

St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
San Rafael, California

# The Epistle

On the Web

December, 2001

Volume 22, Issue 12

## The Rector's Corner Advent—A Season of Paradox

Rev. Bruce Bramlett, Rector

**W**e are entering the wonderful time of Advent once again and it is time for faithful Christians get in touch with the great themes of the season. While our secularized society jumps quickly from Halloween to its hyper-commercialized frenzy of Christmas activity, faithful people are invited to move from the season of All Saints and fall harvest ingathering Thanksgiving to this quiet season of joy, love, and hopefulness. Advent invites us into a mode of quiet expectation; the conviction that God has promised to come among us with power and saving might.

How are we to hear the themes of this season after the events of

this September? We are a country at war, having experienced the disastrous tragedy of terrorism on our own shores in an unprecedented way. Much has been written about the blow struck to the American psyche by such an attack. Indeed, we will, as President Bush proclaimed, never be the same again because of it. To some, it seems to appear as a grim apocalyptic unfolding, matching the worst of the movie cinematic possibilities in ways that has made us shiver with anxiety and dread. We have become tense and introspective as we await each new days' ominous unfolding of events yet to be revealed. Is it coincidental that some members of our congregation have

been reading through the Apocalypse of John (Revelation) during these fall months. Its strident language and vivid imagery suddenly seem strangely vital and pregnant with meaning.

Yet, we people of faith are not called to succumb to apocalyptic flights of fantasy or world denying anxiety and fear. Advent is that season in which we are invited into a quiet and prayerful waiting upon the divine love which has promised to come among us. Throughout this season we are invited to read through the history of God's mighty saving deeds with God's people as a rehearsal of that which is yet to come. This Advent we will welcome our children, young families

*(Continued on page 2)*

### Articles Inside:

Thoughts from the Rev	2
Tips on Using the Epistle's Navigation Aids	3
Webpistle Calls It Quits	3
Mary Frances Schjonberg on 'What's Christ Have To Do With It?'	4
Netweavers: Love One Another	5
Fire at St. John's Cathedral	6



## Advent Paradox, contd.

and anyone else who wishes to use the wonderful Advent devotional tool of the “Jesse Tree” to tell that old, old, story and give us a symbol for each day of preparation to remind us that God always has come to us, God’s people. We rehearse the past in order to hope for the future.

Advent is the season of paradox—the paradox that even as the nights become more dark and the earth falls into its seasonal cold sleep, we hold forth the hope of new light coming among us at its darkest point. This season conspires with our deepest yearnings to reenact the most profound conviction of our faith— that God will come among us. We are promised that it will be a light that will enlighten all of humanity to transform the darkness into a glorious new future for all who experience it. The One whom we anticipate is that light that is coming into the

world than enlightens everyone. (John 1:1-14). While our world struggles against the dread of its darkness, Christians are those who hold out the one thing that cannot fail us; the promise of hope. And this promise stands in the darkness as a beacon welcoming and drawing all who see it to come closer to its warming light. While we are not immune from the fears and problems that afflict everyone else, we are not left to languish under its oppressive despair.

In this Advent season, we pray with fervor and intensity, “Come. Lord Jesus, Come!” And while we pray in anticipation, we are invited to make that new room within our hearts and spirits, that space which will be the place where Emmanuel can dwell. We need to clear away those things in our lives that do not allow the Christ a place to live within us but

all,—all under the sign and promise of hopeful expectation and a quiet sense of joyful waiting. The Apostle Paul gave us the great gift of his own hope. All his letters are filled with its poignant strength. So in this Advent season, Paul can speak anew in our own time when he tells us, “ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word (II Thess. 2:16-17). May the quiet joy of this season surround your hearts with hope and love as we await our Lord Christ and the power of his saving love in our world once again.

