

episcorific.org

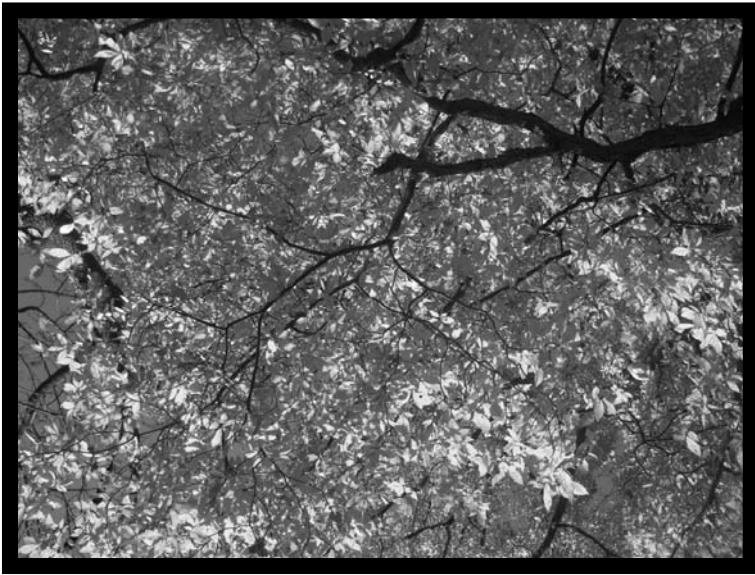


photo by Daniel Stroud

About *Episcorific*

Heya! you're holding the eighth issue of *Episcorific*, a zine for and by the young adults of the Episcopal Church. The big idea? Young adults are not big church-goers generally. Our lives are hectic and often unstable. We are at the mercy of the education system, budding careers, frequent moves and our own indecisiveness. We are justifiably self-involved as we try to make our place in this world, define the bounds of our lives. But for many of us the church is an important site for that self-creation, a place of expanding the me-box to let God in. So, this is just another attempt at bringing the few, the brave, the young adults of the Episcopal Church into closer communion. Read. Listen. Think. Pray. And when you're ready, lend your own voice to the babble. Let's share our lives of faith.



Episcorific

for and by the Young Adults of the Episcopal Church

ISSUE 8, VOLUME I, ADVENT & CHRISTMAS 2009

I AM AM I
incarnation



episcorific.org

A Note from the editor(s)



The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
—John 1:14

As a child I fell in love with the wonder and awe of Christmas in the Episcopal Church. My favorite part was the Christmas Eve service: Midnight Mass, Rite I, with all the smells and bells. My priest, Father Marquis, looked kind of like Santa Claus—snow white hair, red cheeks, and an infectious laugh that warmed the heart of even the coldest Scrooge. In the sleepy haze of trying not to miss it all, the beauty of the liturgy and Christ Incarnate came alive.

When I got a little older, the holidays came to mean a lot of regretful holiday binge eating and forgotten New Year's resolutions. It meant sorting out family schedules and holiday school breaks and travel plans; trying to keep my clothes nice for visiting Grandma and the cousins. The beauty of the season was lost in a maze of making sure I had presents for everyone, that I didn't spend beyond my measly means, that I didn't forget anything in my dorm room over the break. As my parents got older and we moved and scattered our family unit around the country, attending Midnight Mass became an add-on to the family plans for me.

These days things have slowed down: I've got the job, the husband, the house, two families to celebrate with and a church that I have been a part of since 2003. I've grown in my faith since then, and Advent and Christmas are now the time to come together with others in the body of Christ to remember His humble beginnings and celebrate the grace and truth that was brought to us. This year, as in years past, we will gather around tables and altars, kneel together in the pews, sing hymns and with joy and wonder witness the Incarnation.

We are not only witnesses to the Incarnation—we

Its not over!!!!

I AM AM I

BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST

So we received so much good stuff that we decided to split this issue in two, an Advent/Christmas Issue and an Epiphany Issue. Watch for the Epiphany Issue in the first week of the New Year. A blessed Advent and Christmas to all!

In the second installment:

What's in a Covenant?

by Joshua Orsak

Engaging in God's Artistic Process

by Otis Gaddis III

Why Start a Church?

by Jonathan Myers

Christian Incarnate

by Jesse Zink

Following Stars

by Matthew Puckett

Preparing for Marriage Equality

by Rachel Myers

Body Talk

by Nikki Cecil

The Bearable Lightness of Being Episcopalian

by Eileen O'Brien



Resources

for you and for me

episcopalchurch.org / young adults

“We’re here for you.” No really. The Episcopal Church Center Office for Young Adult and Campus Ministry is a great resource for Diocesan Young Adult Missioners, Parish Young Adult Ministers and Young Adults seeking guidance or looking for community.

The website is being relaunched sometime soon but check it out in the meantime. You’ll find event listings, diocesan contact info and some food for thought.

