



# The S. Stephen

The monthly news at S. Stephen's Church in Providence

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## From the Rector

My dear people:

Some reading I was doing recently on three-act plays got me thinking about Holy Week. To hearken back to what we may have learned in high school or college English, the three-act structure dates from the days of ancient Greek drama, and follows a fairly consistent pattern that makes for a good story and often a gripping one when well done.

The first act sets the scene and establishes the main characters of the story, their relationships, and the world they inhabit. Often an incident occurs in the first act that confronts the protagonist with a problem that must be solved, or a question that must be answered: "Will x recover the diamond?" "Will y get the girl?" "Will z capture the murderer?"

The second act generally develops the story into a crisis. Some unforeseen complication often intensifies the problem or question introduced in the first act. By the end of the second act, the antagonistic forces seem to have gained the upper hand; the protagonist seems to be defeated; and the situation appears hopeless.

The third act resolves the crisis. Typically, the climactic scene or sequence brings the tensions of the story to their most intense point and answers the dramatic question. In some cases the protagonist receives help from an unexpected quarter – in ancient drama this was often the proverbial *deus ex machina*, but in more modern drama it may be a character whose resources and potential have previously been underestimated, including the protagonist himself. By the end of the third act, the world that is the play's setting has been transformed and the protagonist and other characters have emerged with a new sense of who they are.

During Holy Week, the liturgies of the *Sacred Triduum* – Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Easter Vigil – can be understood as just such a three-act play. It has even been said that the Triduum liturgies are not really three separate

liturgies but three parts of one liturgy – three acts in the same drama.

As the first act, the Maundy Thursday Liturgy establishes the place (Jerusalem), the time (Passover), and the major characters in the story (Jesus and his disciples). The disciples have followed Jesus to Jerusalem in hopes that he will reveal himself as the Messiah and inaugurate God's reign on earth. But questions emerge as he washes their feet before supper, an unheard-of action, and again at supper as he speaks enigmatic words about the bread and wine being his body and blood. A definite problem emerges when Judas Iscariot leaves the supper to betray him to the authorities. As the gathering disperses and Jesus goes out to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, we are left with the dramatic question: how will Jesus prevail against the antagonistic forces that are mustering against him and establish his messianic kingdom?

As the second act, the Good Friday Liturgy quickly intensifies the crisis precipitated by Judas's betrayal the night before. Jesus is arrested. The dreadful sequence of events unfolds as recounted in the Passion narrative: the trials before the Sanhedrin and then before Pilate, the crowning with thorns, the mockery, the scourging, the sentencing, the carrying of the cross, and finally the crucifixion. After three hours on the cross, Jesus dies, is taken down, and buried. By the end of this second act, then, all hope seems lost.

As the third act, the Great Vigil of Easter doesn't immediately rush to resolve the crisis of Jesus' death. Instead, it begins with a series of flashbacks. In the darkness, fire is kindled and a candle is lit, calling to remembrance God's creation of light in the beginning. Then readings from Scripture recount God's victories over darkness and death throughout the history of his dealings with humankind.

Still in darkness, the congregation is reminded of its hope as water is blessed, holy baptism is administered, and baptismal promises are renewed. Finally, in the climactic moment that represents Christ's resurrection from the dead, the organ sounds, bells ring, and the lights come up, with the congregation praising God with Easter alleluias. The dramatic question posed in the first act has indeed been answered in a new and totally unexpected way: Jesus emerges victorious not over the earthly empire of Rome, but over sin and death itself. The world is forever changed, and nothing can ever be the same again.

The difference, of course, is that many three-act plays tell fictional stories, whereas we believe that the story told in the Triduum is not only true but the Truth itself. It is, in other words, the one true drama of which all other three-act plays are anticipations or shadows.

I have written more about the Easter Vigil elsewhere in this issue of *The S. Stephen*. Here I want simply to reiterate the point that seeing the liturgies of the Triduum as the three acts of a play helps us to appreciate the necessity of attending all three to experience their maximum impact. We shortchange ourselves if we arrive after the first act or leave before the final act of a play. And the same is true of the Triduum. We shortchange ourselves if we attend one or two but not all three of its parts.

With all good wishes and prayers for a blessed Holy Week and a joyous Easter, I remain, faithfully,

Your pastor and priest,

Fr. John D. Alexander +

Fr. John D. Alexander



## From the Curate:



### Dear People of S. Stephen's,

Here at S. Stephen's, we have the privilege of hearing the traditional plainsong mass settings throughout the whole of Lent. While I deeply love the Pal-

estrina, the Ireland, the Victoria and all of the other great composers, I know that it's Lent when we hear the choir sing the plainsong. In some respects, singing plainsong rather than these other great pieces of music might seem a kind of corporate Lenten discipline. But if we are tempted to see the chant in this way, we might miss the power that these simple melodies convey.

