

MY DEAR THEOPHILUS

VOLUME 4 / ISSUE 12 (DECEMBER 2020)

NEWS FROM AROUND THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

Pope, Archbishop and Moderator pray for peace in South Sudan in ecumenical Christmas letter



Dear Parish Family:

It is the season of Christmas. The true Christmas gift does not come in brightly colored paper with red, green, silver and gold bows. It does not come in gift bags for those who are impaired in gift wrapping.

No the Christmas gift comes wrapped in a crude blanket and is sleeping in a barn animals' food trough. The gift comes as a helpless new born. The gift comes to us as one of us, one with us.

This echoes what St. John Chrysostom preached on Christmas Day some one thousand seven hundred years ago: "What shall I say! And how shall I describe this birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of Days has become an infant. He who sits upon the sublime and heavenly throne now lies in a manger. And He Who cannot be touched, who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men. He, who has broken the bonds of sinners, is now bound by an infant's bands. But He has decreed that ignominy shall become honor, infamy be clothed with glory, and total humiliation the measure of His Goodness."

In this gift, we see the very face of God. God expresses himself in the Word, a perfect communication of who God is, and God's Word becomes flesh and dwelt among us and in Jesus we see the very face of God.

In the gift of God with us, in the gift and mystery of the Incarnation, God not only reveals himself to us; but He also reveals us to ourselves, in all our hidden possibilities. Who could have foreseen that a woman of our race could become the mother of the eternal God's only son? Who could have suspected humanity's hidden talent to be able to bear God, not as a cup bears water or as the hand bears a weight, but in the most intimate, physiological sense possible: as a mother bears her child, with everything that implies for the intertwining of two beings, of mother and son? We humans are not only capable of having an intimate relationship with God, but you and I are made for a relationship with the Divine, with God.

Without knowing it, each of us, you and I, are the bearer of a mystery like this. Each of us is also caught up in a genealogy, both biological and spiritual, and we each bear the tremendous Mystery that is the personal experience of God among us and within us.

In time God does reveal to us, too, what he had hidden in us from the beginning. Truly we are almost wholly ignorant of who we are and what promises sleep deep within us just waiting to be awoken.

With the Incarnation, God has taken on our nature and He has glorified our flesh and has consecrated and sanctified our humanity. In the miracle and mystery of the Incarnation, in the person of Jesus, God has shown us who we are and what we can become.

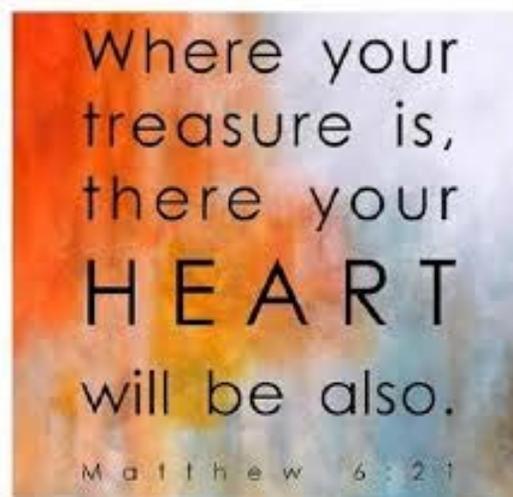
It is only in the Incarnation that we finally see the truth of our human nature. In the Incarnation, by God becoming one of us one with us, the gulf between divinity and humanity collapsed. You and I have been enabled to share God's own life.

The babe wrapped in swaddling clothes will show us a person fully given over to God. The Incarnation shows us that you and I have the potential to be one with God now only now but eternally. You and I are made to be one with God. In the miracle of the Incarnation, God in a radical and loving way tells us that this is our calling, this is what you and I are born for, it is who you and I are, it is in our DNA. As St. Athanasius wrote, “God became man so that man might become one with God.”

Now that is a gift. Unwrap it. Merry Christmas!

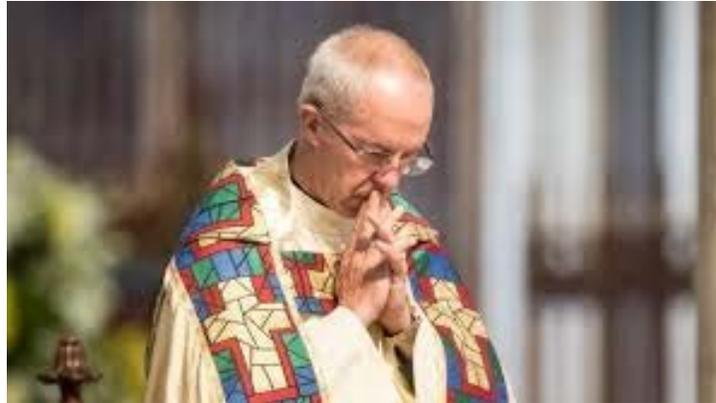
Your servant in Christ,

The Rev. Chester J. Makowski, Rector



Christ tells us: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Mt. 6:21. Please remember the Parish for your annual pledge. This Parish is tremendously generous, but 2020 saw a marked downturn in giving since we were not meeting to worship together and were live-streaming our worship services.

