

Enjoy the St. James Jan Journal



ST. JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH
A joyful, inclusive community

St. James Community Journal January 2014

Dear St. James Members and Friends,

Please enjoy reading our January edition of the St. James Community Journal. For our upcoming events please view the News and Events page or the Calendar on our website at www.stjamesf.org.

If you have comments about this month's Journal or items (especially pictures!) that you'd like to contribute for the next journal please contact Rose Scarff. For more information about St. James please contact Erazm Pochron in the church office at stjames@stjamesf.org or (415) 751-1198 x2.

Thank you!
Rose and Erazm

The Empire Strikes Back: Matthew's Christmas Story

By Rev. John Kirkley



The story of the wise men from the East who pay homage to the Christ child undermines our attempts to sentimentalize the Christmas story. Luke's Gospel tells of angels announcing to shepherds the birth of a Savior bringing peace on earth. The shepherds rush to see the newborn, who will fulfill this hope. The familiar tableau of Madonna and child in the manger is serene and joyful, a pastoral image seemingly far removed from the centers of political power where decisions about war and peace are made. We tend to prefer Luke's account, because it is easier to domesticate.

If Luke provides the family friendly version of the Christmas story, Matthew's account is intended for mature audiences only. Here, the birth of the Messiah occasions conflict and intrigue at the highest levels. It is a matter of state, a threat to national security. What is implicit in Luke is explicit in Matthew: not everyone perceives the birth of Jesus as a tiding of good news.

Matthew's Gospel tells the Christmas story as a contrast between two kings: Herod, the king chosen by Rome, and Jesus, the king chosen by God. When the wise men bring Herod news of the birth of this new king, he is frightened – and all Jerusalem with him. The Jerusalem elites are comfortable being the local proxies for their Roman overlords, complicit in a regime of structural violence that dispossessed and impoverished the rural peasantry – people like the shepherds in Luke's Gospel.

News of the birth of a new king who would save his people – presumably from tyrants like Herod – was not good news to the Jerusalem court. For them, it meant a loss of power and prestige, an existential threat to their identity. They would no longer be in control. They would become accountable for their actions to a power even greater than that of the Roman Emperor: the power of Emmanuel, God with us. So the empire did what all empires do when threatened by regime change: the empire struck back!

Herod convened his national security council to devise an appropriate response. They advise a surgical strike to minimize collateral damage. Herod tries to co-opt the wise men, instructing them to report back on the exact location of the newborn. This is all done in secret, a covert operation. What the people don't know won't hurt them.

The wise men, however, have already decided to give their allegiance to this new king. Heavenly constellations were signs of the rising and falling of kings, and they remain faithful to the star they follow all the way to Bethlehem. Ironically, it is these Gentile foreigners, who recognize the legitimacy of this Jewish king and bring him tribute. The gifts they offer are no mere birthday presents. They are a pledge of allegiance, a sign of their fealty, not to the Roman Emperor, but to the Prince of Peace.

Where Herod responds with fear, the wise men respond with joy. For Herod, submission to the authority of God's Messiah can only be a threat, a loss of identity and status. For the wise men, submission to the authority of the God's messiah is a means of attaining to a higher unity than that provided by Roman imperialism. They return to their own country, but they are not the same. They are citizens of God's kingdom.

Herod is furious that his plans have been foiled. If a surgical strike will not do the job, then he will strike with shock and awe. All the children of Bethlehem under the age of two are put to the sword. Joseph and Mary flee with their toddler to Egypt, tipped off by a dream just in the nick of time. There, they live as refugees until Herod's death, and then return to Nazareth in the north, out of the reach of Herod's heir in Judea.

Luke's birth narrative concludes with Jesus' bar mitzvah in the Temple, astounding the priests with his knowledge. Matthew's birth narrative concludes with the boy Jesus returning from exile, but giving a wide berth to Jerusalem. Matthew's account makes clear the indiscriminant and illegitimate violence through which imperial power is exercised. His version directly challenges us to consider our own response to the birth of Jesus, and our willingness to pledge our allegiance to his kingdom of justice and peace.

