

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

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December 2016

This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is Lorenzo Lotto's *Saint Nicholas of Bari In Glory with Saints John the Baptist and Lucy*, completed in 1529. It is oil on canvas, measuring about 6'x11', and is displayed in Chiesa dei Carmini in Venice. It is appropriate for this month, since we celebrate the feasts of both Saint Nicholas (Dec. 6) and Saint Lucy (Dec. 13). The two go together, because Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of schoolboys, and Saint Lucy of schoolgirls. Saint Nicholas was the 4th century Bishop of Myra (in modernday Turkey),¹ and Saint Lucy was a 3rd century martyr in Sicily. Undocumented tradition says that she was blinded during her martyrdom, so portrayals of her usually show her with a bowl with her eyes in it. In this painting it rests on the cloud to her left. In the post-Renaissance period Saint Nicholas became associated with Christmas. His legends eventually became intermingled with those of the pagan Nordic god Odin, and in the 19th century evolved into the Santa Claus legend. Saint Lucy, however, got left behind in that development. She was extremely popular during the Italian Renaissance, and appears as an auxiliary character in numerous paintings of that era. It is not clear why Lotto included Saint John the Baptist in the painting, although in the Renaissance several painters associated Saint John with Saint Lucy.

Lorenzo Lotto was born in 1480 in Venice. Little is known of his early training. In 1503 he found the competition for a young unknown artist to be too great in Venice, so he moved to Treviso. There he did a number of portraits and two altarpieces, both of which still survive. In 1506 he moved to Recanati, and as his reputation grew he attracted the attention

¹ Lott called him Nicholas of Bari because in 1087 Italian merchants stole part of his remains from Myra in Turkey and brought them to Bari in Italy, allegedly to protect them from the Muslim Turks. They captured only about half of his skeleton during the raid. Soon thereafter Bari's rival city of Venice also raided the tomb and retrieved most of the remainder of the relics. Today his relics are scattered all over Europe.

of Donato Bramante, the papal architect, who saw his work while he was on pilgrimage near Recanati. Bramante invited him to Rome to decorate the papal apartments, but his work was destroyed four years after it was finished. He had imitated the style of Raphael, who was just becoming a star in the papal court, and Lotto's work was replaced by that of Raphael himself. From 1511-1525 he worked in the Marches and in Bergamo painting frescoes and oils, many of which would be considered his masterpieces. In 1525 he returned to Venice, where his reputation now enabled him to be in as much demand as any of the Venetian masters. By 1550, however, at the age of 70 (quite old for those times), he found it increasingly difficult to make a living. When one of his paintings did badly at an auction he became depressed and discouraged. He had always been a deeply religious man, so in 1552 he joined the Dominican Holy Sanctuary at Loreto as a lay brother. During the next four years he painted a number of magnificent frescoes at the sanctuary. He died in 1556, and as he had requested, was buried in the sanctuary in a Dominican habit.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word From the Editor

The elections are now over, for which I am very thankful. I'm not sure I could have taken much more of the anger, vituperation and bitterness that marked what was certainly the nastiest political campaign in modern times. Now it is time for healing, something of which our culture is desperately in need. We are divided and polarized on so many points of difference that it is hard to keep track of them all. We are torn apart by disagreements on everything from religion to sexual orientation/identity; people come close to blows over immigration policy and how welfare programs should be run; I have lived through the era of racial segregation and the Civil Rights movement, yet I have never seen race relations as bad as they are today. Yes, we do need healing.

It doesn't have to be this way. Disagreement and conflict

are nourishment to innovation and progress. Conflict management is a basic part of a business education, because when properly handled conflict can be a very positive force. But when it is allowed to sink into anger it is poison to progress. We don't have to agree in order to make progress—in fact, when everyone agrees it is rare that anything significant is accomplished. To be effective, though, disagreement must be civil and rational. There was a time not so many years ago when senators and congressmen would be at each other's throats in the chamber sessions, but then afterward would go out together, have a beer, and hammer out a compromise that was acceptable to both sides. We need to return to this.