Contact the Reverend Douglas Fenton, Program Officer (dfenton@episcopalchurch.org) or Episcorific’s own Jason Sierra, the Associate Program Officer (jsierra@episcopalchurch.org) for more information.

episcopalchurch.org / plse

The Pastoral Leadership Search Effort or P(u)LSE is a discernment ministry for young adults in the Episcopal Church. And it’s not just about getting a collar. Find your way, find your calling. PLSE can hook you up with a mentor, help you find a ministry that fits you or offer you resources for reflection. Contact the reverend Miguelina Espinal for more information at mespinal@episcopalchurch.org.

iamepiscopalian.org

This is such a cool project! 90 second videos about why we are Episcopalians and what it means. Make a video! Post it.

episcopalcommons.org / broadcast

Check out Broadcast, a newsletter for Young Adults, Students, YA Ministers & Chaplains with stories from around the country about what has worked, what hasn’t and what possibilities are out there.

plug in. keep in touch.

are also a part of it. We are part of the Word Made Flesh as members of the Body of Christ. In this issue young adults explore what that means and how it is experienced in our lives. Advent and Christmas are examined in the context of how we interpret Incarnation—as New Episcopalians, Old Episcopalians, Cosmic Beings—and what it means to be an Incarnate Christian.

And the conversation doesn’t end there! Due to the volume of submissions this time around, we’ve decided to split this issue into two installments. The next issue will come out January 5th—just in time for Epiphany!

Emmanuel: God with us!

—Kathleen Jaco

We welcome Kathleen Jaco of Murfreesboro, TN to the team of Episcorific. Kathleen leads a young adult group at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church. She has been an Episcorific contributor since Issue 3, Advent 2008.

A big thank you to all those who contributed to this issue, to those who helped spread the word and especially to you for reading. We hope you’ll find food for thought and conversation.

Feedback for the authors can be sent to episcorific@gmail.com. Let’s keep the conversation going.

Episcorific is a publication for and by young adults, who may or may not otherwise be affiliated with the Episcopal Church. All opinions expressed in Episcorific are the opinions of the writers themselves and are in no way meant to speak on behalf of the official body of the Episcopal Church. The works belong to the authors and artists and you should ask their permission to reprint them outside of Episcorific. Just in case you were wondering.

The Episcorific editorial board consists of Ross Heinsohn, Kathleen Jaco, Eileen O’Brien, Jeremiah Sierra & Jason Sierra.

Advent & Christmas 2009

I Am Am I

We know, we know, they're separate seasons, but who is going to contribute in the middle of December? So, here they are, keep it around, read a couple each week, savor them. And don't forget to watch out for the Epiphany issue (a continuation of the Incarnation theme) to be released early in the new year (before Epiphany, January 6). Read. Listen. Think. Pray. And When you're ready, lend your own voice to the babble. Let's share our lives of faith!

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of christmas^{present!!!}

1) Jesus

This one is from God to you.

2) Pen & Paper

Write a letter to your friends. Or an email if you're all hi-tech. Write a letter to God. In the beginning was the Word. It's still around, and pretty useful.

3) Prayer Book

Liturgy is the Episcopalian's favorite way to pray.

4) Exercise Machine

Wake up from that turkey coma and use those calories!

5) Art Supplies

Draw a picture, paint a landscape, share it with your friends.

6) Yourself

God likes you. We like you. Feel free to share.

7) A Tree

Go outside. Plant a tree. Do some gardening. Well, that might have to wait until it warms up some, but you can still enjoy God's creation.

8) Nothing

Be still.

9) Help

Volunteer.

10) Treasure

Give a little to Episcopal Relief and Development, or your favorite charity. There's someone out there who has less than you do.

11) Time

Spend some time with all those people you love, and all the ones who love you.

12) Frankincense & Myrrh

Prepare for those wisemen.

That story is too much of a disaster to be a coincidence. It's not just a slight travel mishap; it's not just a slight oversight in planning. This is, after all, the same Mind behind the vast expanses of interstellar space and the staggering contingencies of earthly cellular biology. Surely if God had wanted something in this ineffable plan of Incarnation to go right, this Creator, of all Beings, could have seen to it. But no. The Creator of the vast expanses and the tiny contingent cells of life decides to break into the human experience in one of the messiest ways possible-- and no shortcuts!

Truly, this is what the Incarnation means: that God came among us in the messiest, dirtiest, most broken way possible so that every corner of the human experience would from now on be illuminated with the experience of God. Not just the pretty parts, not just the parts that are suitable for framing, or the parts appropriate for inclusion in family holiday newsletters. But every part. The fear and the excitement. The brisk night air and the smelly, pushing crowds. The cold stable and the prickly straw. Every part is touched with the presence of God. Everything we experience is now a potential encounter with the Divine.

Christmas isn't about perfection, or even about maintaining an elevated state of denial for 24 hours until your relatives leave. Christmas is actually about imperfection; it's about our faith that God comes to us, surrounds us, dwells with us, wherever we are, in whatever imperfect, human-like state we are in-- even on the darkest night of winter, in the deepest cave, covered in sticky camel spit.



It's the day after Christmas. Look under the tree, and all you'll find are pine needles and the cat, gnawing on an ornament. The only gifts in the house are leftovers wrapped in foil, stacked away in the fridge. The radio stations have stopped playing Christmas music, and soon you'll have to pack your bags and go back to work or school or wherever it is you came from.

