trek and a deeply disturbing adjustment for a new family with a young child. After returning, there was a shift back to Nazareth, too. It was an earlier home for Joseph and Mary, but had only about 500 people per Osborne [22], who cites J. Strange. Yet, there was still danger and turmoil for perhaps a couple years.

In counselling, we sometimes meet those who despairingly ask, "Doesn't God realise how terrible tyrants like Hitler, Idi Amin or Stalin can be?" Yes, He does. The wicked Herod, and his awful judgement, prove this. But as sinful humans, we must still face the effects of evil in our world ever since

the Fall. We see others pay a price (as innocent bystanders) when Christians flee ISIS in Syria or Iraq. We must honestly ask, "Will we also be willing to pay such a price, if it is demanded from us in the wealthy and comfortable West?"

Third: The Magi were most unlikely worshippers. They "didn't fit in". Early writers remind us of that, like Ignatius of Antioch - (cited in [22]). And magi at times did use dark practices from astrology or magic. (The English "magic" comes from *magos* or *magus*, the singular form of the original term.) Acts 8:9-24 gives a tragic example in Simon, who practiced both "sorcery" and "magic". But to apply such a judgment indiscriminately is superficial.

Careful scholarship shows heavenly study was refined to a science in the ancient Near East, especially in Babylonia [7]. As with alchemy, valid scientific progress did occur at times. Alchemic discoveries included anaesthetics from herbs, the isolation of sodium sulfate and nitric acid, and possibly gunpowder in China. [16]. Astrological progress also occurred, even without modern telescopes or computers, and despite overtones of superstition. Astrologers tracked celestial events occurring centuries apart, and detailed mathematics were used to plot orbital paths. In contrast to this, Jerusalem Scribes were confident that they "fitted" God's plan. But as various scholars have noted, these Scribes could not be bothered to travel two hours to Bethlehem to see if a remarkable event had indeed occurred. Are we, too, tempted to smugness?

Fourth: The Magi had eyes of Faith. What did they expect to find after following a brilliant, celestial guide? Surely not an impoverished peasant home with perhaps a 14 or 15-year-old woman and a tradesman? Yet, they still presented Him gifts, and gave homage.

Origen [21] is the first to try and give meaning to gold (for a king), frankincense (for a God - used in some Biblical offerings), and myrrh (for a mortal - perhaps for use in a future burial?) We rarely see the last two now. The Greek-English Lexicon of Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker says both are resinous gums. And the whole scene

reminds us of the words of Jesus:

*I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 8:11-12)*

We may criticise the magi for various things. Yet surely, they were able to worship “in spirit and in truth” to some degree, and such people the Father seeks. Even contemporary Jews saw that Persian (Zoroastrian) priests leaned toward monotheism with a focus on Ahura Mazda, and also noted that the Persian religion did not construct false idols.

Will we, blessed with so much more spiritual insight, worship in spirit and in truth this Christmas?



This article is part of a series, *Biblical Wellsprings, Encouraging Evangelical and Catholic Exegesis*.

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## NOTES

The magi (and Matthew) knew the excitement of God’s grace breaking through. As a result, this story has a vivid interjection in Greek in several places – *idou*. But, it is left untranslated. The 1984 NIV (used here) does not explain why, though this version is usually quite good. The same interjection is rendered “Behold” in Rev. 22:7. Hagner [9] says *idou* is a “favourite device” of Matthew, and thus translates Matthew 2:9, to give one example, as follows:

“And, when they had listened to the King [Herod], they departed. And look, the star which they had seen in the eastern sky kept going before them . . .”

That “look” is *idou* [8], which may also be rendered as “see” The present verb tense is used by Matthew in like manner. It draws us into the action as if we were actually there, too.

But, will we feel joy and excitement in this Incarnation Season? Or, are such heartfelt



emotions no longer considered “proper” during technically precise liturgies?