Most of these mass settings were composed – if that's what you can call it – well before the year 1000 A.D. And although plainsong is often called *Gregorian Chant*, St. Gregory the Great is credited more as the person who collected and organized the chant, rather than the person who actually wrote it. The actual composers were anonymous monks, nuns and priests who developed the chant in order to add meaning and feeling to their prayers. These are two very important characteristics for us to keep in mind. The chant is anonymous; it belongs to the whole Church. And it has been around for a very long time. Through the chant, we are connected both to those who have gone before and also to the Church around the world.

When we think about the chant, we often think about how the text drives the singing, and we draw a distinction between the chant and other musical forms. But chant's dependence on the

text goes much deeper than simple rhythm and inflection. The way that the chant moves in response to the text – pitch, rhythm, speed – is actually a theological and spiritual commentary. When sung, the chant and the text enter into a relationship whereby each informs the other.

This is true even in some of the most simple passages. In most of the mass settings we hear throughout the year, the *Kyrie* acts as a kind of opening statement of the composer's theme. Often, it is a brief passage before we get to the main piece, the *Gloria*. But in the plainsong mass settings, the *Kyrie* is an important spiritual statement on its own. Originally, the *kyries* at the beginning of mass were the people's responses to a penitential litany, but by the seventh or eighth centuries, the litany had dropped away and all that was left were the *kyries*. But within the memory of the Church, these *kyries* were understood to be the Church's cry for forgiveness.

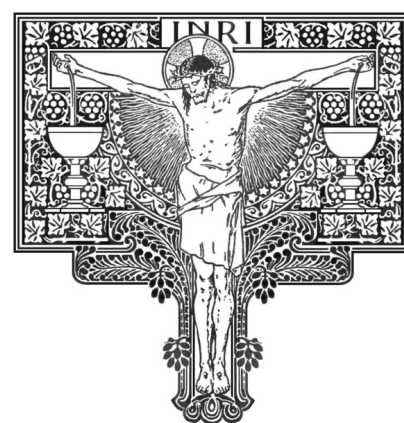
As they came to be sung, the *kyries* took on even more meaning. Structurally, the *Kyrie* is traditionally sung in three sections of three. In the first section, we sing *Kyrie eleison* three times, "Lord, have mercy." And in the chant for the first section, we call upon the Lord God gently. We are sorry, but don't seem to be too upset about our sins. We know that we need to ask forgiveness, but we're not as bad as we could be. In the second section, things change. Now we are singing *Christe eleison* – Christ have mercy. Now we realize that there is someone else involved in our forgiveness. It's not just us and God; we have to understand how Christ fits into things. Our forgiveness is not simply a private act. The chant is quite different from what we sung before, it's almost as if the chant is surprised that it has to consider this other person. In the third section, we return to the text *Kyrie eleison*, and in the chant, we usually try to return to the first theme. But in the final *kyrie*, we realize that we can't go back to the kind of complacent calling upon the Lord. Our encounter with Christ

just won't allow us. In the chant, the final *kyrie* is sometimes completely different from everything that went before, and other times it combines the two themes of the *Kyrie* and the *Christe*. But in all settings, the final *kyrie* reminds us that, once we encounter Christ in prayer, we are not the same. The chant shows us what it feels like to be forgiven in Christ.

In just a few weeks, the choir will be singing that last plainsong mass of this year at the Easter Vigil. This is the great *Missa Lux et Origo*, the mass that is specifically appointed for Easter. Each element of this mass is infused with the contemplation of the Resurrection – even the *Kyrie*. On this night, this particular setting will be sung in churches around the world, just as it has been sung for centuries. And we are blessed to be able to join them.

It has been said, very truly, that religion is the thing that makes the ordinary man feel extraordinary; it is an equally important truth that religion is the thing that makes the extraordinary man feel ordinary.

Charles Dickens



## Stations of The Cross

Friday evenings in Lent  
March 19 & 28

5 pm  
following Evening Prayer  
& Low Mass

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# THE GREAT VIGIL OF EASTER

by Father Alexander

Many church members understand the importance of most of the services of Holy Week and the *Sacrum Triduum*, the great “three days” of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Eve. Palm Sunday commemorates our Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his Passion. Maundy Thursday reenacts the Last Supper, our Lord’s washing of his disciples’ feet, and his agony in the garden at Gethsemane. On Good Friday, we hear the Passion Gospel and venerate the Cross on which he died for our sins. And then Easter morning blazes with the glory of his Resurrection.