## Thoughts From the Rev

Rev. Lynn Oldham Robinett

**I**t seems hard to believe, but here it is, almost Advent. As many of you have commented to me, we have lots of little children running around here on Sunday mornings. It is definitely a joy to see so many parents chasing around after their children, trying to limit the amount of sugar consumed during coffee hour and clean up after they get into everything within reach. Because the majority of the

families with young children come to the 9 o’clock service, many of you from the 7:45 and 10:30 services have not had the opportunity to get to know them and visa versa. During Advent and Christmas there will be a few occasions designed for the different congregations to mingle and I hope you will partake. Look over the following dates and information and mark down on your calendar those that sound appealing

to you.


On December 1, we will have the first of four parent’s time off. For the first four Saturdays in December, we will be offering a time for parents to go Christmas shopping, go to a movie, go out to lunch, or just sleep. We will be watching their children at St. Paul’s and any adults who enjoy being with children and spending time with

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Tips On Using the Epistle's Navigation Aids

The Epistle on the Web is easier to navigate than a paperback book— if you use its *bookmarks, thumbnails and links*.

When you start the Epistle in your browser, a frame on the left side (called the Navigation Pane) shows all the article titles in this month's Epistle. Click the title to go straight to the article. You can get back to article listing at any time by clicking on the *Bookmarks* tab in the Navigation Pane. Click the *Thumbnails* tab in the Navigation Pane. Pictures of each of the pages of the *Epistle* appear. Double click the page to go directly to it.

Tired of looking at the navigation Pane? Clicking the Show/Hide Navigation Pane icon,  shown here, will turn the Pane on and off.

The Table of Contents

("Inside This Issue") on page 1 of the *Epistle* is also *linked* to the article; just click on the title or page number to go to the article.

On articles that continue on later pages, the last column on a page contains the phrase "*(Continued on page x)*." This phrase is itself a link; click on it, and you'll be carried to the next page. How do you know it's a link? Whenever your mouse cursor turns into a pointing finger when you pass over text or a picture, that area's a link.

Want to go back to the page where you clicked that "*(Continued. . .)*" message? Just click the title of the article.

And if you see a Web address, or a word underlined in blue, click on it, too—the click will send you on your way to the website.

The same principle applies to pictures. If you see a picture or a piece of art you like as you

browse through the Epistle and want to take a closer look, pass your mouse cursor over it. If it turns into a pointing hand, the picture is a link to a larger version of the artwork, and your click will take you there.

But, you say, these are all frills. The big problem with the Epistle on the Web is that it loads too slowly, right? Well, there's an easy fix for that, too. Save it and read it offline, then delete it when you're done. You save it by clicking on the Save icon, the one that looks like a floppy, and then selecting the file name you like and the folder you want to save it in. From that point on, when you click on the file, it will open itself in your Acrobat Reader in a flash, and you can read it at your speed, instead of the speed of your Internet connection.

## Webpistle Calls It Quits

Jay Luther, Editor

The Epistle on the Web— what you're reading on your screen right now— seemed like a good idea: It could run longer articles than the paper Epistle that reaches your mailbox each month, it could carry articles from the National Church, and, after it ran for a while, it could provide a quick place to look for the recent history of the church.

But the *Webpistle* didn't catch on. The November Epistle has been visited only a handful of times, and earlier issues likewise failed to attract attention.

So where do we go from here? Well, from time to time, something sufficiently important will happen at St. Paul's— or elsewhere in the Episcopal Church— to call for a special issue. And there may be reason to occasionally run a *Best of the Epistle* issue as well. So, too, if some software changes are made by the published *Epistle*, it is possible that a

simple Adobe Acrobat copy of the paper version could be posted monthly on the Website, with little additional difficulty.

As always, the rule that governs content on St. Paul's website, and the future of *The Epistle on the Web*, is one of readers' choice: If you don't see what you want, ask for it. If you think there should be a quarterly *Webpistle*, or a special event *Webpistle*, or any other format, just let us know.

## What's Christ Got To Do With It?

Mary Frances Schjonberg

Last Sunday I preached an assigned sermon. At our fall fundraiser, the rector and I agree to preach on the topic of the winner's choice. He had to preach about the Second Coming of Christ and I got to answer the question: "What's Christ Got to Do With It?"

We warned the congregation that a rubric of that higher power known to us as the IRS declares the only way the winners could deduct the full amount of their winning bid would be if their purchase had no value.