But cheer up! You're an Episcopalian, and in the liturgical calendar there are 12 days of Christmas. Twelve whole days! That's like, 1,200% more Christmas than the Baptists get. And while your true love may not give you Seven Swans and Golden Rings and Lords a' Leapin', here's some suggestions on gifts for your Twelves Days.

incarnation:

For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily -Colossians 2:9

- 1: embodied in flesh; taking on flesh
- 2: the conception and birth of a sentient creature (generally a human) who is the material manifestation of an entity or force whose original nature is immaterial
- 3: In Christianity, the belief that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, also known as the Son or the Logos (Word), "became flesh" when he was miraculously conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary. In the Incarnation, the divine nature of the Son of God was perfectly united with human nature in one divine Person. The vast majority of churches believe this person, Jesus, was both truly God and truly man.

wikipedia

- Q. What do we mean when we say that Jesus is the only Son of God?
 A. We mean that Jesus is the only perfect image of the Father, and shows us the nature of God.
- Q. What is the nature of God revealed in Jesus?
 A. God is love.
- Q. What do we mean when we say that Jesus was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and became incarnate from the Virgin Mary?
 A. We mean that by God's own act, his divine Son received our human nature from the Virgin Mary, his mother.
- Q. Why did he take our human nature?
 A. The divine Son became human, so that in him human beings might be adopted as children of God, and be made heirs of God's kingdom.

*An Outline of the Faith
 The Book of Common Prayer, p849-50*

If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.'

John 10:37-38

hypostatic union

Cosmic Incarnation

by Joshua Orsak



Theological Progress

Of all the advancements made in the 20th and 21st centuries...the technological and scientific achievements, the expansion of rights and international awareness, the maturing of our understanding of the human mind...few are as unnoticed, nor as monumental in scope, as the advancements that were made in the field of theology. Many intelligent men and women of the last century and current century put their minds to the great theological questions of the ages. They came up with some amazing, creative answers to these questions, and posed questions of their own at least as interesting. Expressing these insights to the general religious populace, and finding ways to explain their relevance, is one of the major jobs of modern ministry. And nowhere can one find a more interesting line of discussion than on the issue of the incarnation.

The Accidental Discovery

Much of the significant theologizing on this subject has been a corollary of some other theological project, and what I take to be the greatest 'discovery' was stumbled upon by theologians whose main focus was not Christology, but cosmology. I'm talking about those men and women who sought to grapple with the rising scientific consciousness of mankind and what our expanded understanding of the universe might mean for Christianity.

We have to stop thinking about God as having 'created' the universe and instead realize that God 'is creating' the universe.

The most striking thing that came out of these musings was that modern science has forced us to see the universe itself as undergoing a kind of evolutionary process. The universe, these people suggested, is not a finished project, but a work in progress. We have to stop thinking about God as having 'created' the universe and instead realize that God 'is creating' the universe. The implications for incarnation have been this: God's incarnation is not something that happened at one particular point in time, but rather is also a part of this cosmic process. Science, seen through the eyes of faith, is not only a journey of discovery, but a journey of self-discovery.

Who we are, is in part inclusive of the whole cosmic evolutionary history. So from a Christian's point of view, that means that Jesus Christ also, being fully man

Re-Thinking Christmas

by Megan Castellan

In *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* by Barbara Robinson, a local family of adolescent troublemakers participates in the church's Christmas pageant for the first time, lured by the promise of all the free sugary food you can eat. This is the first time they are exposed to the Christmas story and, as you might expect, they are completely horrified. "Born in a BARN?! Where was Child Welfare?" one exclaims.

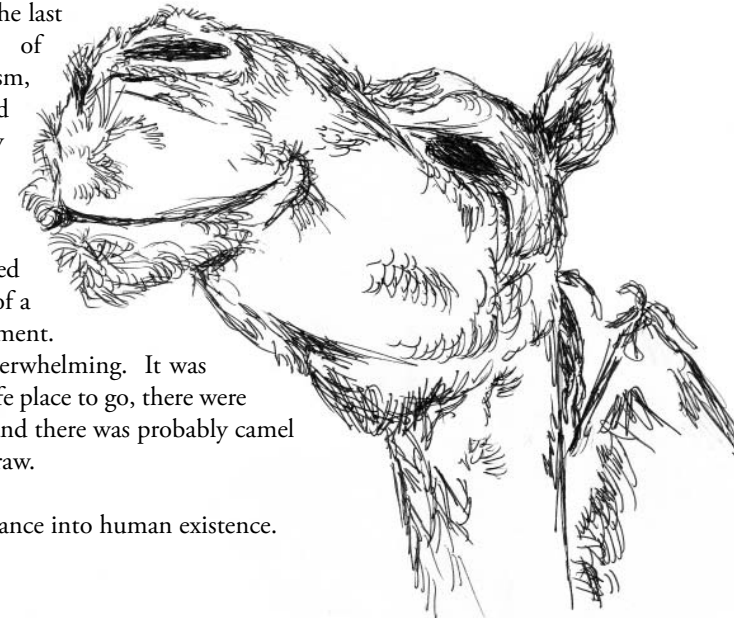
It's a funny moment, and the book is hilarious, but it makes me wonder: How in the world did a story about an unwed pregnant teenager, a baby born in a barn with unhygienic animals, a few visiting, smelly sheep-herding strangers who hear voices from the sky, and all of them fleeing a mass-murdering tyrant, turn into something you can fit into a decorative Christmas card sold by Hallmark? Christmas doesn't seem like a marketable holiday to me, much less the largest shopping season of the year.