Jesus knew what he was talking about when he told us to love our enemies and pray for those who despitefully use us. He never told us we have to like them, but we do have to love them. We cannot control our likes or dislikes, but we can control our love. Love is a conscious concern for the needs and feelings of others, and that we can control. We do not have to agree with our enemies, but we have a moral obligation to try to understand why they believe and act as they do. Among other things, this helps us to have a better understanding of our own point of view. Also, it is very difficult to hate someone for whom you are praying. It is equally difficult to hate someone who you know is sincerely praying for you.

Our country is in a mess, and it is mainly because of irrational rage and hatred. We can make a huge difference with nothing more than sincere prayer. The old adage may be trite and worn out, but it is still as true as ever: the family—and the nation—that prays together stays together.

Father Riek Losch

Be Wordly Wise

Seek and Ye Shall Find

This month we will explore another of those Latin roots that has produced over a hundred English words. It is *petere*, to seek. Its immediate descendant is petition and all the vari-

ous forms of that word. When prefixes are appended the list of derivatives and their associated words is enormous. The Romans attached *ad-* (which becomes *ap-*), forward. This produced *appetere*, to desire avidly, giving us appetite. Adding *con-* (which becomes *com-*), together, they got *competere*, to seek along with someone else, thus to compete. Adding *in-* (*im-*), into, gave them *impetere*, to probe deeply or to attack. From this we get another Latin word that became also English, *impetus*. It also gave us *impetuous*, and in the Middle Ages the name of a skin disease, *impetigo*, came from it. Adding *re-*, again, gave the Romans *repetere*, to seek again, from which we get *repeat* and *repetition*. When we consider all the Latin and later English words that come from it, along with their various forms and derivatives, *petere* is an extraordinarily prolific little word.

Richard R. Losch+

Sunday School in Advent and Christmas

Sunday School will meet each Sunday through December 18th, but *will not meet* on December 25th or January 1st. Sunday School will resume on Sunday, January 8th.

Hiram Patrenos

Wilmer Hall Christmas Contribution

St. James' will be making a special gift to Wilmer Hall for its Christmas needs this year. Last year because of your generous contributions, we were able to contribute \$1,000 and we hope to be able to make that same gift this year. Envelopes are available on the table at the back of the Church and contributions should be made payable to St. James' and designated for "Wilmer Hall Christmas". Envelopes may be placed in the alms basins or given to Hiram Patrenos. So that we may forward our contribution to Wilmer Hall in time for use this Christmas, the last day for making a contribution is Sunday, December 4th.

Hiram Patrenos

Never take life seriously. Nobody gets out alive anyway.

Thank you Deep South Landscaping

We are grateful to Jason Gordy and his workers of Deep South Landscaping for their gift of giving and planting the winter flowers in the prayer garden, as well as pruning and cleaning up the shrubbery. We appreciate their hard work and generosity!

Hiram Patrenos

Christmas Flowers

Each year St. James' Church offers the opportunity to remember loved ones through donations to the Altar Guild, which provides poinsettias and other decorations in the Church for Christmastide. If you wish to make a donation for this –In Memory of, In honor of, or In Thanksgiving for – envelopes with forms are available at the back of the Church or you may print this information clearly and mail it along with your contribution to Carolyn Patrenos, President, St. James' Altar Guild, Post Office Box 399, Livingston, Alabama 35470. Checks should be made payable to St. James' Altar Guild. Because of the increased costs for these flowers and decorations, we ask for a minimum donation of \$40 for memorials. The publication deadline for inclusion in the Christmas bulletin is Wednesday, December 21st. Your donation is tax deductible.

Hiram Patrenos

Special Services for Advent and Christmas

On December 18th, the 4th Sunday of Advent, at 11:00 a.m. we will celebrate the "Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols" as developed and celebrated at King's College, Cambridge annually since 1918. This service was adapted from an Order drawn up by E.W. Benson, who was later Archbishop of Canterbury.