Yet even faithful parishioners often miss the significance of the Great Vigil of Easter on the evening of Holy Saturday. Attendance at the Easter Vigil is often just a bit lower than at the other liturgies of the Triduum, and we can perhaps understand why. The Vigil lasts well into the night, even though we will be returning to church the following morning for the Queen of Feasts in all its splendor. The Vigil is long—beginning in a somewhat spooky darkness—with many lengthy Biblical passages to sit through before the lights come up and we sing the first Alleluia since the beginning of Lent. A newcomer wandering in might well wonder why the faithful are gathered and what is going on.

Nevertheless, no other service of the Christian Year so fully expresses the heart of the faith, the essence of the mystery that defines who we are as Christians. For historical reasons, the Church for a time put insufficient emphasis on this liturgy, at once solemn yet deeply joyful, which allows us to be present at the tomb when Christ breaks the bonds of death and hell to rise victorious from the grave. It recalls our own dying and rising with Christ in Holy Baptism as we relive the story of God’s people from the Creation to the Incarnation, and brings us, rejoicing, into the light of eternal day.

## A Short History of the Easter Vigil

From the earliest days of the Church the celebration of Easter was preceded by a strict fast lasting one or two days, followed by a nocturnal assembly for prayer on Easter Eve, which concluded with celebration of Mass. A.G. Martimort writes: “At that time, then, the Christian Easter consisted in a fast, a feast, and a transition from the one to the other in which the hours of fasting were completed by prayer and in which the feast day was



opened by the Eucharist” (*The Church at Prayer: Vol. 4, The Liturgy and Time*, 35).

The *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, a Syrian work of the third century, offers the earliest description of the Easter celebration:

*On the Friday and on the Sabbath fast wholly, and taste nothing. You shall come together and watch and keep vigil all the night with prayers and intercessions, and with reading of the Prophets, and with the Gospel and with Psalms . . . And then offer your oblations; and thereafter eat and make good cheer, and rejoice and be glad, because the earnest of our resurrection, Christ is risen.*

Here we have some of the basic elements of the Easter Vigil: a fast, an assembly of the faithful, a vigil of prayer

and readings from scripture, celebration of the Eucharist, and subsequent feasting in the joy of the risen Christ.

By the fourth century, the Easter Vigil had become the principal occasion for adult baptism, coming as it did at the end of Lent, the final period of instruction for new converts to the faith. During this period, baptismal ceremonies were added to the Vigil, including a procession to the font, the consecration of the baptismal water, the removal of garments by the candidates for baptism, a triple immersion accompanied by a triple profession of faith, an anointing with chrism, the donning of a white baptismal robe, the laying-on-of-hands by the bishop, and the return to the church for the Eucharist, with the newly baptized receiving Communion for the first time.

Another addition to the rite at this time was the lighting of the Easter candle at the beginning of the service, accompanied by a proclamation of thanksgiving, sung by a deacon, which became known as the *Exsultet*. Since all the lamps in the Church had been extinguished on Maundy Thursday, it was also necessary to strike a new flame from which to light the Easter candle and provide the minimum illumination needed for the night-time vigil. The eighth century Church historian, the Venerable Bede, wrote poetically of this aspect of the Easter Vigil’s symbolism:

*From the beginning of the world’s creation until this time, the course of time was so divided that day preceded night, according to the order of its primeval making. On this night,*

*because of the mystery of our Lord's resurrection, the order of time was changed. He rose from the dead during the night, and on the following day he showed the effect of his resurrection to his disciples.... It was once appropriate that night follow day, for by sinning the human race fell away from the light of paradise into the darkness and hardships of this age. It is appropriate that day follow night now, when through faith in the resurrection we are led back from the darkness of sin and the shadow of death to the light of life by Christ's gift.*

Prayers for the blessing of the new fire and directions for the procession of the Easter candle date from the twelfth century. A final innovation, dating from the early thirteenth century, was the insertion into the Easter candle of five grains of incense in the form of a cross while it was being blessed.

From about the seventh century on, however, the Easter Vigil gradually began to decline. In subsequent centuries, as infant baptism became the norm and adult baptism the exception, baptisms ceased to take place at the Easter Vigil. Meanwhile, the time of the Vigil was brought earlier and earlier, until the lighting of the new fire was taking place at noon or in the morning on Holy Saturday – which completely falsified the symbolism of the light of the Easter candle and the singing of the *Exsultet* with its praise of a “night truly blessed.” The people absented themselves from the Vigil in growing numbers and started coming to church on Easter Sunday morning instead.

It was not until the early twentieth century that the Church rediscovered the Easter Vigil as the high point of the Christian year, largely through the research and writing of the German liturgical scholar Dom Odo Casel. In 1955, Pope Pius XII made the nocturnal celebration of the Easter Vigil obligatory: it was not to begin before night had fallen and was to end before sunrise.

### The Shape of the Vigil

Here at S. Stephen's, the basic shape of the Easter Vigil more or less follows the order given in the 1979 Prayer Book, which comprises the following six elements:

**The Kindling of the New Fire** – the congregation gathers in darkness, and near the entrance of the church the new fire is kindled (traditionally from flint) and blessed.

