

# THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church  
Livingston, Alabama



Volume XXV, Number 2

February 2018



## February 2018

## ***This Month's Cover***

Our cover this month is *The Presentation of Christ in the Temple* by Philippe de Champaigne (1602-1674). Completed in 1648, it is oil on canvas, measures 8'5"x6'6", and is displayed in the Musée Royal des Beaux-Arts de Belgique in Brussels. It shown Saints Mary and Joseph (with halos) on the left, and Saint Simeon (Lk. 2:25) holding the infant Jesus. Joseph holds two turtledoves for a sacrifice (Lev. 12:8). Among the onlookers, the third from the right is the elderly prophetess Saint Anna (Luke 2:36). In the lower background between Mary and Simeon we see the Temple priests waiting for Jesus to be brought before the altar to be presented to God.

Philippe de Champaigne was a prominent Baroque painter of the French school, and was a founding member of the Académie de Peinture et de Sculpture in Paris. He was born of a poor family in Brussels, which was then a part of the Netherlands under Spanish rule. He first studied under Jacques Fouquières in Brussels, but in 1621 he moved to Paris, where he worked with Nicolas Poussin on the decoration of the Luxembourg Palace. As happens in court politics, de Champaigne was becoming more popular at court than his director, Nicolas Duchesne. Duchesne's jealousy encouraged de Champaigne to move back to Brussels, where he lived with his brother. Upon hearing of Duchesne's death he returned to Paris and married Duchesne's daughter. He continued working on the palace under the direct patronage of the Queen Mother, Marie de Médicis. During that time he also made a number of paintings for Notre Dame Cathedral. After the completion of the palace he worked on several buildings for Cardinal Richelieu. He was well enough known in France that he is mentioned in a line in Edmond Rostand's highly

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popular 1897 comic romance *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

Philippe de Champaigne died in Paris in 1674. Sad to say, many of his paintings, especially portraits of French aristocrats, were destroyed in the French Revolution. A large number survived, however, and they are displayed in churches, palaces and museums all over the world.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***A Word from the Editor***

Let me take one last opportunity to wish you a merry Christmas. No, it isn't long over and forgotten. The feast of Christmas falls on December 25 and the festival ends at sundown on January 5, but the Christmas Season is not over until the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple on February 2. Many years ago when I was at St. Michael's Church in Marblehead, MA we would put plain purple-ribboned wreaths on the doors on the first Sunday in Advent. On Christmas Eve we changed the ribbons to red and decorated the wreaths, and on January 6 we changed the ribbons to white and left them until February 2 (admittedly, wreaths in the Massachusetts climate last a lot longer than in Alabama). When people would ask why we hadn't taken down our Christmas wreaths we had a wonderful teaching opportunity.

Traditions, symbols and ceremonies have great value as teaching tools. They only have that value, however, if we continue to teach their meanings and origins. As our society loses its love of tradition, it also loses the understanding of its meaning and forgets the history of its origins. The trend today is to obliterate the symbols of our history, focusing on their flaws and forgetting that in this world no person or event is ever perfect. The Church herself, even though she is the Bride of Christ, has been given into human hands and thus in her earthly branch is often seriously flawed. That does not negate her truth, however, nor does it outweigh her good. Throughout history the Church has been at her weakest when she has lost sight of her traditions, history and purpose.

So I say again, "Merry Christmas." Saying that in the be-

ginning of February may be just unusual enough to jolt us into rethinking the meaning of the whole Christmas event, from its expectation in Advent to its culmination in the presentation of the infant Christ in God's Temple. Take the time to notice the traditions of the Church, and make the effort to practice them. That can move us out of the herd of blindly conforming "sheeple" of the world, and into God's holy flock.

*Father Rick Losch+*

## ***Be Wordly Wise Spirit or Wind?***

In the story of Creation, we read, "Darkness was upon the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Gen. 1:2). In Hebrew, the word we translate Spirit is *ruach* (רוח), which can mean spirit, breath or wind. When God breathed life into Adam the same word is used, and the many references to wind use the same word. Which, then—spirit, breath or wind—was intended in the original? The clue comes from the next word, *merahefet* (מרהפת), which we translate as moved. This word appears only one other time in the Pentateuch: "Like an eagle that stirs up her nest and hovers (*merahefet*) over her young" (Deut. 32:11). When Isaiah speaks of birds hovering overhead (Is. 31:5) he uses *'afut* (עפות), not *merahefet*. A mother eagle hovers over her chicks with gentle loving tenderness, yet ferociously protects them from danger. Breath and wind are inanimate, and are thus incapable of love, tenderness, or the motivation to protect. English does not have the words to translate this passage literally, but if we go back to the original we can clearly see that this is a reference not to a simple wind or even to the life-giving breath of God, but to the tender, loving and protective God the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Holy Trinity.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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*What does an environmentalist do when he sees an endangered animal eating an endangered plant?*