On December 22nd at 1:00 p.m. the Altar Guild and volunteers will decorate the Church for Christmas. Volunteers should be sure to bring their hand clippers, gloves and wear casual clothes.

Our celebration of Christmas will begin on Christmas Eve with our traditional Christmas Mass at 5:30 p.m. Father Losch will be the celebrant and our Nursery will be open for this service. Immediately following the service we will have our parish Christmas

party in the parish house. You are asked to bring your favorite hors d'oeuvre and your favorite wine to share.

On Christmas Day there will be a service of Holy Communion at 11:00 a.m.

Hiram Patrenos

Annual Parish Meeting

Our Annual Parish Meeting will be held on Sunday, December 4th immediately following the 11:00 a.m. service. Reports of various parish organizations will be made and two new Vestry members will be elected to replace Roy Underwood and Ethel Scott whose terms expire December 31st. Dr. Underwood and Mrs. Scott will not be eligible for re-election to the Vestry for one year.

To be eligible to service on the Vestry, one must:

- be an active confirmed communicant in good standing at St. James' (communicants' names are printed in bold type in the parish directory);
- be frequent and regular in worship attendance;
- support the work of St. James' by an annual pledge to the operating budget;
- be willing and able to attend Vestry meetings and perform the work expected of a Vestry Member. (Vestry meetings are normally scheduled on a bi-monthly basis on a weekday at 5:15 p.m. or after Sunday services. Members' schedules and obligations are taken into consideration as much as possible when meetings are scheduled.)

Other members of the Vestry are Madelyn Mack and Hiram Patrenos, whose terms expire on Dec. 31, 2017, and Jim Rankin and Rosalie Dew whose terms expire on Dec. 31, 2018.

Hiram Patrenos

Every Member Canvass

We have begun our Every Member Canvass. Pledge cards are available on the table at the rear of the Church. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to St. James'. Cards may be placed in the Alms Basins or mailed to T. Raiford Noland, Treasurer, St. James' Church, Post Office Box 446, Livingston, Alabama 35470. Please return your card no later than Sunday, December 6th.

Hiram Patrenos

Jesus and Lazarus

There is little doubt that Jesus and Lazarus were friends, or that he and his sisters, Mary and Martha, were among his financial supporters. In fact, Lazarus was probably one of his closest friends outside the Apostles themselves (Jn. 11:5). It has even been suggested that Lazarus might have been the rich man whom Jesus told to sell all that he had, give to the poor, and follow him (Matt. 19:16ff).¹ He could not do it and thus did not become an Apostle, making this perhaps one of the saddest stories in the New Testament. If that man were Lazarus, however, he was nonetheless a righteous man (Mk. 10:19f.) and remained Jesus' friend.

When Lazarus suffered a fatal illness and lay on his death-bed, his sisters Mary and Martha sent to Jesus to come and heal him (Jn. 11:1ff.). Jesus was not far from their home in Bethany at the time,² yet he chose to wait for two more days before going there. When he finally arrived Lazarus had been dead four days. The question is often asked, why did Jesus wait so long to go to Bethany?

It was an ancient Jewish belief that when a person died his soul did not completely depart the body for three days. The Jerusalem Talmud says, "For the first three days after death the soul floats above the body, thinking that it will return to the body. When the soul sees the body, that the appearance of the face has changed, it leaves the body and goes its way."³ In those days of primitive medical knowledge it was often very difficult to tell if a person were really dead, and there were many cases where someone was thought to be dead and later

¹ This was not a general command to all—the rich young man was the only individual whom Jesus ever asked to do this. This was undoubtedly because he, unlike the other Apostles, was very rich. If he were to become an Apostle he could not remain attached to the things of this world.

² Bethany was about two miles from Jerusalem, where Jesus was heading for the last time to be crucified.

³ Yebamot 16:3

revived. In fact, this was so until relatively modern times, and is the reason for the vigil or “wake.” It was not only to guard the body until its burial, but also to give it time to revive in case it were not really dead. One clear proof of death is decomposition, which usually becomes evident after three days. Jesus waited until Lazarus was dead four days (past the traditional three day limit), and when he arrived in Bethany Lazarus’ body had begun to decompose (Jn. 11:39). Jesus waited so that no one could argue that Lazarus was not really dead.