When you get right down to it, it's an emotional nightmare of a story. It's completely at odds with how perfect we push Christmas to be, all the pressure we feel to be bright, cheery, and happy at the Most Wonderful Time of the Year. For Mary, Joseph and even baby Jesus the first Christmas was actually none of those things. Leaving out the last

two thousand years of religious romanticism, Mary and Joseph had to be terrified. They traveled hundreds of miles away from their families to an unknown, overcrowded town, at the bidding of a hostile military government.

It was dark. It was overwhelming. It was cold. There was no safe place to go, there were strangers all around, and there was probably camel spit in that manger straw.

And this is God's entrance into human existence.



and gather together to pray on the Sabbath and on Holy days. At the Transfiguration, Jesus brings Peter, James, and John with him to the top of the mountain and what is he doing when 'the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning?' Praying.

Prayer transforms us. It transforms our relationship with ourselves, each other, and with God.

Prayer transforms us. It transforms our relationship with ourselves, each other, and with God. It helps us deal with the daily trials and tribulations of our hectic young adult lives. But living a prayerful life requires that we make the time to do it, as Jesus often did: retreating, by ourselves, to spend time with God. (Look through the Gospels and see how many times it mentions Jesus going off to pray. Go on, I'll wait.) Think about it, when you meet someone you aren't

instantly best friends no matter how much you have in common or what the context of your meeting is. You begin as acquaintances and the more you communicate and spend time with one another, the deeper the relationship becomes. And so it is with God—Christ's life shows us that creating and sustaining a relationship with God through prayer is not only inherent to the lives of Jews, it is also inherent to the lives of Christians.

Anyone who has met me in the last month or so is aware of my obsessive love for a book I happened upon in the Episcopal Bookstore. *Prayerfulness: Awakening to the Fullness of Life* by Robert Wicks has been my constant companion on road trips, free time at work, and anywhere else I have a few minutes to read. It's a practical, easy-to-read guide to prayer, pointing out that one of prayer's chief goals is reducing stress and leading us toward a more compassionate and creative life—one that is rooted in our love for God and for one another.

Our Book of Common Prayer has liturgy for the morning, afternoon, and evening as well as bedtime (Compline) prayers. Developed from the monastic life, these prayers are wonderful tools to use in a prayerful life. There are many places on the internet that podcast or post the prayers, complete with lectionary readings and hymns for the day. Not only do they connect me with God, but saying them together with people all over the world makes me feel connected to the body of Christ in a way that I have never felt before. And not just a connection to the present body, but also to those who have recited these prayers for hundreds of years in the past, and those who will continue them into the future.

As we celebrate the incarnation of Christ this Advent season, we also celebrate the ways in which our relationships are renewed by his coming. My hope and prayer this Advent season is that we follow Christ's prayerful example and take the time to renew our relationships with God and one another, and that our lives become more fruitful for it.

And P.S.—Prayerfulness makes a great stocking stuffer!

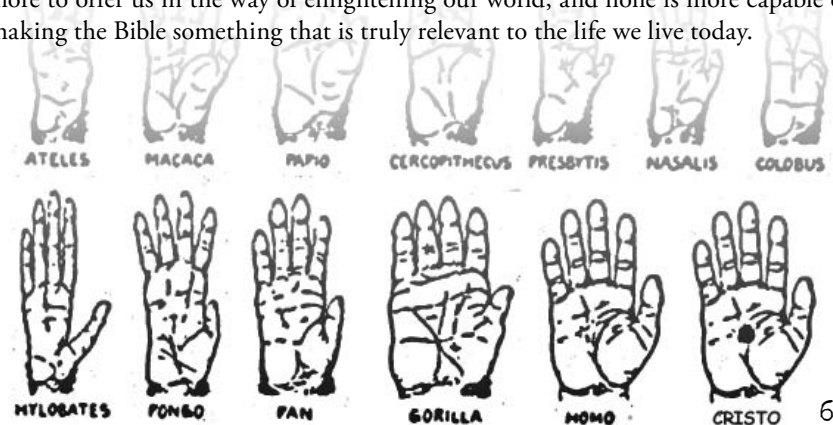
and fully God, did not 'begin' at Bethlehem, but rather the whole of natural and human history is the story of Him becoming incarnate. Nor did that story end with His death and resurrection. The Church is Christ existing still, and that story of incarnation continues with us. We, too, are a part of that cosmic and divine story.