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## ***Shrove Tuesday Supper***

On February 13<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m., in observance of Shrove Tuesday, we will have a Mardi Gras dinner. Signup sheets for Creole and Cajun dishes, other foods, and for those who plan to attend are posted on the bulletin board in the vestibule so that we may know how many for whom to plan. In addition to bringing a dish you are invited to bring your favorite wine to share. For more details, please speak with Hiram Patrenos. As always, there will be plenty of good food and fellowship. Please make your plans to attend.

*Hiram Patrenos*

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## ***Ash Wednesday***

On February 14<sup>th</sup> the observance of Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, will be held at 12:05 p.m. with a service of Holy Communion and Imposition of Ashes. Please make your plans to begin your observance of the Lenten Season at this special service.

*Hiram Patrenos*

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## ***Altar Flowers in Advent and Lent***

During Lent, it being a penitential season, there are no flowers or cheerful decorations of any kind on the altar. Although Advent is also a penitential season, simple non-floral decorations such as plain greenery are permitted. The reason for this is that each of the two seasons focuses on a different aspect of penitence. During Advent we focus on the need of fallen mankind for salvation, and we look to the coming of the Savior. The Old Testament prophets foretold his coming, and brought to us God's promise of salvation. Although we are penitent for the fact that we are sinners and need salvation, there is also a joyful aspect to the season, in that a promise has been given and we know in faith that it will be fulfilled. The focus of Lent, on the other hand, is on our failure to respond properly to that gift of salvation, and our regular betrayal of God's love through our sins. Advent, then, is

about our sinfulness and the need for salvation, while Lent is about our actual sins and our need for forgiveness. For this reason, during Lent the altar is stark and bare of everything but the liturgical basics—the sacred vessels, the candles and the paraments. Even these are removed at the end of the last Mass on Maundy Thursday, leaving the sanctuary and even the Tabernacle bare and empty until all the beautiful and glorious decorations are restored for the first Mass of Easter.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***Ash Wednesday Ashes***

On Ash Wednesday, February 14 this year, most liturgical churches will dispense ashes by marking a cross on the forehead with them with the reminder, “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19). This is a reminder of the shortness of life and of our need to prepare for its end. It is thus an appropriate way, “downer” that it may be, to begin the season of Lent, which is our period of introspection and repentance in preparation for Easter. Many Protestants argue that it is not biblical, and technically they are right. However, the standard token of mourning and penitence in Jesus’ time was to tear one’s clothing and place ashes on one’s head (Job 42:6, Est. 4:1, Jer. 6:26 et al.). We no longer tear our clothes, but ashes on the forehead still denote the recognition of our mortality and our need for penitence, which are the basic themes of Lent.

There is no rule for when to remove the ashes. Some choose to do so immediately after the service, while others choose to retain them for the day either as a personal reminder of their mortality and fallibility, or as an opportunity to teach when others ask about them. Those who are tempted to wear them to display their own righteousness are actually being prideful and self-righteous and should remove them at once (and in their self-examination they should include that as one of their sins).

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***The Lord, the LORD, God and GOD.***

In many translations of the Bible we see God referred to both as the Lord and as God, and sometimes in the Old Testament these words are in SMALL CAPS. Although there are several names for God in the Old Testament, by far the most common are *Elohim* and an enigmatic name that is usually rendered as *Yahweh*. While this is pronounced “Yá-whay” by most Gentile scholars, Jews usually substitute *Adonai* (אדוני), “Lord.” Most English versions of the Bible also use that substitution in translation, printing it in small caps as LORD.

The first biblical reference to God, in Genesis 1:1, calls him *Elohim* (אלהים).<sup>1</sup> This is more of a generic term for God than an actual name. In the structure of the Hebrew language it is a plural word, which could be literally translated Gods. Some argue that this indicates a primitive henotheism<sup>2</sup> in early Judaism, in which God is recognized as the chief and most powerful among many gods. Most, however, acknowledge that it is a Hebrew idiom of veneration and respect. Identifying someone or something in the plural is a recognition of uniqueness and supreme honor. It is related to what in English is known as the “royal we,” when kings refer to themselves as we rather than I. A king uses it to denote that the power of all his subjects is vested in him. When used for God it denotes that all his creation is involved in his very being.