**The Lighting of the Paschal Candle** – after the insertion of five grains of incense and the accompanying prayers, the Easter candle is lighted from the new fire. The deacon carries the candle into the church, pausing three times (at the same three places where he paused on Good Friday when carrying the cross) to sing “The Light of Christ,” to which the congregation responds, “Thanks be to God.” The hand candles of the members of the congregation are lighted from the Paschal Candle, filling the church with the glow of candlelight.

**The Exsultet** – the deacon places the Paschal Candle in its stand next to the pulpit, and sings the Exsultet, a praying calling on whole company of heaven, the creatures of the earth, and the members of the Church to rejoice in the victory of the eternal King. Christ is praised as the Paschal Lamb who by his blood has delivered his people as the Hebrews were delivered from

Egypt. Just as the children of Israel were brought out of bondage, so those who believe in Christ are delivered from death and sin and restored to life.

**The Service of Readings** – by definition, a vigil consists of a series of scripture readings interspersed with psalms, canticles, and prayers. The Prayer Book offers a choice of nine readings from the Old Testament – traditionally known as ‘the Prophecies’ since they anticipate Christ's Resurrection in various ways – of which one must always be the account of Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea. Here at S. Stephen's, we generally use four or five readings.

**Holy Baptism or the Renewal of Baptismal Vows** – at the conclusion of the Service of Readings, there is a procession to the font to the accompaniment of the Litany of the Saints. If there are candidates for baptism, they are presented by their sponsors and make their baptismal vows. The celebrant blesses the water and administers Holy Baptism. Even if there are no candidates for baptism, however, there is still a procession to the font; the congregation renews its baptismal vows, and the celebrant blesses the font and may sprinkle the congregation with water from the font as a reminder of their baptism. The procession returns to the sanctuary, again to the singing of the Litany of the Saints.

**The First Mass of Easter** – at this point, the candles at the High Altar are lighted. On returning from the baptismal font, the three sacred ministers go into the sacristy and quickly change from the purple vestments of Lent into the gold vestments of Easter. Then, at the conclusion of the Litany of the Saints, the Mass begins with the celebrant intoning the words *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, at which point the lights come on to an organ fanfare – ideally, the first time the organ sounds since it fell silent on Maundy Thursday – and the joyous clash of ringing bells. Shortly afterwards, preceding the Gospel, a cantor sings and the congregations repeats the threefold Great Alleluia – the first utterance of the word Alleluia since the beginning of Lent. Thus begins the first Easter Mass at which those who have just been baptized receive Communion for the first time.

### Concluding Word

It has been aptly remarked that the Easter Vigil is the hinge on which the rest of the Christian liturgical year turns. Every Sunday throughout the year is a “little Easter,” the weekly celebration of the Lord's Resurrection; and every Sunday Mass throughout the year is likewise a recapitulation or extension of the Easter Vigil. The symbolism of the Easter Vigil lies at the heart of Christian liturgy, making it simply the most important service of the entire Church year.

The Great Vigil of Easter makes present to the Church the reality of the Paschal mystery, assuring us, in the words of St. Paul, that “*Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive*” (1 Corinthians 15:20-22). Experiencing the joy of this ancient and beautiful service amply repays the effort to attend.

He is risen, he is risen! Tell it out with joyful voice; he has burst his three days' prison; let the whole wide earth rejoice! - Hymn 180



## John Mason Neale (1818-1866)

by Karen Vorbeck Williams

At the back of *The Hymnal 1982*, John Mason Neale is credited as the source of far more hymns than contributed by any other single author or translator. He was a man of fragile health and basic goodness who suffered greatly during the period of discrimination against Anglo-Catholics in the Church of England during the nineteenth century. On account of his affiliation with the Oxford Movement he was called an "agent of the Vatican assigned to destroy the Anglican Church by subverting it from within." He was attacked and battered at a funeral, unruly crowds threatened to stone him or to burn his house. But by the end of his life his fundamental holiness had converted many who had violently opposed him.

Neale is best known as a hymn writer and translator. He translated Eastern liturgies into English and wrote a mystical devotional commentary on the Psalms. His work brought many ancient and medieval hymns translated from Latin, Greek, Russian and Syrian to English-speaking congregations. For example, Holy Week and Easter hymns translated by Neale include *All Glory, laud, and honor, Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle, Thou hallowed chosen morn of praise, and Come, ye faithful, raise the strain*. He also published many books on the history of the church.

At the age of fourteen, he began a translation of the poetry of Coelius Sedulius (450 AD), published in 1833. Books were his passion. Everywhere he went, whatever he was doing he had a book open and, it was said, he never forgot a word he read.