A Relevant Incarnationalism

This realization has had grand results in my own life. I have learned to see the entire cosmic process as a system of divine promise. No longer is Christ some far-flung deity in another world. Rather I have learned to truly see Christ within the dance of nature and my own life. The little things I do become filled with significance even as my own self-centered way of looking at the world shrinks, as it is no longer simply me, or mankind, but the entire cosmos that is the arena of divine grace and salvation. The incarnation from this view has clear relevance to every human life, because every human life is a part of the process of incarnation, and every action becomes a part of the Christian message. For from this point of view, as Alfred North Whitehead said, "every act leaves the world with a deeper or a fainter impress of God." However, since this God is a truly cosmic Divinity, no act is the final word in the story, and there is always a larger context in which one is acting. The relationship between grace and responsibility is clearly enlightened.

It is no longer simply me, or mankind, but the entire cosmos that is the arena of divine grace and salvation

I don't know about you, but I feel constantly bombarded by two worldviews: one the dualistic other-worldliness of much of modern Christianity, the other the materialistic monism of scientism. In both cases, one gets the feeling that the true meaningfulness of life in this world is lost, the complexities of human experience ignored, and the full breadth of the Biblical message is forgotten. The more nuanced, cosmic view of many modern theologians is the Christianity I was, thankfully, introduced to when I finally sought a religious faith as an adult, but I've been saddened to find that among most people it is unknown or ignored. In my experience, no worldview has more to offer us in the way of enlightening our world, and none is more capable of making the Bible something that is truly relevant to the life we live today.



give
us grace
to cast
away the
works of
darkness,
and put
on the
armor
of
light

collect for
Advent 1,
BCP211

advent



photo by Daniel Stroud

Jesus Prayed

by Kathleen Jaco

The Early Church spent hundreds of years trying to figure out their (our) Christology. (Wait, what's Christology? Wiki says: a field of study within Christian theology which is concerned with the nature of Jesus the Christ, particularly with how the divine and human are related in his person.) Ecumenical councils and theologians have been wrestling with this from the start. Some settled on what we have in today's Nicene Creed—beautifully yet vaguely articulated. You know, “God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God” and all that.

The things I don't know about Christology vastly outnumber the things I do know, or at least think I know. For me, Christ is Fully Human and Fully Divine, but don't ask me to explain that—sometimes you just have to embrace the mystery. But what calls out to me about Christ's Human/Divine split is that even though he was divine, he still prayed. Being 'the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father' didn't give him a Direct Line; it didn't mean that he could bypass our human need to connect with God through prayer. In fact, he taught us how to pray, and gave us an example of how to live a prayerful life in order to create and sustain our relationship with God and one another.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus frequently leaves the disciples to pray in solitude but he also teaches us how to pray in community. The Lord's Prayer doesn't start off, “My Father”; it begins, “Our Father”. Synagogues are houses of prayer, and praying is inherent in the life of the Jews. They pray in the morning, afternoon, and evening

So Jesus is fully human – not some ghost or apparition or hologram. And he's fully divine. 100% of both. This 100% of humanity is the real miracle here. It's impossible for God not to be 100% divine (God wouldn't be God without the perfect batting average). But it's very possible (indeed, likely) to be less than fully human. Jesus succeeded in realizing this unlikely full humanity, and that's one of the reasons he's so special. His life and his example teach us to be fully human.

If we aren't fully human now, what takes up the rest of the space? In Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis explains this question well.

Lewis calls us "toy soldiers." We begin as automatons—clockwork beings in need of winding and direction. But God doesn't want toy soldiers. God wants sons and daughters to love and adopt as God's children. Jesus' example and his grace enable us to move through the messy, painful, joyous process of outgrowing our clockwork. Only by becoming fully human, can we fully embrace God's love for humanity. If we can recognize God's love for humanity, perhaps we can love other humans, as well.

God
doesn't
want toy
soldiers.
God wants
sons and
daughters.



photo by Sissel Myhre

her body and blood. *by Alissabeth Newton*

Every Sunday after communion I stop and kneel in front of our church's Mary shrine to light a candle and spend a moment with Our Mother. It's not an action that former versions of myself - raised in a holiness movement Evangelical church - would recognize or understand. But these days my worship doesn't feel complete without a moment spent with Mary, the mother of Jesus, the first to offer the world her body and her blood. She did something that only a woman could do, something many women do more than once in their lives, and in that very common act of giving birth the Divine became flesh-with-us. She is the God-bearer.

I identify with Mary for other reasons, too. Though her child came from her body and blood, he was also a stranger to her. She bore a child whose father she had never seen, she bled and labored and cuddled and parented a child who belonged not just to her but to many. My husband and I are in the process of adopting a child, our first. We are waiting this Advent not just for Christmas but for the advent of our own new family, for the baby who we believe is meant to be with us. This will not be a child who comes from my body, from our blood. This baby won't just belong to us, but also to his biological family and to our extended family of relatives and intimate friends, and most importantly to her own very special self. Because of Mary's child we are able to believe that family is more than biological connection - that if God could choose to become one of us by the body and blood of Mary, certainly we can choose to belong to each other in the mysterious ways that families do, whether blood binds us together or not. Indeed we choose this sort of belonging every time we partake of the feast of Mary's son, of his body and his blood.