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# God the Father is not Beyond Gender

*Fr. Gavin Ashenden replies to Rachel of Gloucester*

The newly appointed bishop of Gloucester, has had to ask the Queen not to write to her as a Reverend Father in God. She returned the document addressed to her. The scribes have not caught up yet. She is not a Father. This has been the time-honoured way of addressing Christian bishops down the ages, but it stops now for the Church of England.

But Rachel Treweek of Gloucester has gone further and said it is not just her gender that is in the frame after her appointment, but God's. She does not choose to address God as "He."

*"Instead of using either 'He' or 'She' to describe God, Bishop Treweek said she prefers simply to use the word 'God'.*

*"Sometimes I lapse, but I try not to," she told The Observer, reigniting a long-running debate in the Church of England about inclusion and gender equality. She added: "I am not in the business of wanting to offend anyone, but I do want to gently challenge people."*

Does this matter?

If you are a Christian who says the creed, this will matter beyond measure.

In the creed we believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

The movement to ordain women as bishops and priests takes its inspiration from feminism and from a piece of cultural Marxism that has infused Western culture, egalitarianism. What happens to the faith and the Church when you impose this secular creed on it?

Firstly, the Church breaks – it fragments even further and becomes less 'one' than ever before. This movement has divided the Church across the world.

It has become less holy. This movement sees itself driven by its own concept of justice. Purity has morphed into justice.

It has become less catholic. What was true at all times and in all places is no longer so. This movement does not spring from the lived tradition of the world-wide church; rather it confronts and subverts it.

It makes the Church less apostolic. This is not the teaching or the practice of the Apostles.

So the ordination of women assaults the credal integrity of the Church theologically.

But does it have any other spiritual implications other than confronting Christian tradition and breaking the Church of England and Anglicans who accept it, from their apostolic roots?

There has not been very much theological argument over the last forty years. Assuming the notion of equality to be a given, the argument has been simplistic: "If men can be ordained why can't women?"

Part of the incoherence of the Church of England is that some parts of it believe in the practice of the apostolic Church in the office of bishops, successors to the Apostles, who presided over the Eucharist in the place of the risen Christ, and some don't. This lack of coherence in a theology of episcopacy, priesthood and ministry has made discussion

more obtuse and complex. The 'why can't women' argument finds its most comfortable home in the protestant context of ministry involving doing things. But episcopacy and its derivative priesthood are more about ontology than they are about doing, though they comprise both.

The office of bishop and priest has been understood from the earliest roots of the Church as acting in *imago Christi*, the image of Christ. This played a part in the chain of revelation where Christ told he has had come to reveal the Father to us.

Inevitably we are then faced with asking theological questions about gender and whether the fatherhood of God is an intrinsic part of the nature of God.

Bishop Rachel reminds us that men and women together are made in the image of God. This is certainly true. But can one simply stop theologically there, or is there more to be said?

She goes further herself. She wants us to stop addressing God as 'He'. This has the effect of placing her in conflict with Christ. He tells us that we both can and should address God as 'He' and in particular as our father.

So the consecration of bishop Rachel and other women as bishops assaults the creeds, and the teaching of bishop Rachel contradicts Christ.

Was any of this theological development taken in conjunction with the historic branches of apostolic Christianity, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches? No. They were ignored. When they begged those parts of Anglicanism that pursued this course to think again, and beware of the consequences of driving irremediable wedges into the body of Christ, they were still ignored.

For many faithful Christians that would settle the integrity of the matter. But there are other questions to be asked as part of the task of discernment. These questions are not only theological, in the conceptual sense, but also requires discernment, to help us work out what the spiritual dynamics are. Test the spirits, advises St John.

It is no great surprise that the progressives who have pushed this change on the Church are more comfortable with a socialist view of the world than a scriptural view. The socialist view carries it with the hope the earth can be modified so that with some improvements in the human condition and human nature, it becomes more like heaven.

Scripture, and in particular the Gospel of John, see the world as primarily being under the influence of the evil one, and being engaged in a permanent assault on the church, the kingdom of heaven and those who follow Christ. It is the aim of evil to assault and break down the paradigms and patterns of God's creation.