The son of a clergyman, who died when Neale was only five, he was educated at Shelbourne Grammar school and by private tutors before he entered Trinity College in Cambridge in 1836. Except for his lack of ability in mathematics which kept him from taking honors, he was the best classical scholar in his class.

Touched by an interest in church architecture, he helped organize the Cambridge Camden Society in 1839 which became the Ecclesiological Society and exercised a huge influence on both the architecture and ritual of the English Church. They published a periodical, *The Ecclesiologist*, which took on a campaign against the dilapidated condition of many English church buildings. The Society became influential in the Victorian campaign of church construction. Neale had a special dislike for the ugly stoves used to heat many churches. An article in *The Ecclesiologist* described a large Arnott stove in the middle of the chancel, whose flue rose to the height of the priest and crossed his face before exiting the building via a hole in the glass of the north window. He also ranted against the high



walled box pews or "pens," as the Society enjoyed calling them, where rich families reclined upon their sofas. The Ecclesiological Movement, which wanted to introduce more ritual and religious decoration in churches, associated closely with the Gothic Revival and became a natural partner to The Oxford Movement, which also looked back to the Middle Ages as a time when the Church had perfected both liturgy and aesthetics in worship.

Neale graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge in 1840, was ordained deacon in 1841, and priest in 1842, the same year he married Sarah Norman Webster. He became incumbent of Crawley in Sussex, but after six weeks he became ill with a chronic lung disease and resigned. Because of his bad health, he moved to the Madeira Islands off the northwest coast of Africa where he made good use of the fine cathedral library filled with sources for his *History of the Eastern Church* and for *Commentary on the Psalms* and his liturgical studies.

In 1845 Neale returned to England and in 1846 at a salary of only £27, became Warden of Sackville College, East Grinstead, Sussex, an almshouse and charitable institution for the aged. And there he remained until his death. At Sackville College he wrote voluminously: theology, history, travel books, hymns, poetry and books for children.

Neale received no honor or advancement in England and his doctorate was bestowed by Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut in 1860. Because of his high church sympathies and very possibly his decorated furnishings of the church at Sackville College, he endured seventeen years inhibition (1846-1863) by the Bishop of Chichester, which means that he was prohibited from publicly performing any ministerial duties.

In 1854 he founded the Society of Saint Margaret, an order of nuns committed to nursing the sick, especially the sick and suffering poor, "going to their homes whenever called for, living with them, sharing their discomfort and refusing no difficulty, and adapting themselves to all circumstances." At the time this was considered a Utopian scheme that one of its warmest supporters thought, "a very interesting experiment, and I wonder whether Anglicanism can carry it out." Although extremely unpopular at the time, the Sisterhood of Saint Margaret survived and prospered becoming known for the best nurses in England. The sisterhood grew from one to many houses in England and branched out to Scotland, America and Ceylon. From this work grew a school for girls, a house of refuge for prostitutes and an orphanage. The Society of Saint Margaret exists to the present day, with a house not too far away from us in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Neale died on August 6, 1866 at the young age of 48 on the Feast of the Transfiguration. At his funeral the highest ranking clergymen were Orthodox. One of the hymns was an adaptation from St. Joseph the Hymnographer, a special favorite with Neale. Here is the first verse:

Safe home, safe home in port!  
Rent cordage, shatter'd deck,  
Torn sails, provisions short,  
And only not a wreck;  
But oh! the joy upon the shore,  
To tell our voyage perils o'er!

At his request his coffin was inscribed: J. M. Neale, *miser et indignus sacerdos requiescens sub Signo Thau* ("J. M. Neale. Poor and unworthy priest resting under the sign of the cross"). Because his death fell on the Feast of the Transfiguration it is commemorated in the calendar of the Episcopal Church and many other Anglican calendars on the following day, August 7.

Following is a short taste of prose taken from an article by J.M. Neale, *English Hymnology: Its History and Prospects* in the periodical *The Christian Remembrancer*, 1849. It is interesting to know that in Neale's time, singing hymns in church was a relatively recent innovation—the Wesleys and others had written some hymns in the 18th century, but before then mostly psalms were sung in the Church of England. Neale's great achievement was to retrieve and translate large parts of the church's forgotten ancient hymnody.