So I light a candle for Mary and think about her Son. I light a candle for Mary and think about our child's mother, who is also a woman in a difficult situation, giving of herself to give life to a child that ultimately she cannot keep with her. I light a candle for Mary and think about Incarnation, that our God chose to enter our world the very same way that you and I did and by doing so made sacred all of our bleeding, our loving, our physical living and choosing in the world. I light a candle for Mary and the mystery of its flame helps me come close to the mystery of advent, which is also the mystery of my own family, and the mystery of my self.

Congratulations to Alissa and Andrew who were matched shortly after the writing of this article. Jubilee Amirra was born October 23 and now resides in Seattle, WA.



A NEW EPISCOPALIAN LOOKS BACK

by Stacey Carmody

It's almost Advent. This is a season for reflection on birth, incarnation and connection. I have now been an Episcopalian for over 3 years. I am still a "new" Episcopalian, yet I am able to look back and reflect on my "birth" as a new Episcopalian. My entrance into a denomination was surprising. I had never been religious growing up, to my peers my religious affiliation was non-existent, or ambiguous at best. I never let others know what I believed, perhaps because I was still trying to figure that out myself.

One thing I did know is that once I walked into a church, I knew I felt different- it was a good kind of different. But it took a long time for me to do anything about it. Finally, I mustered up the strength to walk into my local Episcopal church on a Sunday. Before I made my trip, I researched the liturgy online so I wouldn't look like a fool.

It was love at first sight, and I feel fast and hard with the beauty of the church, and sounds too- since I loved the sermon, the prayers and the hymns. Most of all, I loved the people in this small parish. I felt very welcome and sensed that they were very accepting. The stereotypes I had of "church people" were shattered. I used believe people who went to church were judgmental, humorless, rigid and had nothing in common with me. How wrong I had been!

It was the end of Epiphany and the beginning of Lent. Somehow, this seemed an appropriate time to begin a new faith journey. I studied the Prayer Book, read up on the history of the Anglican/Episcopal Church, got a NRSV Bible, became acquainted with the liturgical calendar, the saints, the rituals and signs of inner and outward grace. I discovered that I loved "bells and smells" and that questioning the Bible was not only allowed, but encouraged.

I jumped in with both feet. It was almost like a whirlwind romance: the kind where people meet, connect, feel giddy and are headed to the altar in a matter of weeks. I was also heading to the altar but for a different reason. And unlike a whirlwind romance where passion tends to fizzle out, my feelings only got stronger, and I knew this was not a temporary fling.

This was a place where I was supposed to be. So, with a sponsor from the parish, I was baptized on Easter Sunday at 37 years of age by my new priest, who was becoming a spiritual guide for me. I never even knew a priest before I met him, and now I was seeing one on a regular basis.

Fully Human

by the Rev Adam Thomas

The trouble with being human is that most of us aren't very good at it. We are way better at being couch potatoes or social butterflies or unique snowflakes or chickens. We explain the very act of making more humans by referring to the birds and the bees. A frightened human is a scaredy cat; an insufferable one is a less polite term for donkey. We may exist as humans, but we spend a lot of time filling the roles of other species.

And these other species are darn good at being themselves. Bees fly around collecting nectar and pollinating flowers. Trees keep soil from eroding. Grass scrubs the air of carbon dioxide. Cockroaches allow husbands to feel manly. If evolution teaches us one thing it's that species thrive when they don't try to fill the role of some other species.

While we are busy being butterflies and potatoes, we forget that in reality we are human. And who really wants to be human? Our skin isn't very well adapted to our climates. Our young can't fend for themselves for at least twenty-two years. Our bodies break down with alarming frequency. And to top it off, I can't think of another species on this planet that kills its own kind with as much regularity and aplomb as we humans.

And here's where
Jesus comes in.
Jesus didn't come
to show us a new
way to be human.
Jesus came to show
us how to be fully
human.

But somehow we have survived down through the ages amidst the dangers of saber-toothed tigers, drought, pestilence, war, and deficit spending. We have survived, but, as Tennyson writes, "We are not now that strength which in old days / Moved earth and heaven." I'm not even convinced that we've ever been that old strength. I don't think that we've ever lived into our humanity to the greatest extent possible.

And here's where Jesus comes in. Jesus didn't come to show us a new way to be human. Jesus came to show us how to be fully human. The Gospel makes a big deal about Jesus' own humanity. Matthew and Luke talk about Jesus' birth. John shows Jesus tired, angry, and sad. In all four accounts of the Gospel, he is brutally murdered. And why present God the Son as such a frail collection of bones and tissue and synapses? Well, he couldn't be the "Word made flesh" without flesh. And he couldn't be our hope and our salvation without fully identifying with our lives, however "nasty, brutish, and short" they may be (thanks to Thomas Hobbes for those appropriate adjectives).