When our lives are driven by fear, we retreat into narrow loyalties and the willful destruction of anything that threatens our identity and security. Even the gift of God's love and forgiveness can feel like a threat when our ultimate trust is in the coercive power of the state.

The joyful reception of the birth of God-with-us, the power of love and forgiveness to heal and make new, transcends narrow loyalties and partial identities in recognition of the universality of God's gracious rule. We can no longer give our allegiance to anything less than God's kingdom. Like the wise men, we return to our own country, but we are citizens of the world.

Matthew's Gospel is unrelenting in its portrayal of the normalcy of violence: the making victims of innocent children and the putting to flight of refugees for the sake of national security; the secrecy and surveillance through which illegitimate power seeks to cloak and protect itself. Empire resists the coming of the light. It prefers to operate in the darkness.

But now that the light has come, to whom will we offer our tribute, in whose service will we put our gifts to work? Are we frightened by the coming of Jesus or overwhelmed with joy? I guess it depends, in part, on whether or not we trust the power of love more than the power of violence to save our world.

Mothers Helping Mothers

by Doreen Canton



The Mother's Helping Mothers group meets several times a year and is open to all. Generally we meet on a Sunday after church to plan for four Mary Sundays throughout the year. On these Sundays we make recommendations for a special prayer to be included as part of the church service; twice a year we take a collection to support individuals and groups in developing countries.

We meet again at intervals to decide where to make our micro-loans through Kiva. On December 1st the following individuals were able to attend the meeting: Oi Yun Chow, Nancy Newmeyer, Barbara Webb, Noreen Chin Huey and Doreen Canton. We planned the Mary Sunday on December 22, 2013 and made decisions regarding loans. We decided to keep this Mary Sunday low key as it would be immediately before Christmas, which is a busy time of year for all.

Following discussion on the devastating effects of Super Typhoon Haiyan, it was agreed to send the monies on hand (that totaled \$320.00) to the Episcopal Relief & Development fund to support the relief efforts in the Philippines. We considered doing additional micro lending to the Philippines, but we received an update message through Kiva indicating that loan repayments in the Philippines had been delayed due to the damage and confusion following the massive Typhoon. At this time assessment will need to be made on who will be able to continue repayment and on who will need restructuring of their loans, or perhaps have their loans forgiven. We will look at micro-loans to the Philippines in the next quarter when more information is available and there is a process in place to continue supporting these individuals.

With our loan repayment dollars we made three micro-loans as follows:

\$500 to the Tuvuke group in Tanzania. Gloria is the leader of this group of five who will share the loan and she has taken the responsibility of holding each member accountable for paying back the loan. Gloria is in her late 30s, married with four children who are still going to school. She has been selling hardware since 2010. She works from 6 am to 8 pm daily and is able to make a good monthly profit. This will be Gloria's first loan. She is from Tujjenge, Tanzania, and will use this loan to buy more stock of hardware to resell. She dreams of having a very big hardware store.

\$325 went to Rosalind in Honduras (this completed funding of her loan request). Rosalina is 54 years old and is in a common-law relationship with her husband, with whom she has three children. She lives in the municipality of Morazán, Yoro. She has had her own small general store business for four years, where she offers basic household products such as flour, soft drinks, candy, snacks, bread, cheese, butter, pasta, beans, corn, rice, etc. Her business has regular customers and is her family's source of income. The loan she is requesting is for 10,000 lempiras. She is going to use the money to buy more grocery products for stocking her store; such as lard, eggs, bread, staple grains, sugar, flour, coffee, salt, snacks and other items, to increase sales and revenue. Her goal is to see her business grow and have a better quality of life.

Our last loan of \$150 is to Teu in Samoa. Teu is a 28-year-old single mother of one child. She has a small plantation and grows taro to earn a living. She has been doing this for five years. Teu has requested a loan to buy chemicals, a wheelbarrow, paints, and timbers for home improvements. She has been a member of SBPD since 2010. With her profits, Teu hopes to improve her business and to support her family financially.

Our final act was to donate the remaining \$26.97 to the Kiva account to support Kiva operations. If you have questions, or if you would like to join MHM, please ask any member of the group or visit the group when we meet. You are very welcome.