The expression “raised from the dead” can mean either resurrection or revivification. Despite the common misunderstanding, on that day Jesus did not resurrect Lazarus, he revived him. There is an important theological distinction here. Resurrection is a transfiguration of the corruptible mortal body into a glorious, incorruptible spiritual body.¹ Ultimately at the Eschaton all who are saved will be resurrected, but at this point only Jesus has undergone resurrection. Revivification is simply the restoration of life to a dead body, and that is what Jesus did to Lazarus. John does not say anything about the state of Lazarus’ body after he was revived. It is generally assumed, however, that he was restored not only to life, but also to a state of physical health.²

By raising Lazarus Jesus sealed his own death warrant,

¹ We see examples of the resurrected body in the stories of Jesus after his Resurrection. He could do anything a mortal human could do—he walked with the disciples to Emmaus, ate fish with the Apostles, etc.—yet he was not subject to any of our physical limitations. He could appear in the closed locked room and control whether or not anyone recognized him. He could eat, but did not have to, and he was not subject to injury or corruption, yet he could by his own choice retain the wounds in his hands and side so that Thomas could touch them. Though his body was spiritual, it was also tangible and not just a ghostly apparition.

² In *The Last Temptation of Christ* Kazantzakis has Jesus restore life to Lazarus, yet leaving him in the state of decomposition that he was in after four days in the tomb. According to Kazantzakis this was to emphasize the insignificance of temporal life with respect to spiritual life. Needless to say, this novel was highly controversial for many reasons.

and he knew it. He had prophesied many times that he would be crucified in Jerusalem, and was on his way there to fulfill this prophecy. Many who had come to Bethany to mourn with Mary and Martha were converted, but many could not wait to go to the Pharisees to tell them what had happened (Jn. 11:45f). Some probably went in the hope of converting the Pharisees, but others who disliked Jesus' teachings wanted to give more testimony against him. Jesus was a serious threat to the status quo, and while many of the Pharisees were righteous men, many were very comfortable with the wealth and power they had obtained through corruption and cooperation with the Romans. Jesus was upsetting the political applecart along with the tables of the moneychangers, and he had to be eliminated. The raising of Lazarus led immediately to the High Priest Caiaphas saying, "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people" (Jn. 11:50).

The importance of the story of the raising of Lazarus is the emphasis on the distinction between revivification and resurrection, both of which involve the restoration of life—the former of mortal physical life, and the latter of everlasting spiritual life. Resurrection is not simply something that Jesus *does*, it is what he *is*. It is a basic part of his very nature. He said to Martha, "I *am* the resurrection, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn. 11:25).

Richard R. Losch+

"The Epistle" Is Online

The last three years' issues of *The Epistle* are online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the "Epistle" tab at the top, then click on the issue you want to see. You can read it online or download it as a .pdf file.

Richard R. Losch+

*It has been proved conclusively that the earth revolves around the sun.
This is very upsetting to those who think it revolves around them.*

When Was Jesus Really Born?

From the second century A.D. the Christian Church has celebrated the birth of Christ on December 25,¹ yet since at least the 19th century scholars have challenged that date. They say that we have no idea when he was born, but that it was most likely in the spring or fall. Recent research has made a very compelling case for his birth being on April 17, 6 B.C. This is based on astrological evidence and the death of King Herod the Great. Although astrology is firmly rejected by both the Church and science, it was equally firmly believed by the ancients. The Magi (“Wise Men”) were unquestionably Persian court astrologers. They would have sought astrological signs, and the “star” they saw may well have been not an actual star, but a convergence of important astrological signs that can be traced today. If so, then a strong case can be made for the April 17 date. That would also explain why only the Magi, not even the shepherds, saw the Star of Bethlehem. As astrologers the signs would have been obvious to them, but the shepherds were unaware of them. It can be argued that since astrology is considered unchristian, why would God use it as the sign of Christ’s birth? The Bible is full of situations where God used things outside the Faith to achieve his ends. The story of the Magi is the story of the revelation of Christ to Gentiles, thus to all mankind. Why not then work in terms that those Gentiles would understand?