Christians should be particularly wary then when they adopt values of the world and secularism. But as well as testing the spirits, we can test the fruit.

If we fast-forward a little to the conflict over gay marriage, what we find is that the weapon of equality that was used to change the church's practice over ordination, has been used to change the way in which men and women

relate in marriage.

The interdependence of men and women, and their coming together to act as co-creators with God of humanity, is one of the basic building blocks of God's creation on earth. But under the influence of equality, husbands and wives have been replaced and reduced by the more functional de-gendered category of 'partners'.

The central characteristic of men and women making babies together has been distorted so that in the context of gay partnerships, it requires three people to make them. There is the surrogate and then either two men or two women. The child no longer knows where it has come from. One of its natural parents is excluded. Its identity is hidden from it in order to shore up the non-fertile gay partner's place in the family.

Equality has gone further and acted as fuel for the movement to transition one's gender. In the face of the given biology of birth, a new idea has taken root, that sexuality is fluid. It is not binary at all, but simply on a scale that stretches out between two poles, and one can occupy whatever part of that scale one identifies with. This is the next summit in the project that it is we who choose what we want to be by an act gender identification. What in the past would have raised suspicions of mental adjustment in the face of biological reality, has now become a victim to raw wish-fulfillment. If this is what or who you want to be, no one can or should stop or contradict you. In the scales of pride on one side and humility on the other, this fails the tests of spiritual integrity.

The patterns of God's creation, his making of humanity into men and women has been attacked and diluted by an assault on gender and identity that goes to the roots of the paradigms we are given in Genesis.

At what point does the Church wake up and say 'an enemy has done this' as the farmer said when he found weeds planted where there should have been fruitful crops? (Matt 13.28).

Gay 'marriage' becomes the celebration and institution of the biologically sterile and the psychologically narcissistic. It is the celebration of sameness rather than difference. It takes the patterns of humanity that revelation celebrates, and muddles them beyond recognition. Who suffers? Those who refuse to accept these revisionist categories in the face of an increasingly fascist body politic, but also the children who have an experience of their natural parents denied to them.

But also, of course, there is the issue of the integrity of the Scriptures.

The implications of equality are far reaching.

#### THE INTEGRITY OF JESUS AS THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON

If Jesus was wrong about God being our Father, as bishop Rachel of Gloucester tells her flock and her public, then he may have been wrong about other things. If he was culturally limited in a way that bishop Rachel has risen above, then his limitations may show in other areas.

In TEC, the Episcopal Church in America, these implications have been allowed to run their course for the last forty years or so. If equality is the key concept, it is hard not to apply it to other matters. It is not easy to maintain that Jesus was unique, that Scripture is unique if in every



*The Trinity*

other sphere of life you bow down to the idol of equality. Soon the implication of relativity comes to the surface and works its way through the whole conceptual system. Jesus becomes one teacher among many; the Church one agency among many; salvation eroded as a concept. After all, if Jesus is not the unique Son of God come to save the world from its sins and a broken relationship with the Father, then what does he become?

The concept of the equality erupts from a new Arianism. Its Jesus is less than the only begotten Son of God; he is a 'creature with insights'. Salvation becomes meaningless; heaven and hell no longer pertain. There is no hell or judgement to be saved from. The ordination of women, the raising up of equality as the new divine principle, the breaking of the apostolic patterns, takes us to a place which the Church has been before.

Athanasius was the bishop who spent his life fighting with the first outbreak of Arianism. Arius' Jesus was a Jesus who was less than the incarnate Word; less than the unique only begotten Son of God; made rather than begotten. Athanasius saw that if this change in the nature of Christ that the new heresy proposed succeeded, the whole structure of the faith and the integrity of the Gospels would collapse.

We face the same threat today with the ordination of women, the muddling of gender and the elevation of "equality" over the teaching of Jesus.



Mary, Theotokos

## THE REVELATION OF GOD AS FATHER

Does the fatherhood of God matter anyway?