"...That treasury, into which the saints of every age and country had poured their contributions, delighting, each in his generation, to express their hopes and fears, their joys and sorrows, in language which would be the heritage of their Holy Mother until the end of time—those noble hymns, which had solaced anchorites on their mountains, monks in their cells, priests in bearing up against the burden and heat of the day, missionaries in girding themselves for martyrdom—henceforth became as a sealed book and as a dead letter. The prayers and collects, the versicles and responses, of the earlier Church might, without any great loss of beauty, be preserved; but the hymns, whether of the sevenfold daily office, of the weekly commemoration of creation and redemption, of the yearly revolution of the Church's seasons, or of the birthdays to glory of martyrs and confessors—those hymns by which day unto day had uttered speech, and night unto night had taught knowledge—could not, by the hands then employed in ecclesiastical matters, be rendered into another, and that a then comparatively barbarous tongue. One attempt the Reformers made—the version of the *Veni Creator Spiritus* in the Ordinal; and that, so far perhaps fortunately, was the only one. Cranmer, indeed, expressed some casual hope that men fit for the office might be induced to come forward; but the very idea of a hymnology of the time of Henry VIII may make us feel thankful that the prelate's wishes were not carried out. The Church of England had, then, to wait. She had, as it has well been said, to begin over again. There might arise saints within herself, who, one by one, should enrich her with hymns of earlier times. In the meantime the psalms were her own; and grievous as was the loss she had sustained, she might be content to suffice herself with those, and expect in patience the rest."

## 2010 Lenten Series



'What is Truth?' –

The Passion of S. John: Music and Interpretation

Sunday 21 March from 7 to 8pm in the Great Hall

The story of the Passion of Our Lord as recorded in S. John's Gospel has shaped the faith and identity of generations of Christians. Its richness lends itself to a variety of interpretations. Inspired by the power of the story, many composers have set the Passion to music. In their interpretations, these composers reveal their own understanding of what this text means to them. And through our responses to their music, we better understand our own preconceptions and interpretations of this foundational Christian story. By reflecting on the way that the Passion has been set to music, we hope to enter more deeply into its meaning.

## The Feast of the Annunciation



Thursday 25 March  
at 5pm

Plainchant Vespers and Sung Mass for the  
Feast of the Annunciation



## Fasting and Prayer

by Phoebe Pettingell



Someone who taught me much about fasting and prayer was the chairman of a committee I served on at The General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 1988. We had been assigned the difficult task of rewriting some badly prepared drafts of potentially controversial liturgical materials for the Convention's approval. Our chair, a devout layman from the Southwest known not only for his political skills but even more for his holiness of life, spent his lunch hours during the first week—while most of us were scarfing down junk food—in “fasting and prayer,” asking God for guidance. The Anglo-Catholics on the committee, inclined to be wary and skeptical of anything outside our own branch of churchmanship, soon came to trust him because of his devotional self-denial. His prayer and fasting convinced us that he genuinely sought the Lord's will before his own inclinations. And, as it turned out, God certainly granted him the wisdom and influence to shape our committee's motley cross-section of the Church—ranging from radical representatives of the Episcopal Women's Caucus to ultra-traditionalist priests who had only celebrated from *The Anglican Missal*—into a team that managed to salvage and rewrite enough of the material for Episcopalians to weigh and evaluate at future conventions.

Scripture provides ample cases of fasting and prayer as preparation for some significant work or as an act of atonement. Before meeting God on the mountain to receive the tablets of the Ten Commandments, Moses readied himself and “neither ate bread nor drank water” for forty days and nights. (Deuteronomy 9:9-11). King David fasted when the child born

of his adulterous union with Bathsheba fell sick, hoping that by his show of penitence God might spare the boy (2 Samuel 12:16-18). When Haman the Agagite devised a plot to destroy the Jews, Queen Esther asked her people to fast and pray for three days before she went to King Ahasuerus to plead for their lives. (Esther 4) When Jonah delivered God's judgment on Nineveh, that in forty days they would be destroyed, the entire city fasted and prayed so that the Lord forgave their sin and spared them (Jonah 3:7). Christ himself fasted forty days in the wilderness before beginning his mission (see both Matthew 4:2 and Luke 4:2). Some ancient manuscripts of the Gospel according to Mark explain that when our Lord cast a demon out of a child after his disciples had tried and failed, he said, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting.” (Mark 9:29).

Since the tradition of the fast is so often referred to throughout the Old and New Testaments, the Early Church followed the practice and often preached about its importance. St. Ambrose (c. 339-397) called it “That which is heavenly both in meaning and substance. Fasting is the nourishment of the soul, and the food of the mind. Fasting is the life of the angels. Fasting is the death of sin, the destruction of guilt, the remedy of salvation, the source of grace, and the foundation of chastity. By this path God is more easily approached.” St. Jerome called it “the foundation of all other virtues.” Before baptism at the Easter Vigil, catechumens fasted for the previous forty days to purify themselves for their new life in Christ, and in imitation of his fasting in the wilderness. This is the origin of the Church's practice of fasting before receiving the Eucharist, and during Lent. *The Book of Common Prayer* has always prescribed certain fast days in addition: the vigil of (i.e., the day before) major feasts like Christmas, the Annunciation, the Ascension or Pentecost; and vigils of the feasts of the Apostles and All Saint's Day. In addition, it calls for fasts during Lent, Ember Days and Rogation Days. Elizabethan and Caroline Anglicans took fasting and abstinence very seriously, but in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the practice dwindled until the Oxford Movement revived the interest in the Church Fathers and the Caroline Divines. Modern revisions of *The Book of Common Prayer* throughout the Anglican Communion have retained the traditional fast days and there is a growing feeling that the tradition continues to speak powerfully to our own age.

