



The ST. THOMAS' CHURCH Epistle

January
2009

"An American Anglican Church Following Christ and His Commands"

The Season of Christmas-Epiphany



THIS ISSUE:

RECTOR'S MESSAGE

*The Season of
Christmas-Epiphany*

VESTRY MEETING

*The Vestry Meets
Sunday, January 4*

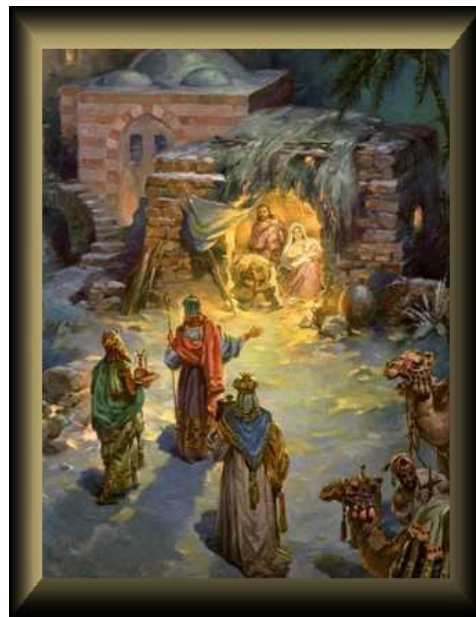
SAINT STORY

St. Polycarp

In the tradition of the western Christian Church, January 6, is celebrated as Epiphany. Because of differences in church calendars, mainly between the Eastern Orthodox and the western Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions, both Christmas and Epiphany have been observed at different times in the past. Today most of the Eastern Orthodox traditions also follow the western Church calendar for Christmas-Epiphany. However, some of the Greek, Russian and Serbian Orthodox Churches often still follow the older calendar and celebrate Epiphany as the Theophany on January 19th.

We rarely hear of the 12 Days of Christmas any more, except by way of Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" play, or the words to the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas." Epiphany is the climax of the Christmas-Epiphany Season, coming on the twelfth day when counting from the evening of December 25th until the morning of January 6th. Although it is often overlooked in our busy modern world, Epiphany is a major feast day in the Church. It is an occasion for feasting, which includes the baking of a special King's Cake as part of the festivities on Epiphany. We usually remember the King's Cake as a part of the observance of Mardi Gras in the French Roman Catholic culture of the South. In the Anglican Church we often celebrate Fat Tuesday with a King Cake as well.

In traditional Christian churches Christmas-Epiphany was always celebrated as a single season of the church year, rather than two separate seasons on the calendar. Although these seasons have been separated on the liturgical calendar, they are inseparably linked together spiritually



because they both point to the mission of the Church to the world in light of the Nativity. The season of Christmas, the twelve days from Christmas to Epiphany is known as Christmastide. The season of Epiphany lasts from January 6th until Pre-Lent, the three Sundays prior to Ash Wednesday, which begins the season of Lent. Depending on the timing of Easter, the period of Epiphany may be from four to six Sundays.

The term Epiphany in Greek means manifestation - to “show”, or to “make known”, or to “reveal.” In Western churches, it is celebrated by remembering the coming of the wise men who brought gifts to visit the Christ child. By doing this the Magi "revealed" Jesus to the world as Lord and King. In some Central and South American countries influenced by the Roman Catholic tradition, Three Kings' Day, or the night before, is the time for opening Christmas presents. In some Eastern churches, Epiphany, or the Theophany, commemorates Jesus' baptism, with the visit of the Magi linked to Christmas. In some churches the day is even celebrated as Christmas, with Epiphany/Theophany occurring on January 19th.

The colors of our hangings in the traditional church during Epiphany are the colors of Christmas, which are white and gold. These are the colors of celebration, newness, purity, holiness and hope that mark most of the sacred days in the Church's liturgical calendar year. These colors are changed to purple (violet) on the first Sunday of Pre-Lent, Septuagesima Sunday.

As many of us know, the Church calendar was developed to give Christians a rhythm of life that helps us reinforce all aspects of our Christian walk from year to year. It is designed to help us grow closer to the Lord by emphasizing Christian character development. The ancient leaders of the Church designed the liturgical calendar to both give us a natural progression in our walk with Christ, helping us to grow spiritually, and to take advantage of the holidays celebrated by the pagans, helping to convert them to Christianity.

Thus, a close inspection of the text in Holy Scripture leads us to understand that Jesus was born closer to the time of the Jewish Passover, around the time of Easter, not in the winter when we celebrate Christmas. However, it wouldn't be very wise or beneficial spiritually for us to celebrate the Incarnation one week and two weeks later celebrate the Resurrection. The Church calendar was planned for our benefit, to help us develop spiritually by emphasizing all of the major themes God reveals in the Bible.

Consider how Christmas and Easter expand our Christian character. Four weeks are given to prepare our hearts for the Coming of our Lord in Advent. Forty days are given to prepare our hearts for what Jesus had to go through to pay the price for our sins as we walk the road to Jerusalem with Christ toward Easter. The Season of Epiphany is no different. The lessons in Epiphany help us to widen our eyes to the Lord's plan for us. All of these teaching aspects of the Church help us grow spiritually in a logical progression. Without forcing us to conform to Christian standards, virtues and morals, the lessons and teachings slowly lead us to a better way of life – a life God wants us to have.