Here's the gist of what I preached: The answer to the question "What's Christ Got to Do With It?" has a beginning as well as an end. It begins **and** ends in weakness, just as our stories do. Origen of Alexandria, writing at the turn of the First Century as he struggled to understand what Christ had to do with it, said that Jesus had to "have been born as a

small child, and to have squalled in the manner of crying children" for his message to make any sense.

To say that Jesus came to us only for the cross is to say that his life didn't matter. That the teaching, the parables, the miracles don't carry any weight. Well, they did to the people who listened and watched him. They scared some people. Jesus died the same punishment the Romans reserved for all criminals who threatened the social order. In that sense, his death was ordinary. It was his life that was extraordinary.

Every religious tradition in history worships a divine being. The scandal of particularity is that Jesus Christ was that squalling baby and that dying man on the

cross. This humbling of God into an earthen vessel is unheard of in other faiths, notes Diana Eck. The Greeks found it absurd. It insulted the Jews of Jesus' time and threatened the Romans.

Eck, a fellow Montanan transplanted to Harvard, write in "Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Baranash" of trying to explain what Christ has to do with it to a Hindu friend. He declared that God could not be helpless, such a state is not befitting of God.

On the other hand, she writes, Ghandi once explained what Christ has to do with it this way: "Christ died on the cross with a crown of thorns on his head, defying the might of a whole empire. And if I raise resistance of a non-violent character, I simply and humbly follow in the footsteps of the great teacher."

But then, what's Christ got to

*(Continued on page 5)*

## Thoughts from the Rev, contd.

them are encouraged to sign up to help baby-sit. We plan to have the time very structured so that the babysitters don't feel completely overwhelmed. Every parent who participates with their child(ren) is required to watch other children at least one of the Saturdays. We still need other adults to help out though. So if you would like to get to know

some of the young children in the parish, please talk to me.

December 2 is our annual Advent wreath-making event so please join us. If you've never made wreath or don't know what Advent is, you are more than welcome to come and find out. It is a potluck which begins at 5:00 and ends around 7:00. We will also be making a Jesse Tree and have kits

### *The St. Anne's Thursday Lunch Bunch*

St. Anne's Guild is the longest continuing group at St. Paul's. All women in the parish are welcome to have lunch in Duncan Hall on Thursdays at noon at the regular St. Anne's get-together. When you taste St. Anne's fellowship, you'll know why it's been around so long.

## Netweavers: Loving One Another

Medora Gordon

**I**t's November 10, 2001 and I am trying to get my head around the fact that this column is for the CHRISTMAS issue of the Epistle. I am in no way ready for any of this! Everyday there is something new to think about, some new worry that has never challenged us before. We are barraged on television with stories of war, and we have learned more about Afghanistan that we thought it possible to know. But there is good news too. What I remember most about this time in our lives is how much everything has changed. Have you noticed how polite we are? Neighborhoods and families are back in fashion. Small towns and the suburbs are enjoying a growth spurt and big cities are finding ways to break up into contiguous villages where people actually KNOW each other. More than

anything else September 11 reminded us all of how precious life is and how quickly that spark can be snuffed out.

Church is back in fashion too. Attendance is up and we are finding the strength to go forward with God's help. We are learning about our common Christian, Islamic and Judaic roots. We are not so different after all and the United States, which has thought of itself as a very large, impregnable Christian Island has discovered that we are vulnerable and not isolated after all.

Somehow, between September 11, anthrax, and just the usual rush of stuff, the holidays feel very different this year. Richard was talking to a lawyer the other day who said the thing that surprises him is how many people want to settle lawsuits now that they were well prepared to fight

BEFORE September 11. We want to be friends, we want to meet our neighbors, and we want to be with our families. It is not that we don't still struggle - we do - but somehow life is fundamentally different now. Our personal struggles are weighed against the world at war and that makes fighting with our neighbors, or our kids, or that guy who cuts us off in traffic, less important. Before September 11, we used to preach about loving our neighbors in a sort of head-trip, esoteric sort of way. Now we are daily grappling with loving our neighbors in ways that many of us could never imagine.