News from the Vestry

By Tom Matthews, Junior Warden



We had a small but mighty crew for our December workday - and got much accomplished. The awesome crew included the following: Doreen Canton, Dave Davies, John Harrison, JJ Harrison, Tom Matthews, Erazm Pochron, Eleanor Scott, Barbara Webb, and Roger Wickstrom.

We have an ongoing spreadsheet to track work projects. Here is a brief rundown.

Recurring Check List - all items were completed for the recurring December workday which included:

- cleaning the ledges and baseboards in the church sanctuary and narthex
- cleaning the ledges, baseboards, and light fixtures in the parish hall
- ensuring the kitchen pantry was tidy/clean
- ensuring the furnace room remains void of any storage
- replacing furnace filters in the flats.

For the Non-recurring Check List - most items were accomplished, which included:

- Determining solution for some spaces/cracks between the alley sidewalk and church building in west side alley way
- Determining solution for peeling paint on the east side of church building outside sacristy
- Finished mounting plaques in Narthex
- For men's room, work in progress on door vent and replacing motion detector
- Inspected fixtures/replaced bulbs in exterior lights around property
- Repaired damaged porch light outside of parish hall door
- Determined solution for bird deterrent for flats
- Determined solution for utility closet outside Rabbit Room of SJPS
- Wrapping up inventory of property for offsite storage for insurance purposes.

We are in the process of doing the following:

- Adding signage around the property for what should NOT be deposited in the toilets and not turning off certain light switches
- Having the coffee machine serviced.

The next parish workday will be in the Spring - look for information on that in late February/March.

Thank you for letting me be your Junior Warden this year - I have appreciated being of service to the parish. I have done most things around the parish in my lifetime here, but this was one that I had not done until this year!

Living into Your Aliveness

by Elaine Chan-Sherer, LCSW
California Counseling Institute



I was pondering our wish of a "happy" new year –what makes us truly happy? I think it has to do with being present with whatever life presents: the joys and the sorrows, the sacred and the mundane, the fears and the love. You are alive right now. You are reading these words right now. What does it mean to be "present" as you read this? Is it possible to pause, to feel your aliveness as your eyes receive these words and your brain processes their meaning and your body responds?

My year ended with the tragic death of a friend. It made these words of Elisabeth Kuebler-Ross come alive for me.

"It is not the end of the physical body that should worry us. Rather, our concern must be to live while we're alive – to release our inner selves from the spiritual death that comes with living behind a façade designed to conform to external definitions of who and what we are."

Being a psychotherapist is such a gift. In our jobs, we get to witness people live into their aliveness, as they become more of who they really are. It is not about perfection. Perfection is static. It is about movement and freedom and flow and possibility.

May we all experience our aliveness in this new year.

The California Counseling Institute has served the Episcopal Diocese for over 20 years, as well as San Francisco Presbyterian and Methodist churches by acting as a resource for psychotherapy to Bay Area Ministers and their parishioners. Our experienced therapists believe that the healing process is best achieved through the integration of psychotherapy and spirituality. CCI is a non-profit Institute, dedicated to providing therapy to people of all income levels, and can provide therapy to low-income clients by supplementing their cost through the Client Assistance Fund.

More Garrison Keilor on Episcopalians

Contributed by Carol Jan Lee



I do believe this, people: Episcopalians, who love to sing in four-part harmony are the sort of people you could call up when you're in deep distress. If you are dying, they will comfort you. If you are lonely, they'll talk to you. And if you are hungry, they'll give you tuna salad!

Episcopalians believe in prayer, but would practically die if asked to pray out loud.

Episcopalians like to sing, except when confronted with a new hymn or a hymn with more than four stanzas.

Episcopalians feel that applauding for their children's choirs will not make the kids proud and conceited.

Episcopalians usually follow the official liturgy and will feel it is their way of suffering for their sins.

Episcopalians believe in miracles and even expect miracles, especially during their stewardship visitation programs or when passing the plate.

Episcopalians believe their rectors will visit them in the hospital, even if they don't notify them that they are there.

More to come of Garrison Keilor on Episcopalians next month!