A Christmas Message from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, to the Anglican Communion



When there is a year like the year that we have had, I am overwhelmed with emotion at belonging to the Anglican Communion. You are such dear and wonderful sisters and brothers in Christ.

We are all in such different places. There have been some common features: the economic downturn; Covid in many, many countries. The common feature in which I rejoice is that you and we have reached out to Jesus Christ and he has responded and the sign of that response has been the heroism, the strength, the brilliance of the way that so many of us have lived.

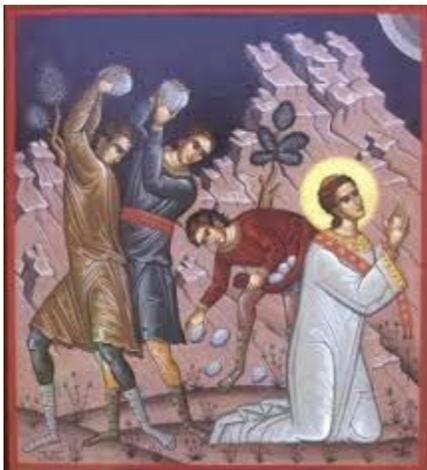
So as we come towards the end of this year, to Christmas and the New Year, my prayer is that God strengthens all of us to love one another, to love our neighbours and to carry the love of Christ into a world that more and more shows its need of the news of Salvation, of repentance, of change.

May God give you - in whatever circumstances you are - a wonderful Christmas. A Christmas in which you know his love. And may He protect you and guard you, and us, in unity and hope, in this coming year.

+ Justin Welby

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

The Annual Parish Meeting will be unlike the meetings of the past. The reports will be very brief and distributed by email. The elections will be done after each of the services on Sunday, January 10, 2021. Ballots will be passed out. For those not able to attend in person, the voting will be by email. The Diocesan Council this year will be done by Zoom this year and we will need four (4) delegates.



*FEATURED HOLY PERSON OF
THE MONTH
STEPHEN, DEACON & MARTYR
December 26
By James Kiefer*

All that we know about Stephen the Protomartyr (that is, the first martyr of the Christian Church) is found in chapters 6 and 7 of the Book of Acts.

The early Christian congregations, like the Jewish synagogues, had a program of assistance for needy widows, and some of the Greek-speaking Jews in the Jerusalem congregation complained that their widows were

being neglected. The apostles replied: “We cannot both preach and administer financial matters. Choose seven men from among yourselves, respected, Spirit-filled, and of sound judgement, and let them be in charge of the accounts, and we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.” The people accordingly chose seven men, including Stephen, and the apostles laid their hands on them. They are traditionally considered to be the first deacons, although the Scriptures do not use the word to describe them. (The Scriptures do refer to officials called deacons in the local congregations, without being very specific about their duties; and a century or more later, we find the organized charities of each local congregation in the hands of its deacons.)

Stephen was an eloquent and fiery speaker, and a provocative one. (Some readers have speculated that some of his fellow Christians wanted to put him in charge of alms in the hope that he would administer more and talk less.) His blunt declarations that the Temple service was no longer the means by which penitent sinners should seek reconciliation with God enraged the Temple leaders, who caused him to be stoned to death. As he died, he said, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” One of those who saw the stoning and approved of it was Saul (or Paul) of Tarsus, who took an active part in the general persecution of Christians that followed the death of Stephen, but who was later led to become a Christian himself.

We remember Stephen on December 26, the day after Christmas. Hence the song “Good King Wenceslas looked out on the feast of Stephen,” describes an action of the king on the day after Christmas Day. The tune used with this song is older than the words and was previously used with a hymn often sung on the feasts of Stephen and other martyrs. It begins:

Christian friends, your voices raise.
Wake the day with gladness.
God himself to joy and praise turns our human sadness:
Joy that martyrs won their crown, opened heaven’s bright portal,
when they laid the mortal down for the life immortal.

Let us pray: We give you thanks, O Lord of glory, for the example of the first martyr Stephen, who looked up to heaven and prayed for his persecutors to your Son Jesus Christ, who stands at your right hand: where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting. Amen.

