



THE PARISH PAPERS

St. James' Episcopal Church Parkton, Maryland



Dear Parishioners and Friends of St. James'

December 2008

While I was driving home from St. James' Monday evening, I suddenly saw an amazing sight in the southwestern sky. At twilight, Venus, Jupiter and the crescent moon were all within view lighting up the heavens in an extraordinary triangle. Two planets and a crescent moon—all dazzling jewels of the evening! The sight was so beautiful, I nearly drove off the road. I wonder if you happened to see this wonder yourselves—a configuration that will not take place again for 40 years.

Advent is a special season all of its own—apart from Christmas. It is a time of beginnings, of wonder, of attentiveness. The word itself means appearance, arrival, visitation. The celestial sign of the three heavenly bodies is so fitting in that it reminds us of the hope, the light, the peace of the Advent season, the beauty of God's creation, and Christ's heavenly appearance. The candles our families light each Sunday in Advent bring us the same wonder, but they are earthly reminders of what we can embrace for our lives here and now: hope, peace, love, and joy—the essentials of life. The white candle is lit last and represents Christ's birth—God's presence among us as Emmanuel.



We shall light our own outdoor Christmas tree for the parish and the Parkton community this Sunday night. With carols, lights, bonfire, and hand-held candles, we shall celebrate our faith in this simple way reminding ourselves of the values we place in music, spirit, community, family, children, and faith. Even in troubled times, we can say together: "Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armor of light."

Advent is a special season of its own. Its character and mood is so different from our secular culture that promotes the superficial, spend-all notion of Christmas. Perhaps, Sunday morning here at St. James' is the only time when we can truly connect with the quiet, introspective, restorative side of the Advent season. But there are other complementary ways to connect: keeping an Advent calendar, praying for those dear to us, pondering how we might help someone in need, doing a number of charitable acts. We need to consider, as well, forgiving those we have found difficult, expressing gratitude to someone for what they do, and passing on the blessings we have received to others. We do this in order to prepare our hearts for the miracle of Christ's birth. By reception, by practice, by devotion, by prayer, by charitable acts, we discover, through the grace of God, a new and amazing disposition of the heart. And when Christmas Eve comes, we shall be surprised to see something far greater than the stars of heaven; instead we shall behold God's presence, Emmanuel, as a newborn child. If we have the hospitality to welcome this divine gift, then we may also find God's grandeur, his immeasurable love, residing in our hearts. No wonder we sing so heartily the hymn: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come."

In God's Peace,

Elizabeth+

Outreach

Ann Herring

Christmas Project for the Hungry in Our Midst

As we are preparing for the Christmas Holidays, please do not forget our many neighbors who are in need. The Outreach Committee is once again counting on your generosity. A bag of groceries or a check to the Hereford Food Bank is a wonderful way to embrace the true meaning of this Season of Sharing. Perhaps you have someone on your gift list who seems to have everything. Consider a gift in his name to the food bank. This makes everyone a winner, the giver and the recipient. For monetary donations please make checks payable to St. James' Church with "Hereford Food Bank" in the memo line.

The food bank has informed us that some of the needed items are powdered and canned milk, powdered creamer, canned ham, fruit, sauerkraut, large cans of sweet potatoes, jello, puddings and pasta. No additional corn or green beans are needed. Our last date of collection at church is Wednesday, Dec 17. Please put all items in a bag (not a basket).

St. James' Preschool

Ingrid Carr, Director

Students Celebrate the Season

The Preschool began its Thanksgiving celebration by having a feast. During this celebration the students had a special visitor, the Rev. Elizabeth Orens. All the students were very happy to have such a special guest with them to share their feast. They also shared what they were thankful for during this holiday season. The thoughts ranged from their families to trees, from snow to giraffes.

During this Advent season, the children are working with Lin Wagner in preparation for their Christmas Program on December 17. They are learning about the Advent season and such beautiful hymns as "O come, O come Emmanuel" and "What Child is This."

In January, the Preschool will begin a community outreach program with a shoe drive called "Happy Feet." We will be collecting "gently" used shoes for children, women and men. These shoes will be donated to local shelters once the students have done many wonderful mathematical activities with the shoes (charting by color, size, etc.).

Together with the staff and students here at St. James' Preschool we wish you and your family a Happy and Healthy Holiday Season and a Merry Christmas !

Christmas Services

Christmas Eve † Wed., Dec. 24
Family Eucharist 4:30 p.m.
followed by singing *Silent Night* at
the manger.
Carols with Choir 10:30 p.m.
Eucharist 11 p.m.



Christmas Day † Thurs., Dec. 25
Eucharist 10 a.m.

Sunday, Dec. 28
Eucharist 8 a.m.
Lessons & Carols 10 a.m.

Holiday Items Still Available

We are taking a break for the month of December. Come January, we will be looking forward to doing a few new things and possible road trips. If you have any ideas, let us know. To date: Holiday Festival has shown a profit of \$4,200 give/or take a few dollars. We still have a few items available for teacher gifts, stocking stuffers and decorations. Thank you one and all for your support.

Finance Committee

Dottie Arthur

Making a Commitment to St. James' Church

November was Stewardship Month. Letters, a Narrative Budget, and Pledge Cards went out. Now we are waiting for your commitments to come back. Last year, our goal was \$87,000; this year, we are hoping for \$100,000. At the 10 a.m. service, several members spoke about why they joined St. James': how the church supported their family during a crisis; what they have learned as a result of their giving of their time and talent: and the importance of the church for their children. Each of these people spoke from their heart, expressing joy and thanksgiving to God for all his blessings. On December 7, you will have an opportunity to make your commitment by placing your pledge card in the plate during the offertory. "Thank you for choosing our church as your primary way of returning to God a portion of what has been given you."

In January, look for information about "Mortgage Meals." This will be an Italian Dinner for the family on Sunday, January 25 from 5-7 p.m. All donations will go to reducing the mortgage. More information to follow.

December Anniversary

Sue and Sandy Wallis: 27



December Birthdays

Lauren Kraft: 1

Rebecca Kraft: 7

Larry Gribble: 8

Howard Canoune: 8

Jane Waugh: 10

Barb Schomann: 12

Jessie Gee: 16

John Merryman: 19

Catch the Spirit at St. James' Church

During this hectic time of Christmas preparations and the accompanying excitement, it is more important than ever for us to prepare our hearts and minds for the this blessed event. Our spiritual life here at St. James' affords us the opportunity to do this over the next few weeks. Here are some suggestions for "Catching the Christmas Spirit":

1. Each Sunday in Advent the children will present a new part of the Christmas story as we build up to Christmas Day. There is a sign up for the various parts, and Nora will make reminder calls. Sign your child up.



2. Our Youth and Intermediate groups will travel to the Lutheran Retirement Village to go Christmas caroling on *Dec. 7 at 2:00 p.m.* We will provide lunch and a movie after church that day before leaving for the village. Sign up to sing with us.

3. Worship together on Christmas Eve. We will conclude our service by gathering around the stable as we sing Silent Night. Plan to celebrate with your St. James' family that evening.



On *Sat., Feb. 7* our teens will revisit *New Life*. We encourage your participation. The first group had a great time playing with the kids, and we'd love to share this experience with all.

We will initiate a Nursery in the near future. This will include children under the age of 4 years. The wee ones will gather in the Wee Two room of the Preschool.

The Christian Education committee will hold its next meeting on *Jan. 4, 2009!*

We hope you will "Catch the Christmas Spirit" this season at St. James'. It will live in your heart all year long.



Read Br. Tobias' sermon about St. James on our Web site, stjamesparkton.org.