There is an advertisement for something that says "Family is anyone who sits at your dining room table," and I think that is where we are this Advent Season.

*(Continued on page 7)*

## What's Christ Got To Do With It, contd.

do with it with respect to those neighbors of ours who do not follow Christ? They might be Jews or Muslims or Sikhs or fine upstanding members of the community who profess no faith but whom we are glad have in our lives. What's Christ go to do with them?

I believe that Christ's life and death and resurrection dignifies and enlightens all human life, not just the lives of all Christians. Thus, I cannot declare that be-

cause my neighbor does not confess Christ she is not touched by Christ's love. I cannot declare that my neighbor's life will not count before God because he does not confess Christ. I cannot declare that those who follow other religions are devoid of experiences of God's presence and mercy that prompt them to act in good ways.

I am not saying that my neighbors are "anonymous Christians," as the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner once

called them, or that they will eventually realize that Christianity is better. What I am saying is that the difference between them and us if you need to define one, is one of hospitality. Confessing Christ means I invite Christ into my life and open myself to be guided and transformed by him.

It is risky to enter into a life with this resurrected Christ who still bears the wounds of his suffering. I cannot control or even pre-

*(Continued on page 7)*

## Thoughts from the Rev, contd.

for people to take home as well.

Christmas Day we will have our 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Christmas Dinner here at the church. If you do not feel like cooking an entire meal but would like to have a nice dinner, please join us at the church. The past two years have been a lot of fun with everyone bringing their "specialty" for the rest of us to share. We had two turkeys last year and all the main Christmas staples. We begin the festivities around 3 p.m. and eat

shortly thereafter, so if you would like to join us, sign up in the parish hall or talk to me.

On the day of Epiphany, we will be having a pageant at the 10:30 service for the entire parish. The children will be the main participants, but if you have any talents you could offer for the pageant, we would love your help. We will be rehearsing on the Sundays in December after the 9:00 service. Again, talk to me if you'd like to help.

I hope that you will join us for one or more of the above activities. The more, the merrier, as they say . . . .

and about the columbarium. At first glance, the organ appears to be in good shape," he said.

Sellers reported that fire commissioner Thomas Von Es-sen said it is likely the fire started overnight, based on its extent by the time firefighters had arrived. The homeless shelter in the cathedral was evacuated.

The only event canceled at the cathedral was the 8:30 a.m. Eucharist, said Neva Rae Fox, director of communications for the Diocese of New York. She said the school located near the cathedral on Amsterdam Avenue at 112th Street had not been damaged. A recorded message said the school was closed as a result of the fire.

"As far as our Christmas schedule, we need to figure out where we are and what the damage is," Fox said, explaining that a variety of choruses and services are scheduled over the next week. "That decision will probably be made later on today."

Construction on the medieval-style Episcopal cathedral began in the late 19th century and renovation of the facility has been ongoing since.

## National News: Fire at St. John's Cathedral



((ENS) A fire which broke out Tuesday morning, December 18 at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York was brought under control after as many as 200 firemen battled it for 2 1/2 hours. No one was injured, and the cause of the fire was not known. The fire began around 6:42 a.m.

"The fire was more or less contained to the gift shop," said

Michael Sellers, editor of the Episcopal New Yorker. "The entire roof of the gift shop is gone. There appears to be some fire damage to the outside of the cathedral on the north side, directly above the gift shop."

Sellers said there is severe water damage to the cathedral itself, including water in the basement. "They are very concerned about the tapestries on the north wall,

### Official Notice of Meeting St. Paul's Episcopal Church

in San Rafael, California

The Annual Meeting will take place in Duncan Hall at 1123 Court Street, San Rafael, California on Sunday, January 27, 2002 following a single Sunday service at 9:00 am.

## What's Christ Got To Do With It, contd.

dict where he will lead me. I simply agree to be led by a God who knows my deepest secrets and fears because He experienced them. I hope for compassion from him and courage for myself. If I do not invite Christ to come in, warns theologian Sally McFague, I hide from Christ's call to continually renew the salvation he brought by working in concert with a loving God who is creating the world even as we speak.