As we see from some of the Scriptural examples above, fasts can be heroic bouts of many days leading to visions and profound spiritual experiences. Such a fast must not be attempted without some kind of qualified spiritual advisor (and it would also be wise to consult medical personnel to assess one's fitness for such an endeavor). In the Catholic understanding, however, fasting is not limited to such extremes. Fasting simply involves reducing or eliminating one's food intake for a certain period. Thus, one cuts back on the *quantity* of food consumed. Current Roman Catholic law specifies that on a fast day, people should eat only one full meal (with up to two “collations”—light meals or snacks). Good Friday is a fast day where, typically, the meal would come after 3 pm—the hour at which Christ died on the Cross. Abstinence, on the other hand, requires that one refrain from certain types of food or drink for a specified period—thus altering the *quality* of food or drink consumed. Days of abstinence include Fridays during Lent (or, for many people, Fridays during all the liturgical seasons except Christmastide and Eastertide). Abstaining from meat represents a symbolic

mortification of our own frail flesh, *carne* in Latin being the word both for meat and for the human flesh that the meat sustains. In the Western Catholic tradition, fish is permissible on days of abstinence. In the East, Orthodox fasting rules are more complicated. They vary, depending on the season or saint's day, but frequently avoid all consumption of oils or fats. They may also exclude fish at times. Personal rules of abstinence in all fasting traditions often involve giving up alcohol, desserts, or any other fare we find particularly pleasurable.

Most of us enjoy eating. We eat not merely to satisfy hunger, but for pleasure or to assuage boredom, loneliness or some other hole in our well-being. We indulge in certain forms of food not because they are good for us but because they bring us some form of comfort. Our society of plenty is riddled with eating disorders—morbid obesity and anorexia being the two most publicized. We cannot deny that gluttony (or its perverse opposite, starvation) represents a form of disordered behavior where we feel an inner compulsion to do things we really don't want to do and know we should not. For the religious person, fasting or abstinence becomes a way of spiritual focus, self-discipline, and sacrifice of our fleshly desires in order to bring our wills in conformity with God's. This is *not* because the material world is evil. Christ was often criticized by the Pharisees for so often being seen feasting. Indeed, we should enjoy food. It is a gift from God. However, we will enjoy it all the more if we bring our appetites under control, fasting or abstaining when the Church ordains—receiving the Eucharist fasting, abstaining from meat during Fridays in Lent (as a minimum), giving up some form of unnecessary but pleasurable food we are particularly inclined to indulge in. The joy of Easter will be all the greater when we can once again appreciate what we have deprived ourselves of for a season. Furthermore, having learned to “do without,” we may feel less enslaved to our cravings in future. We know we can give them up.

The ultimate object of fasting and abstinence is not self-improvement. It is one more way to “listen” to what God is saying to us—even as Moses and Christ prepared themselves, one to receive the Lord's commandments for his people, the other to embark on his earthly mission. It is a way to repent and express our sorrow for the behavior that separates us from God—as David and the people of Nineveh recognized. It is a form of deprivation that puts us in closer sympathy with “the poor and the oppressed...the unemployed and the destitute...prisoners and captives” [BCP “Prayers of the People, Form I]. Of late, it has been fashionable in certain religious circles to aver that a loving God wants us to be happy all the time, to rejoice and enjoy life, to never feel bad about ourselves. Therefore, any form of penance or deprivation is unnecessary. Such well-meaning advice has the opposite effect of that intended, because in this broken and fallen world, we are often miserable. We know we aren't living up to what we ought to be. We suffer losses and hurts. We are faced with difficult decisions and don't know what the right choice might be. A “Don't worry, be happy” environment affords us no comfort.

The seasons of the Church Year relive our Lord's life on earth, but also mirror our own. Many people in depression or mourning find Lent a comfort precisely because it asks all of us to turn again, to lament our wrongdoings, to feel sorrow for our sins and failures. Unhappy people need not feel alone—the

Church upholds their mood in this season. Conversely, in particularly joyful periods of our life, Lent permits us the ritual of remembering those times when all was not well. Fasting and abstinence are part of that ritual. Without them, we deny the difficulties of life and close off an avenue in which Christ can lead us to become the people that God has created us to be.



If we want to give poor people soap we must set out deliberately to give them luxuries. If we will not make them rich enough to be clean, then empathically we must do what we did with the saints. We must reverence them for being dirty.