The Nativity of our Lord

you have
caused this
holy night
to shine
with the
brightness
of the true
Light

collect for
Christmas
Day, BCP212

As a new Episcopalian, I thought it was important that I follow the news of the Episcopal Church. I was so naive that I knew nothing of the “controversies”; I didn’t even know who Gene Robinson was. So, I began to educate myself through various media outlets and I followed the General Convention of 2006. Almost 2 months after I was baptized, the Episcopal Church elected its first female Presiding Bishop. Since part of the appeal of the Church for me was its inclusion of women in the priesthood and episcopate, I was absolutely thrilled at this news. Unbeknownst to me at that time, I would get to meet this Presiding Bishop almost 3 years later and tell her in person how joining this Church was the best decision I ever made.

I learned about all the debates, the disagreements, the talks of “walking apart”. My own diocese was embroiled in controversy over matters concerning its bishop. I learned that the infighting was prompting some to leave the Episcopal Church. I would not be truthful if I said that this chaos did not affect me in some way. After all we are all “one body” with many members. But I could not imagine walking away and leaving the Church that has so enriched me and introduced me to so many wonderful ministries and people on all levels. Speaking of “one body”- for me to leave the Episcopal Church would be cutting off my nose to spite my face. I do hope that after this chaos will come peace, and that the Holy Spirit will do its work to ensure this.

At the parish level, things has been peaceful but we have other worries. We are small and worry about growth. Sometimes I don’t know if my church needs me more, or if I need it more. In any case, we need each other. I’ve thrown myself into parish life, with goals to support the church in any way possible: I am involved in serving, vestry, outreach and exploring new ways to draw people to our church.

Over 3 years has passed since I have taken those baptismal vows. Have I kept those vows? I’d like to think that yes, I have made a good start by doing what I’ve just mentioned, but I still have more work to do. That’s the things about vows- sticking with them is a lifelong process.

I had always been one to care about and value peace, justice and the dignity of my fellow man. I had been identifying with Christian values through most of my life, well before I even realized they were Christian values! Christianity teaches us that these values were brought to us in human form- this is what the incarnation was all about, and we are to carry on these values.

I am Episcopalian for only 3 years, yet it seems like the Church has always been a part of me. My faith now comes as naturally to me as breathing. I look back on my journey with gladness. I am in awe of it all. I look forward to continuing on.

I do hope that
after this chaos
will come peace,
and that the Holy
Spirit will do its
work to ensure
this.



On the Advent: For a Silent World

(*excerpts from "Cantos on the Death of Stars"*)
by Br. Karekin Madteos Yarian, BSG

I. On memories and expectations

Whispering moments
Passing, dancing;
Unseen,
 Unfelt,
 Unheard,
Piercing through the skin
Neither here nor there
Yet splendid,
Like sunlight
 On the surface
 Of a (too still) pond.

Forbidden, the stillness.
Our apathetic souls un-quickened
 By the time, but only
 By the pace, do not quiet
For redemption,
 Do not hear
The children's voices
Terrorized,

 (Martyred by
 Futures yet unpainted,
 Progress yet unquestioned,)

Whispering,
 Passing,
 Dancing,

Rippling yet unnoticed
Like moonlight on the surface
Of a too still
 pond.

Am I there reflected?

And where are you
My Savior,

become Incarnate in the very flesh of humankind, to live and be with us, to go through the motions of everyday life, to run the gamut of human emotion and experience. On days when even that is hard to believe, I thank God for the Creeds, because I know the Church believes for me, on my behalf. And on days when even that kind of understanding comes at too high a cost, I stay awake until the sun comes up, and remember that the mechanics of the universe are too perfect and too precise to just be an accident, and when the birds start singing and I can smell the coffee perking from across the street, I can feel something that seems like faith and belief to start perking up inside of me, as well.

I'm thinking about you, in Raleigh, and am so grateful that you asked such a big question. I don't think for a minute that I've solved your problem, or that you really have a problem, at all. You're like a lot of us, a lot like me, if the truth be told. We're all in this together...this Church, this world, in this relationship with a Creator who is so big and so infinite that we struggle to know what to name it, how to love it, how to be. We are not alone, not any of us, and we are all, in some way, trying to find out who we are, and who God is. That's a big deal. And it's kind of wonderful, too. I'm glad we're here.

Hopefully,
Sister Sally

Waiting

by Stacey Carmody

Come November
The days are shorter
There's a darker blue.

Days cool down
Get quieter
And we wait

We light a candle at a time
And we wait

Counting down
In anticipation of
When all lights shine

Waiting...

Just like the Mother of God
We are waiting

For a new beginning
His arrival
Brightness and white
Wait is over!
Rejoice!



SISTER SALLY SAYS

*An extraordinary
exceptional ex-sister,
superbly sassy
and slightly sarcastic.
She's here to answer
your questions.
Why should you listen?
Because, Sister Sally Says..."*

Dear Sister Sally,

I've been in a bit of a trough the last few years. I am in a place where I just can't seem to be convinced that God exists. I keep going to church, I say the prayers, I sing the hymns. But it all seems pointless...and that scares me. How do we know that God exists...and if God exists, how do we know God really cares about my little life? ...or is that too big a question?