Missing Christmas

by Rose Scarff, Editor



Christmas is my favorite time of year. I love the music, I love the food, I love getting together with friends and celebrating, I love the church services, especially Christmas Eve, I love thinking of the perfect gifts for friends and family even if I don't enjoy the actual shopping. Like everyone, I have my Christmas traditions, although they have changed over the years. But this year, a combination of my own lingering illness and a mal-functioning car combined to take away my two favorite Christmas traditions: Christmas Eve at St. James and Christmas Day dinner and secret Santa gift exchange with the family of my good friend, Pat Mayer.

When I found out my car would not be drivable at the crucial times, I was really put out, I can tell you. Lots of complaining went on until the next coughing fit made me realize that I wasn't up to driving those distances even if my car had been. So I took it as a sign that I was meant to stay home and rest, even if it meant breaking promises, disappointing other people and missing Christmas altogether as far as I was concerned.

Then, of course, a bit of Christmas happened anyway. On Christmas Eve I found out that my upstairs neighbor had still not decorated her Christmas tree, even though she'd had it up for days, because she was feeling depressed over family problems. My place is too small for a Christmas tree, so I volunteered to help. I haven't decorated a tree in the five years I've lived here, and that was my number one favorite Christmas tradition up until then. It was really a joy to put her beautiful ornaments on the tree and hear some of the stories behind them. She invited me to join her family at her place for Christmas Day dinner, which I did, and although it wasn't half as much fun as going to Pat's, it involved no driving and I could go right back to bed afterward.

And speaking of bed, on Christmas morning I got to do something I've been wanting to do for years, but haven't. I took all the gifts that had been arriving in the mail for weeks from family back east and piled them on my bed. I made a big pot of tea, put on a CD of Christmas music and climbed back in bed and leisurely opened my gifts in great comfort. I think I'll make that a new tradition! But not unless I get a few of my old ones back—like Christmas Eve service at St. James and Christmas dinner with Pat's family!

I hope all of you had a wonderful Christmas full of family, friends, and traditions old and new!

JANUARY CALENDAR

January 2, Thursday	6:30 p.m. <i>Lectio Divina</i> group
January 5, Sunday	Services at 8 a.m. & 10 a.m. Mindfulness Meditation after 10:00 a.m. service
January 11, Saturday	7:30 a.m. Men's Breakfast-Keeping Faith in a Competitive World
January 12, Sunday	Service at 8 a.m. & 10 a.m. Service 9 a.m. Choir Practice St. James serves at Martin de Porres House of Hospitality 7 – 9 p.m. The Way of Christ Study Group
January 16, Thursday	6:30 p.m. <i>Lectio Divina</i> group
January 18, Saturday	10 a.m. Women's Group (meeting at Debbie Sham's – 122 – 22 nd Ave. between California and Lake)
January 19, Sunday	Services at 8 a.m. & 10 a.m. Parish Annual Meeting after 10 am service
January 29, Sunday	Services at 8 a.m. & 10 a.m. 9 a.m. Choir Practice
Every Tuesday	7:30 a.m. Morning Prayer & Meditation
Every Wednesday	6:30 p.m. Evening Prayer & Meditation 7:30 p.m. Buddhist Meditation in Caldwell Room

The St. James Community Journal is a monthly publication on behalf of:

St. James Episcopal Church

The Reverend John Kirkley, Rector
4620 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94118
415.751.1198
stjames@stjamesf.org
www.stjamesf.org

Community Learning Center

at St. James
4620 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94118
415.751.1199
clc@stjamesf.org
www.clcstjames.org

We welcome your articles
on or before the 15th
of the month.

Please send submissions
to Rose Scarff at
Rose.Scarff@gmail.com

St. James Preschool

Roger Setterfield, Head of School
4620 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94118
415.752.8258
rsetterfield@stjamesf.org
www.stjamespreschoolsf.org

The California Counseling Institute

Elaine Chan-Scherer, Executive Dir.
Meg Bloomfield, Managing Dir.
4614 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94118
415.752.1702
ccpsyche@earthlink.net
<http://californiacounseling.org>

Editor:

Rose Scarff

Production:

Rose Scarff
and Erazm Pochron,
Andrew Hom *in spiritu*