We have been lured into the misapprehension of looking at the universe through the eyes of Feuerbach and others like him. It was Feuerbach who persuaded European public opinion that by means of projection, we take our longing for God and project it onto a black cosmic canvas, and by means of this psychological self-delusion claim to have found a god created in our image.

CS Lewis offers us the antidote to this. He reminds us that all other religions outside the Judaeo-Christian experience are “made up” religions. That is, they were invented by their practitioners. To that extent Feuerbach’s critique may have some resonance.

But the unique aspect of the Judaeo-Christian revelation is that it comes from the outside and happens to people. It originates from the outside, not the inside. The experience of the transcendent God burst upon the prophets, as they in turn burst upon the people, saying “thus saith the Lord.”

The implications of this for projection are that they reverse the whole process. Instead of us projecting our identity onto God as a blank cosmic canvas, he projects his identity onto us, turning us from the blank canvas of

the animal into his children.

Gender is not theologically neutral at this point. Masculinity plays a role.

Unlike all the other religions of the world, there were within Judaism no goddesses

Nor were there any hermaphrodite deities; nor were there any priestesses. So one has to ask why not?

Why was Judaism marked out from all the other religious narratives of the world in this way? The answer appears to be that masculinity was an essential element of revelation.

Unlike all the other religions, God the Father – “Yahweh- I am that I am” was wholly transcendent. He did not emerge from within the universe, but was utterly distinct from it. The universe, the earth, all creation emerged from nothing – and was completely dependent on him. Masculinity connects to this, too.

A number of theologians have made the link between our experience of our own biology and theological ideas. Where gods are feminine, they are linked with fertility and the earth. The feminine is the fertile. It is inextricably linked with creation.

In the Old Testament, the great religious apostasy that the prophets were sent to rescue the people of God from, was the worship and placating of the feminine in the form of fertility goddesses; the Canaanite high places.

Masculinity become linked with the Creator, transcendence rather than

immanence.

Lewis continues to remind us that we use masculinity only because that is how God speaks of himself. In his paper *Priestesses* (p 237) he writes:

“Christians think that God Himself has taught us how to speak of Him. To say that it does not matter is to say either that all the masculine imagery is not inspired, is merely human in origin, or else that, though inspired, it is quite arbitrary and unessential. And this is surely intolerable: or, if tolerable, it is an argument not in favour of Christian priestesses [or changes in biblical gender language but against Christianity. It is also surely based on a shallow view of imagery. Without drawing upon religion, we know from our poetical experience that image and apprehension cleave closer together than common sense is here prepared to admit; that a child who has been taught to pray to a Mother in heaven would have a religious life radically different from that of a Christian child. And as image and apprehension are in an organic unity, so, for a Christian, are human body and human soul.”

Lewis’ point is that religious experience that places the feminine and the motherhood at the centre of its narrative looks very different from the Judaeo-Christian revelation.

Lewis addresses both the issue of projection and those who can’t tell the difference between biology and gender.

“Everyone must sometimes have wondered why in nearly all tongues certain inanimate objects are masculine and others feminine. What is masculine about a mountain or feminine about certain trees? Ransom has cured me of believing that this is a purely morphological phenomenon, depending on the form of the world. Still less is gender an imaginative extension of sex. Our ancestors did not make mountains masculine because they projected male characteristics into them. The real process is the reverse. Gender is a reality, and a more fundamental reality than sex. Sex is, in fact, merely the adaptation to organic life of a fundamental polarity which divides all created beings. Female sex is simply one of the things that have feminine gender; there are many others, and Masculine and Feminine meet us on planes of reality where male and female would simply be meaningless. Masculine

*is not attenuated male, nor feminine attenuated female. On the contrary, the male and female or organic creatures are rather faint and blurred reflections of masculine and feminine. Their reproductive functions, their differences in strength and size, partly exhibit, but partly also confuse and misrepresent, the real polarity.” (Perelandra p.200)*

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Father of Jesus is indeed therefore masculine. He is beyond sex, but not beyond gender. He is more like a Father than he is like a Mother, though Jesus, Mother Julian and St Anselm all felt free to use feminine and maternal imagery to augment and to amplify the kind of Father he is.