The more common name for God in the Old Testament is *Yahweh*. Since there are no vowels in the Hebrew alphabet, this is written with four letters, YHWH (יהוה), sometimes transliterated as JHVH. This is technically known as the tetragrammaton (from the Greek for “four-letter”). Even though there are no written vowels, we know fairly accurately how

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<sup>1</sup> “In the beginning God (*Elohim*) created the heaven and the earth.”

<sup>2</sup> Henotheism is a form of polytheism in which there are many gods, but only one is acknowledged and worshiped, ignoring all the rest as subservient to him.

most ancient Hebrew words were pronounced. In the eighth century AD a system was developed in which combinations of dots and small lines are inserted below and among the consonants to indicate vowels. Since Hebrew was still spoken liturgically and among scholars, their written Hebrew after that time clearly indicated the vowels and thus the pronunciation. The only word for which that did not hold true was the tetragrammaton. This name was so sacred that it was never pronounced, so even the scholars who invented the vowel pointing did not know how to say it. Instead, *Adonai* (Lord) was substituted. To make sure that no one spoke the sacred name accidentally, they used the consonants YHVH, but inserted the vowels for *Adonai*. This produced something like *Yahowaih* or *Jahovaih*, which is an almost unpronounceable word in Hebrew. This served as a reminder to say the word *Adonai* when reading the scriptures aloud. Unfortunately, early Christian translators who were not familiar with this custom often mis-transliterated the sacred name as Jehovah instead of translating it as LORD. In some places God is referred to as Yahweh God (*Yahweh Elohim*, יהוה אלהים), LORD God. We also find *Adonai Yahweh*, which is usually translated Lord GOD.

When all is said and done, one might ask, “What does it matter, since they both mean God?” The difference becomes very significant in the story of the near sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham was raised a pagan. He was surrounded by pagan cultures, most of whom practiced human sacrifice at least to some degree. The story of his submission to God—more than a conversion, it was a rising to a new awareness—is a story of great spiritual growth and of a new understanding of deity. When it is read in Hebrew, it was *Elohim* who commanded him to sacrifice Isaac. He could understand the command, as painful as it was, because he had grown up in a culture in which the sacrifice of one’s child was the ultimate act of submission and worship of a god. On top of Mount Moriah, as he raised the knife to kill Isaac, God sent an angel to stop

him.<sup>1</sup> In the Hebrew, the God who sent the angel was *Yahweh*. This was the turning point of Abraham's life. From that point on he served not just a powerful God, but the only God, the God of the Hebrews, who would choose Abraham's descendants to prepare the way of salvation for all mankind.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***The Feast of the Purification***

According to the Jewish Law, a woman was considered ritually unclean from the time she became pregnant (or was aware of it) until forty days after giving birth. She could have no social contact with anyone outside her immediate family, and was not permitted to enter a synagogue, the Temple, or any other public place. This law was not rooted in patriarchalism or misogyny, but actually showed great wisdom. In ancient times (actually until quite recently), pregnancy and childbirth were very perilous. Huge numbers of women died or were permanently disabled as a result of a variety of diseases associated with childbirth. Infant mortality was also enormous, but if a mother or infant survived the first forty days their chances of living were vastly increased. Keeping the mother and infant virtually isolated greatly reduced their chance of infection in a world that knew nothing of germs. The Law required that at the end of the forty days of "uncleanness" the woman was to offer a sacrifice in the Temple, and if she could not do so herself, arrange to have one offered. This was called her Purification, and she was then fully re-integrated into society.

The pivotal point in Jewish history was the escape of

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<sup>1</sup> God did not need to test Abraham's obedience. He knew what Abraham would do. He commanded it because Abraham, until he was actually in the process of obeying, did not himself know what he would do. This was his own ultimate test of the strength of his faith.

the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. This was accomplished after a long struggle, when the firstborn of the Israelites were spared the tenth plague, the death of all the firstborn in Egypt. In honor of this, the Law required of the Jews that the firstborn son of every family be given to God. This ceremony was to be done within the first forty days after the boy's birth, and thus was usually done at the same time as the mother's purification. Like the Purification, it was to be done in the Temple in Jerusalem if possible, and otherwise in a public ceremony with a local priest.<sup>1</sup> On the rare occasions that the boy was actually given over to the priests, he remained with them and was raised by them rather than by his parents. The prophet Samuel was raised by the priest Eli (1 Sam. 1:28). It is possible that Simeon was also raised in the Temple (Lk. 2:25). It was rare, however, that the infant was actually left to be raised by the priests. This usually happened only if he were orphaned or his parents were unable to raise him themselves. In most cases the boy was presented to God, and then redeemed (bought back) according to the Law by the gift of a token sum of money so that he could be raised by his own family. A Christian theological concept akin to this is that fallen mankind had been given over to Satan, and was redeemed by God through the sacrifice of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

As the forty-day period was coming to a close, Mary

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<sup>1</sup> Any adult male of the tribe of Levi was automatically a priest, and could therefore accept the child in the name of God.