G. K. Chesterton



## Fr. Tuck's Walsingham Update

*An occasional series  
on all things Walsingham*

### The Feast of the Annunciation

Every year, the ordinarily plain season of Lent is punctuated by a very few feast days which overshadow the penitence of Lent. The Feast of the Annunciation is one of these feasts. The Feast of the Annunciation is one of the highest points of the Marian cycles of feasts, and it is especially associated with devotion to Our Lady of Walsingham.

According to the tradition, Mary was brought up in a small house in Nazareth. It was in this house that the Angel Gabriel appeared to her to tell her of her vocation to become the Mother of God. It was in this house that she lived during the childhood of Jesus and it was to this house that she returned after Our Lord's Ascension.

When Lady Richeldis beheld her three visions of Our Lady in 1061 A.D., Mary showed her the dimensions of this house and asked her to build a replica, the Holy House at Walsingham. This Holy House was to be a destination and a focus of prayer for all those who were unable to travel to the Holy Land.

On 25 March, we at S. Stephens will commemorate the Feast of the Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to Mary, the Mother of God. With signs such as the Holy House at Walsingham, we are reminded that the events the Gospels, with their eternal and cosmic consequences, happened in real places to real people. These are signs to us that God is working in our lives as well.



## Treasurer's Corner

by Brian Ehlers

Having been your treasurer for eleven years, now, it didn't take me long to recognize that the largest line item every year on the detailed expense parish budget was and is the Diocesan Apportionment. For 2010 that expense will be \$74,647. This year, when I was giving my treasurer's report, someone (without any prompting by me) spoke up loudly enough for everyone to hear, "That's a lot of money!" As I've often said at this parish's Annual Meeting, I think the current 17.5% apportionment is too much. 10% might be more appropriate. Symbolically, it would be the church's "tithe" in support of common diocesan programs, as well as National Church programs.

However, now that I am active at Diocesan "headquarters" I have a better understanding of where our apportionment goes. Last December I became a member of the new Mission Task Force established by a resolution passed by the 2009 Diocesan Convention. Our work is to evaluate the current diocesan mission and suggest changes. My layman's understanding of where the money goes is going to be very important. I have a voice!

One relatively new mission of the diocese wins my full approval. Ruth Meter was hired as Communications Officer. Disconnects between diocesan headquarters and the churches in the past have often been problems of communicating. Ruth is doing an excellent job! Have you every browsed the newly designed and "living" Diocesan Website? <http://www.episcopalri.org/> I strongly suggest you do, because you will learn about the current common missions of the diocese which we and all parishes support financially. This information helps us all better understand where our money goes—which missions seem to be strong and working, and which need a new approach.

The website is a most important means of communicating. It can become a tool linking all of us—parish to parish to headquarters. I strongly believe that COMMUNICATIONS can facilitate involvement by all in exciting new ways. I think it can help discouraged churches become vital and living churches. I am a strong supporter of the Communications Office and the work Ruth Meter is doing for all of us in the Diocese.

Love's redeeming work is done,  
Fought the fight, the battle won.  
Death in vain for bids him rise;  
Christ has opened paradise. Alleluia

Lives again our glorious King:  
Where, O death is now thy sting?  
Once he died our souls to save,  
Where thy victory, O grave? Alleluia

Soar we now where Christ has led,  
Following our exalted Head;  
Made like him, like him we rise,  
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies. Alleluia  
Hymn 189

## The Altar

A broken Altar, Lord, thy servant rears,  
Made of a heart, and cemented with tears:  
Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;  
No workman's tool hath touched the same.

A Heart alone  
Is such a stone,  
As nothing but  
Thy pow'r doth cut.  
Wherefore each part  
Of my hard heart  
Meets in this frame,  
To praise thy name:  
That if I chance to hold my peace,  
These stones to praise thee may not cease.  
O let thy blessed Sacrifice be mine,  
And sanctify this Altar to be thine.

George Herbert

## Organ Recital



Sunday 18 April at 5:30 pm

Mark Dwyer

Organist

The Church of the Advent in Boston

Mark Dwyer, organist and choirmaster at The Church of the Advent in Boston, formerly held the same post at St. Paul's Parish, K Street in Washington, DC. He was the Music Director at the Cathedral of All Saints in Albany, NY, and before that Associate Organist & Choirmaster at the Advent. A Worcester native and 1985 graduate of the New England Conservatory, he studied with Yuko Hayashi, William Porter, Frank Taylor and Charles Krigbaum. For many years, Mark has also been a faculty member and choirmaster at the annual Saint Michael's Conference for Young People. An active accompanist and recitalist, Mark has performed in North and South America and Europe, is featured on several recordings by the Advent Choir as both accompanist and conductor, and is the performer on a JAV recording of the Advent's Aeolian-Skinner organ in the series *Great Organ Builders of America: A Retrospective*.



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