#### THE SPIRIT

St Paul tells us that those who experience the Holy Spirit find themselves calling out—Abba—father, dad. This leap of intimacy from the soul to the Father lies at the heart of the Christian experience. It is inconceivable that any person whose life is rooted in the Spirit would want to do anything but celebrate and amplify it. It is hard to know what to say to a bishop who wants to quench the experience of the Holy Spirit, and depersonalize this experience by replacing the intimacy, trust and love of “Abba” to the impersonal, vacuous and neutral concept of ‘God’. The drawing near of the Godhead to the soul takes place in a dynamic of increasing trust and love which is predicated on knowing the Creator as Father, the Saviour as Son, and the Spirit as the Comforter and strengthener who points to Jesus and Father. Strip out masculinity from this intimacy, and you are left with no Father, no Son and the Spirit whose promptings and leadings you refuse to recognise.

#### MARY THEOTOKOS

For many in the protestant compartment of the Church there is an obvious lack of the feminine. Turning their back on the third Council of Ephesus where St Mary was recognized as ‘theotokos’, the essential complementarity of the economy of salvation was diminished. In the refusal to recognise the role that Mary as Godbearer continues to play in the endless apparitions that stir the Church into fresh repentance

and deeper prayer, there is of course the danger of evacuating the role of the feminine from the Church. But the answer to the quest for a better balance between the genders in the narrative of salvation is to balance Adam and Eve, made in the image of God, with Jesus the Saviour and Mary theotokos. At the beginning of John’s Gospel, Jesus’ first miracle takes place as a response to her intercession. If we have to choose between the intercessions of the Mother of God and the Mother of the Church, whose obedience and humility are in proportion to the honour promised her by the angels, and the innovation of women bishops who take it upon themselves to diminish Jesus and his revelation of the Father, which should we choose?

#### DISCERNMENT

From what source do we trace the denial of Jesus as Saviour and ikon of the Father? Scripture tells us “from the father of lies.” From what source do we find the authority and integrity of Scripture denied and belittled? The same place. From what source do we find the unity, the holiness, the catholicity and the apostolicity of the Church distorted and diminished. The same place.

The movement born in Marxism, idolizing equality, confusing gender, undermining marriage, depriving children of true parenthood through politicized surrogacy, rebuffing the Holy Trinity, quenching the Spirit, prioritizing the relative over the objectivity and sanctity of revelation, - comes from the wrong spiritual source.

There is one further test. When orthodox theology on gender is placed in the public sphere, it seems to immediately evoke bile and hatred from the progressive and the heterodox. In order to divert attention from their own hatred, anger and pride, the opposing spirits seem to clamour

in their rage, accusing the orthodox of hate crime and bigotry.

St John advised us to “test the spirits to see if they are of God” (1 John 4.1.) Jesus said, by their fruits you shall know them. The fruits of this progressive diminished Christianity do not lead to a penitent, renewed and converting church, but rather pride, indiscriminating inclusivity, and a secular epistemology.

For some Anglicans it took the inevitable development of the idea of equality in the implementation of gay marriage before the implications of this new heresy was obvious. Others saw it earlier as the pro-women bishops lobbyists made concord with the gays rights lobby to help deliver gay marriage once some women had achieved the goal of women in the episcopate. Equality between the genders in the episcopate could not be separated conceptually or strategically from equality for gay partnerships with marriage.

It has now become obvious that the Anglican community has reached a parting of the ways. Bishop Rachel’s attempt to redirect the language of Jesus and the Holy Spirit help show us why.

There comes a point, and for many of us it is already here, where communion is breached by the assault on the integrity of Scripture and tradition in the name of the idols of egalitarianism, feminism, and relativism.

In the end, it is Scripture and the creeds that divide us. Bishop Rachel and those who appointed her and follow her are on one side of the divide; and the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church is on the other.



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