This vulnerable hospitality mirrors the timeless story of Christ. We Anglicans cherish the doctrine of the incarnation . . . that scandal of particularity. It is the answer to the question what's Christ got to do with it which, if I

had to say it in 25 words or less, I would quote the great theologian Athanasius:

*God became human so that we might become divine.*

*Published with permission. The Rev. Mary Frances Schjonberg, St. Paul's Church's former seminarian, is curate at Christ Church in Short Hills, Short Hills, NJ. Some of her current sermons, all of them excellent, can be found on the Christ Church Website [here](#).*

## Centering Prayer and Waiting for God

*The fundamental disposition in centering prayer is opening to God. Christian practice can be summed up by the word "patience." In the New Testament, patience means waiting for God for any length of time, not going away, and not giving in to boredom or discouragement. . . . If you wait, God will manifest Himself. Of course, you may have a long wait.*

— Fr. Thomas Keating

Centering Prayer is a regular Wednesday night event at St. Paul's. Please join us every Wednesday evening at 6:00 pm before the 6:30 Eucharist. Both beginners and experienced par-

ticipants are welcome. Instruction in Centering Prayer is available at 5:45 by prior arrangement for those with questions or who are new to contemplative prayer and meditation. Now also at 9:30—10:30 on Sundays in Room 7. Call Chris Olson (479-0409) for more information.

### **The Mission Statement of St. Paul's Episcopal Church**

We are called to be a diverse and inclusive community of Christians in the Anglican tradition. We offer a compassionate haven for reconciliation, spiritual growth and commitment to social justice.

## December Birthdays

12/3 Ann Hanson  
 12/3 Michael Lavinnder  
 12/7 Sue Mason  
 12/10 Andrew Allenson  
 12/12 Matt Higham  
 12/16 Mildred Kaepfel  
 12/17 Chris Olson  
 12/17 Jeff Rosenberger  
 12/18 Barbara Vaslett  
 12/23 Elizabeth Olson  
 12/25 Bobbie Hanley  
 12/26 Alex Elliot

## Netweavers, contd.

This holiday, let us try harder to be certain that everyone has someone. Let us try harder to be certain that people are remembered and called and considered. And most of all let us remember to love one another and to pray for Peace.

***Can't control your pledging? Think about pledging all the time? Want to pledge right now? It's OK. Your online pledge card is available [here](#). Go for it!***

# St. Paul's Episcopal Church

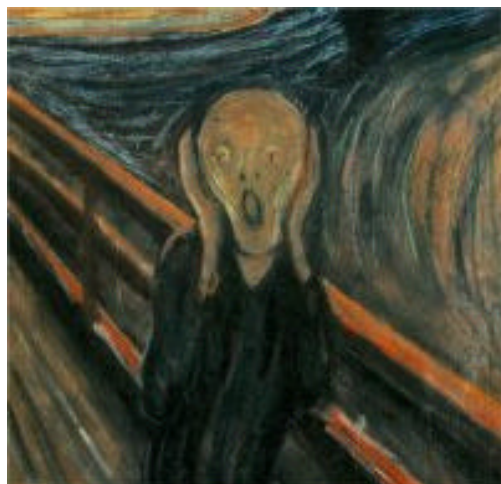
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Founded in 1868, St. Paul's parish worships weekly at the most beautiful and second oldest church in Marin County, a classic Gothic Revival structure built of 19th Century California Redwood. With a mission of providing a "compassionate haven for reconciliation, spiritual growth and commitment to social justice," it has been in the forefront of superb Anglican liturgy and music, healing and contemplative ministries, social action, and the building of Christian communities for decades.



Oh, no! I started a ministry. Now I'll have to do it forever.

Wrong again, Edvard.

A person's participation in a ministry should have a very definite beginning, middle and end, and those limits should be decided in advance. And whether you form your own ministry or join one that's been around for a long time, we know you'll need help. Helping people find and enjoy their ministries is the only ministry the Empowering Team has. So stop screaming and call Jay Luther at 456-6197 to start down the path of your very own Vision process.