Although we celebrate Epiphany directly following Christmas in the calendar, we may wish to note that, like celebrating Christmas in winter, technically the Magi did not visit the baby Jesus in the manger, as most pictures are drawn in the nativity scenes. The Gospel of Matthew says the wise men visited the "house" and saw the "young child." The language of Holy Scripture signifies that Jesus could have been up to 2 years old by this time. This is further emphasized when we remember that King Herod's order was to kill all children up to the age of two. Once again, though, it makes logical sense in our Christian walk that after we celebrate the birth of our Lord and King, the Church would want Christians to “reveal” the wonderful miracle God has given us in the gift of His Son.

As with all aspects of the traditional Christian liturgical calendar, Epiphany has a theological significance as a teaching tool in the Church. The Wise Men or Magi who brought gifts to the infant Jesus were the first Gentiles to acknowledge Jesus as King. They were the first to "show" or "reveal" Jesus to a wider world as the incarnate Christ. This act of worship by the Magi, which corresponded to Simeon's blessing that this child Jesus would be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Luke 2:32), was one of the first indications that Jesus came for all people, all nations, all races, and that the work of God in the world would not be limited to only a few chosen Jews.

Epiphany is observed as a time of focusing on the mission of the Church. It is characterized by reaching out to people to "reveal" Jesus as the Savior of all people. It is also a time of focusing on Christian brotherhood and fellowship, especially in healing the divisions of prejudice and bigotry that are all too often created between God's children. Epiphany expands our knowledge of who God wants us to be. The season calls us to be “revealers” of God's light to a world that lives in darkness. May God help us to be such a people.

It is significant in God's timing that we will now look at our mission as a parish through the eyes of a Strategic Planning Committee. Please keep St. Thomas' Church in your prayers over the next few weeks as we look at where our parish has been, where we are now, and where we believe God is leading us in the future. Please pray for everyone on the Strategic Planning Committee. Pray God will "reveal" His mission for us and help us to develop a plan to make that mission happen in Little Rock. God help us to all be marked by the colors of the season with newness, purity, holiness, and hope.

Fr. John Lohmann, IV+

CURRENT EVENTS...

New Website:

If you haven't seen the new website please take a few moments to look it over. It looks great! The new site was designed and created by IVM Communications. It is both informative and pleasing to the eye.

Strategic Planning Committee

The first date for the Strategic Planning Committee to meet will be on Thursday evening, January 8, at 7:30 PM. We will meet in the home of Mr. & Mrs. Trent Galloway, at 4817 Country Club Blvd. The archdeacon of the Diocese of Mid-America, The Venerable James T. Payne will address the committee. The committee will meet every two weeks for the next few months and will file a report to the congregation by the end of March.

Annual Parish Meeting

The St. Thomas' Annual Parish Meeting will be on Sunday, **January 25, 2009**. The business to be conducted will include: Election of three members to the vestry; Election of one delegate and alternate delegate to Council of the Diocese of Mid-America to be held in Houston, Texas in October 2009; 2009 Budget.

Nomination letters for vestry were sent in the mail and are due by January 4.

Anniversaries

January 15
Edmund & Elizabeth Kasner

Happy Birthday!

(There are no birthdays in January)

January 29
Gordon & Sue O'Steen



WELCOME!

Trent and Anne Galloway recently decided to join the parish. We welcome you to our community with the right hand of fellowship in Christ!

Please consult the calendar on our new website for any other events, worship times, etc. This is an easy way to keep up with things without using paper!

ST. THOMAS' CHURCH

Little Rock's American Anglican Church
4411 Woodlawn Dr. at Ash St.
Little Rock, AR 72205

FIRST CLASS

St. Polycarp of Smyrna

January 26
(69-155 AD)

Polycarp occupies an important place in the history of the Christian Church. He is among the earliest Christians whose writings survived. Polycarp knew St. John the Apostle and he was a correspondent of Ignatius of Antioch. Polycarp's most famous pupil was Irenaeus, for whom the memory of Polycarp was a link to the apostolic past. Irenaeus relates how and when he became a Christian, and in his letter to Florinus stated he saw and heard Polycarp personally in lower Asia; in particular he heard the account of Polycarp's discussion with John the Evangelist and with others who had seen Jesus. Irenaeus also reports that Polycarp was converted to Christianity by apostles, was consecrated a bishop, and communicated with many who had seen Jesus. He repeatedly emphasizes the very great age of Polycarp. In the *Martyrdom*, Polycarp indicates on the day of his death: "Eighty and six years I have served him", which "probably means he was then eighty-six years old" (and was baptized as an infant, though he may have been older). Polycarp is remembered for saying, "How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior? Bring forth what thou wilt." He was burned at the stake for refusing to burn incense to the Roman Emperor.

Polycarp was not a philosopher or theologian. He appears to have been a practical leader and gifted teacher, "a man who was of much greater weight, and a more steadfast witness of truth," said Irenaeus. He lived in an age after the deaths of the apostles, when a variety of interpretations of the sayings of Jesus were being preached. His role was to authenticate orthodox teachings through his reputed connection with the apostle John. A high value was attached to Polycarp's testimony as to the genuine tradition of apostolic doctrine.

His personal testimony condemned heretical teachings. Irenaeus stated that on Polycarp's visit to Rome his testimony converted many disciples. Surviving accounts of the bravery of this very old man in the face of death by burning at the stake added credence to his words. His martyrdom is of particular importance in understanding the position of the church in the pagan era of the Roman Empire.



Bishop & Martyr