—Wondering in Raleigh

Well...thanks for the soft pitch from Raleigh. Kidding, kidding. This is a legit question, and oddly enough, it's one with which your pal Sally has wrestled with, herself. To be honest, people who consider themselves people of faith or spirituality (or whatever the cool word is this week that defines a relationship with Ultimate Reality) struggle with really KNOWING that God is real and interested in our little lives. Still, saying all that and knowing all that doesn't really answer your question, and probably doesn't even make you feel any better.

We do a bad job talking about faith, what it means to believe, what it means to have a relationship with God. We talk about it like faith is some done deal, like you're Baptized and Confirmed and those faith batteries just whirl away in the back of your head and the bottom of your heart. We do ourselves and God

a huge disservice with that idea. Faith and belief are a practice, not unlike medicine or law or yoga (oh gosh... YOGA... HINDUS...HEATHENS). Practice is not perfection, it's not ever really seeing all the way out to the edges. It's saying the prayers and singing the songs and holding the postures because you want to believe. The church gets so down on people who struggle with belief, and manages to forget pretty quickly that St. Peter, the Rock upon whom Jesus said he would build His church, struggled mightily with belief.

It is easy to feel hopeless when you aren't one of the people who hear the still, small voice in your heart of hearts, or the big, booming voice coming out of the burning bush. I'm not one of those people, either. I have to remind myself that God thought enough of this crazy human existence to

Between

here and there,
Beyond memories
and moonbeams,
Between silence and
The word unspoken?

Where are you...
Whispering, Passing, Dancing

Across piercing moments...

Whose mighty voice was
Once heard above the crowd;
Painting a love as strong and fragile
As butterfly wings
And still
As silent?

Redeeming
The moment with forgiveness
As strong as stones
Skipping across the surface

Of a too still pond?
We await your coming in glory.

We await the death of stillness
On the surface,

AND
Long for quiet in the depths
Between the silence

and the word unspoken.

We await your coming.

BRIDGING THE GAP

by Chelsea Mitchell



*photo by
Mitra Irdmusa*

For most of elementary school, I attended Sunday services with my dad at a Unitarian Universalist church in Houston. I don't remember much about that church - my main memory is of running away from Sunday School class because I hated group sing-alongs and the weird kids in my class. When my family began going to Christ Church Cathedral when I was ten, my whole understanding of what church meant was flipped. I loved Sunday School because we got to dress up in costume, and I was chosen to play Jesus during my first class. Even better, we didn't have to sing, and my classmates didn't run screaming around the room like at the old church. In middle and high school, my life revolved around the Church. I was at every youth group event, every Sunday School class, served on the youth council, acolyted, listened to Christian radio, worked as a camp counselor at Camp Allen our diocesan summer camp, taught Sunday School, attended youth retreats, and annoyed all my school friends with stories from church. EYC youth

group and diocesan events were a great fit for me - there, I was able to escape from my school identity. I could go from being the overlooked teacher's kid to the somewhat popular girl who everyone knew. My faith community was active, personal, engaging, and very important in my life, and it gave me a complete sense of comfort and confidence.

But that was then. I am currently in my second year at the University of Portland in Oregon. U.P., as it is commonly called, is "Oregon's Catholic University." Trust me, it does not take that name lightly. Priests live in each residence hall. There is usually a Mass being held at any hour of the day. Pro-life literature often makes its way on to the tables in the dining hall. But for all the religion that goes on here, I have found it difficult to sustain an active faith community that even slightly resembles that of my adolescence. Sure, there are religious groups on campus, namely the non-denominational praise group Fish, but I have yet to find a group that gives me the same sense of spiritual fulfillment. I wonder, how hard have I actually looked? And how bad do I actually want it? My motto this year is "no excuses, make it happen." I have had to question my willingness to even involve myself in a new faith community because I am still so attached to Christ Church Cathedral and Camp Allen.

This brings me to an even greater question—why is no one actively seeking me out? Why is it so hard to find more than a handful of practicing Episcopalians in my school of over 3000 students? Is religion, or at least mainline Protestantism, out of fashion with my peers? I have to admit, many aspects of organized religion are not so attractive, especially to socially-minded young liberals in the Pacific Northwest. Even so, I think we should be able to address those problems. Make our own community. Forge our own path. I find it ironic that some of my peers I disagree with so much about politics and social issues are the ones that I can pray with at home, but many of the people who share my socio-political views won't share communion with me here. I guess I'm still in limbo—not really belonging here nor there.

I have found community in other ways and places, but I really miss my old faith communities and that sense of self-assuredness and comfort that comes with being surrounded by people who like to focus on the more important things in life. I sporadically find myself longing to fill the wonderful place that active involvement in the Episcopal Church holds in my heart. I know I can't do it alone. Being part of the body of Christ means just that—being part. Where and how that community will come together, I'm not sure yet. I don't know what it will look like. And honestly, I don't think I will ever be able to recreate the warmth and comfort I got from the Cathedral and Camp Allen during my high school years. Maybe it can start just person to person. Maybe that community can be small - just two or three people dedicated to maintaining their spirituality in a time when it often seems that no one cares what you really believe. Whatever form it takes, I look forward to the day when I have an active, present and passionate faith community again.