Episcopal Health Foundation News: Trinity Episcopal, Marble Falls and the Burnet County Hunger Alliance

What would your response be if someone told you that the problem of hunger was solvable in your lifetime? That was the starting point for the **Burnet County Hunger Alliance**, after **Pam Rodgers** attended a workshop from **Texas Hunger Initiative** on the “Ethics of Hunger.” Rodgers and other congregation members from **Trinity Episcopal Church in Marble Falls** recognized that they could play a role in solving the issue of hunger in their community, and started a plan to do just that.

This last summer marks the fourth year that the Burnet County Hunger Alliance has served the community, and the group continues to innovate and react to the needs of their neighbors. The coalition works with different food pantries, churches, businesses and civic organizations, the Burnet County Hunger Alliance is able to identify gaps in food assistance. One of the important decisions they made was to not become a non-profit organization, which allows them to serve as a mediator and collaborator between the existing food pantries and non-profit organizations in the area. While food pantries, church ministries, and other assistance programs have long been available, before the Hunger Alliance was formed there was no system in place for these groups to communicate needs or share what they had learned. The alliance meets quarterly and the organizations have the capacity to share and work together to fill the needs of the community.

Along the way, the group has continually learned how to best serve others. They have navigated the complex relationships and stigmas people associate with “assistance” programs, “hand-outs,” and even “government aid.” They’ve learned that community meals can be an effective way to feed others without stigma.

Taking the community’s needs into account also means focusing on the needs of children. **One in five children in Burnet County is food insecure**, meaning they have limited access to food or don’t have access to nutritional food. More than 60% of children in the county qualify for free or reduced-cost school lunches and

the Burnet County Hunger Alliance works to make sure that summers are covered for those children.

One special consideration for children is their food preferences. While children may have little or no choice at school, members say it's unhelpful to feed children if they won't eat what they are served. So over the summer, the group works to provide healthy meals that children will enjoy and a place for children to eat together indoors with air conditioning.

COVID-19 has only exacerbated many of the problems that cause hunger. Increased unemployment and reduced hours have increased food insecurity. In addition, there's also the issue that usual gatherings to serve food and eat together are now unsafe.



This last summer, the Highland Lakes Crisis Network, which is a member of the Hunger Alliance, rose to the occasion of responding to COVID and began providing meals to people who were sequestered at home. The Hunger Alliance then collaborated with the Boys and Girls Club and the Highland Lakes Crisis Network to add 200 additional meals to the 500 meals the Crisis Network was already providing. The Hunger Alliance helped provide some funding to help offset the cost of these additional meals.

By building relationships, listening to the needs and preferences of their community, and working in coalition, the Burnet County Hunger Alliance is filling in the gaps to better serve the hunger needs of their community.

It is common to feel upset after something traumatic happens. But while some people may feel better in a few weeks or months, others may experience changes in thoughts, feelings or behavior that impact their daily lives. They may need more help over a longer period of time to heal. Supporting a person immediately after a traumatic event and providing ongoing support can prevent symptoms that cause distress and lifelong physical, mental and emotional challenges.

If your loved one or peer is struggling because of COVID-19 or another traumatic event, ask them about their current situation and life experiences without judgment or blame. Find out if they are being harmed or are safe. Having an open and honest conversation about how they are doing and what they need can be life changing and get them the support they may need.



HOSPITAL VISITS

Given COVID-19, visitations are restricted by hospitals. Nevertheless, if you know of anyone who needs a home visit because they cannot get to Church, please call the Parish Office, or let Fr. Makowski know. We will see if the hospital will allow Fr. Makowski to call on them. If you have a pastoral emergency, please call Fr. Makowski at 713.299.7675.

THERE IS POWER IN PRAYER

Praying is something that we all can do, young and old, rich and poor, tall and short. Please pray for everyone in our Parish, those who have asked you to pray for them and especially those who have no one to pray for them.



PLEASE BRING PORK & BEANS FOR MANNAFEST

St. Luke's Episcopal Church

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NOTICE

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CONFORME A LA SECCIÓN 30.07, DEL CÓDIGO PENAL (TRASPASE POR PORTADOR DE LICENCIA PARA EL LIBRE PORTE DE ARMAS DE FUEGO), PERSONAS CON LICENCIA BAJO AUTORIDAD DEL SUBCAPÍTULO H, CAPÍTULO 411, DEL CÓDIGO DE GOBIERNO (LEY REGULADORA DE ARMAS DE FUEGO), NO DEBERÁ ENTRAR A ESTA PROPIEDAD CON UN ARMA DE FUEGO A LIBRE PORTE.

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