<sup>2</sup> This custom of giving the firstborn son to God may have been rooted in an ancient Canaanite practice that was abhorrent to the Jews. They would cast their first-born sons alive into a fire as a human sacrifice to their god Moloch in order to promote fertility. The prophets deemed this a symbol of the evil barbarity of paganism. It was done in the Valley of Hinnom just outside Jerusalem (before David captured the city). The New Testament calls the place Gehenna, and uses it as a metaphor for Hell.

and Joseph took the infant Jesus to Jerusalem for the purification of Mary and the presentation of Jesus. In the tradition of Western Christianity these two feasts, the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, are both celebrated on February 2, forty days after Christmas. In Eastern Christianity, the days of their celebration differ among patriarchal sees. Most Protestant churches do not observe either of these as major feasts, although those who practice adult-only baptism refer to the presentation of Jesus as a justification for the presentation (not baptism) of infants to the congregation as something of an initiatory rite.

Another ancient practice that also occurs at this time is the blessing of all the candles that will be used in the church during the coming year. The observance is called Candlemas, and is done at this time in recognition that Christ is the Light of the World. When Jesus was brought to the Temple, Simeon called him “a light to lighten the Gentiles” (Lk. 2:32).

Secular Western culture also observes Ground Hog Day or its equivalent on February 2. This has its roots in a medieval British superstition that rain on the Feast of the Purification meant that there would be an early spring. The superstition of the groundhog’s shadow being a weather predictor goes back only to the 19<sup>th</sup> century among German immigrants in Pennsylvania. In Germany they watch the badger’s shadow.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***The Family of the Blessed Virgin***

If the Bible were our only source of information, we would know almost nothing of the family of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Fortunately, however, we have many very early traditions that give us information that can be considered reliable.

When we have writings by prominent Christian leaders from the late first and early second centuries, it is not unreasonable to trust them. Many of these people knew the Apostles and earliest Christians personally or at least knew people who did, and therefore there is little reason to doubt them.

There is an important city named Sepphoris about four miles from Nazareth, and tradition says that Mary was born there of Joachim and Anna. The city was in turmoil with a series of rebellions near the end of Herod's reign, and because of Roman reprisals many Jews fled it. It was finally burned to the ground shortly after Herod's death, and then rebuilt as a Roman city. It is reasonable that during these times Joachim and Anna left Sepphoris and settled in the obscure nearby village of Nazareth, which was so unimportant that there would be little trouble from the Romans there. It was in Nazareth that their daughter Mary conceived Jesus.

The Bible tells us that Mary had a sister, and if we look at the accounts of the Crucifixion, we can identify her. All four gospels speak of the women at the Cross, although Luke tells us only that "the women who followed him from Galilee stood at a distance" (Lk. 23:49). Matthew, Mark and John, however, name four women at the foot of the cross. All three name Mary the mother of Jesus, and Mary Magdalene. Matthew adds Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Matt. 27:56); Mark adds Mary the mother of James and Joses, and Salome (not the dancer) (Mk. 15:40); and John adds Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Jesus' mother's sister (Jn. 19:25). From this we can deduce that Mary the wife of Cleopas was the mother of James and Joses, and Salome was Mary's sister and the wife of Zebedee.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***The Inner Circle of the Twelve Apostles***

Listing the Twelve Apostles is not as easy as one might think, since the accounts of them in the four gospels call some by different names. For example, Levi, Zacchaeus and Matthew are all the same person, as probably are Nathanael and

Bartholomew. Three, however, are clearly identified, and are unquestionably the inner circle of the twelve. They are Peter, James and John. In the ancient social structure of patronage, which was an integral part of Roman and Jewish society in Jesus' time, there was always an inner circle of a few clients who were much closer to their patron than the rest. It is clear that these three enjoyed that privilege. They were the only ones invited to join Jesus on the Mount of the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1); they were the only ones allowed to go with Jesus into the house of Jairus (Lk. 8:51); along with Peter's brother Andrew, they were with him on the Mount of Olives across from the Temple when he predicted its destruction (Mk. 13:3); and they were the only ones with him when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before his death (Mk. 14:33). If we read between the lines of the gospels, we can see a good reason why these were the select few.

In the preceding article we deduced that Salome, the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and Jon, was the sister of the Blessed Virgin Mary. If this is correct, and most biblical scholars agree that it is, then James and John were Jesus' first cousins. Their father Zebedee, a fisherman, lived with his family in Bethsaida, an important fishing village on the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida was only a half-day's walk from Nazareth (not considered terribly far in those days), so it is more than likely that Joseph, Mary and Jesus visited her sister Salome's family often. While the men exchanged news and the women and girls prepared the meals, the boys went out to play together. There is little doubt that Jesus, James and John knew each other from early childhood.

When James and John were adults they joined with their father in the fishing business. They had as partners two other men from Bethsaida, the brothers Peter and Andrew, the sons of Jonas. Although we have no firm evidence, it is entirely possible that Zebedee and Jonas were partners, and that both brought their sons into the business (as was the norm in those days). They were quite prosperous by the standards of the time, because Zebedee and Peter each owned their own boat,

which would have been a very large investment. In the culture of those days, it would have been extremely unlikely that a businessman would go into a partnership with anyone that he had not known very well for many years. This leads us to the reasonable conclusion that Peter and Andrew were childhood friends of James and John, and thus of Jesus.

All this casts a whole new light on the calling of the first Apostles, who were, not surprisingly, James, John, Peter and Andrew. If we read the Bible with no other background, it appears that Jesus saw Peter and Andrew, and then James and John at the seaside, told them to follow him, and they immediately dropped everything and followed a total stranger (Mk. 1:14ff). Not only is this unlikely, but the Bible gives absolutely no evidence that this was the case. Among other things, why is there no objection from Zebedee? Consider a more likely scenario. As they grew up together, the four boys learned more and more about Jesus' teachings and his thinking. They may well have realized that at some point they would become his followers, but did not know how or when. Jesus' public ministry did not begin until he was thirty (Lk. 3:23), so the others would have been roughly the same age—hardly naïve youngsters. After his baptism and retreat in the wilderness, one of the first things Jesus did was to go to his friends and say in effect, “Now we are ready. Now is the time. Follow me,” and they did. Why did Zebedee not object? Because he knew it was coming, and he approved.

The question then arises, why does Andrew seem to fade out of the inner circle, leaving only Peter, James and John? We do not know, but throughout the gospels he seems to play a very minor role. We can only conjecture, but perhaps, although he was worthy of Apostleship, martyrdom and sainthood, Andrew may not have had the intense spiritual strength that we see in Peter, James and John.

The Bible tells us that the Son of God took upon himself full humanity, even to the point of being conceived in a human womb. If that is so, then as Paul tells us, he would not step beyond that humanity and call upon his divine power

every time he wanted to accomplish something—that is what Satan tempted him to do, and he refused. He told us himself that if we had sufficient faith we could cast mountains into the sea. The miracles he performed can be done by anyone who has sufficient faith (Peter walked on the water until he said, “I can’t do this,” and then sank). The problem is that we don’t have sufficient faith. When Jesus called James, John, Peter and Andrew he did not use some divine or magical charisma to induce four total strangers to disrupt their whole lives and follow him. He invited his friends, who at least to some degree knew what they were getting into, to join him in a divine mission and become “fishers of men.”

*Richard R. Losch+*

## ***Leadership***

In the Bible, few leaders were elected—rather, they were selected, either by God or by the acclaim of the people. The Hebrew word for leader (*manhig*, מנהיג) derives from the verb *linhog* (לנהיג), which means “dealing with people with consistent actions.”<sup>1</sup> In the Hebrew usage, then, being a leader is not just an idea, it is a responsibility that carries with accountability for one’s actions.

*Richard R. Losch+*

## ***The Epistle is Online***

The last five years of *The Epistle* are now online . Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the “Epistle” tab at the top. You can read it online or download it as a .pdf file.

*Richard R. Losch+*

*Being old isn’t all that bad. I have everything I wanted as a teen-ager, only 60 years later. I don’t have to go to school or work. I get an allowance every month. I have my own pad, and I don’t have a curfew. I have a driver’s license and my own car, and I don’t have acne.*

<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, in modern Hebrew this also refers to driving a car. We suspect that Israeli drivers are expected to be courteous.

# *A Touch of Trivia*

In 1864 Robert Lincoln was buying a ticket in a train station in Jersey City, NJ. He was accidentally knocked over and fell onto the tracks before an on-coming train. A man rushed forward, grabbed him and pulled him to his feet out of the way of the train, saving his life. The man was the actor Edwin Booth, the older brother of John Wilkes Booth, who murdered his father Abraham Lincoln a year later.

*Richard R. Losch+*

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



*“And bless Mom and Dad  
even if they are mean.”*



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