There are three main objections to the December 25 date. The first is that December 25 was chosen in order to replace two pagan Winter Solstice celebrations, the Roman Saturnalia and the Nordic Yule. The problem with that is that the Winter

¹ In the very early days Christmas was celebrated on a variety of dates around the world, but always on December 25 in the regions influenced by Rome. That date was observed 200 years before the conversion of Constantine and the Christianization of the Roman Empire. Contrary to the common misunderstanding, the Eastern Orthodox Churches do not celebrate Christmas on Epiphany (January 6), but on December 25. Their main partying and the time of gift giving, however, are on Epiphany.

Solstice occurs on December 22, not the 25th. The Saturnalia and Yule ran from December 18-23, and were over before the 25th. If the Church wanted to replace these pagan festivals with the festival of Christ's birth it would have chosen the chief date of the festivals, December 22.

The second objection is based on the fact that there was also a pagan Roman festival on December 25. It was *Natalis Sol Invictus*, the Birth of the Unconquered Sun. It was not a particularly popular celebration, however, following directly upon the heels of the raucous and often lewd Saturnalia. Particularly important is that this celebration was instituted in A.D. 361 by the emperor Julianus or Julian. The Church had been celebrating Christmas on December 25 for over 200 years before Julian ascended the throne. He is known as Julian the Apostate, because he was raised a Christian and renounced his faith to revert to paganism. He hated Christianity, so it would be quite appropriate for him to institute a pagan feast to replace Christmas rather than the other way around.

The third objection is that the Gospel according to St. Luke describes the shepherds watching their sheep in the fields outside Bethlehem on the night Jesus was born. It is argued that shepherds did not herd their sheep in the fields in the cold of winter or in the arid summer when the grass had dried up, therefore Jesus must have been born in the spring or fall. That may well be true in England, but in southern Palestine, where Bethlehem is, December is still quite mild and the grass is still plentiful because of the early winter rains. The only really cold period there is mid-January to early March.

There is also an objection to Jesus having been born in A.D. 1.¹ It is based on the record that King Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. Since he was alive to give the order for the massacre of the infants in Bethlehem as a result of Jesus' birth, then Jesus had to have been born no later than 4 B.C. Events moved slowly in those days, and since Herod order the death of all the boys two and under, Jesus might have been at

¹ There is no year 0—we go directly from 1 B.C. to A.D. 1.

least a year old, and possibly close to two. This would place his birth in at least 5 or 6 B.C. There is a problem with this whole argument, however. The only record we have that dates Herod's death is a report by Flavius Josephus that there was an eclipse of the moon at the time of his death, and there was such an eclipse in Jerusalem on March 13, 4 B.C. Unfortunately, Josephus in at least three other places gives conflicting accounts of Herod's reign and death. Also, the March 13 eclipse was very late at night and only partial, so it would not have gotten much attention. Nevertheless, for some reason scholars since the 19th century have associated Herod's death with that eclipse. There were also two lunar eclipses in 1 B.C., the one on December 29 being total. This is still too early to place the Nativity in the Christian era, but it would make it more likely to have been in 1 or 2 B.C., four years later than the traditional date. Since all we have to go on is Josephus' report and it is full of inconsistencies, it is entirely possible that Herod died as late as A.D. 2.

One of the reasons there is no Biblical record of Jesus' birthday is that birth dates were unimportant to the Jews. They did not care *when* a child was born, but rather *that* he was born, to whom, and whether there were any unusual circumstances surrounding the birth. The Romans and Greeks, on the other hand, because of astrology, put a great deal of importance on the exact date and time of a birth. Galilee and Judea were full of Romans and Hellenized (Greek-influenced) Jews, many of whom became followers of Christ. They would have been very interested in his birth date, and there were many who had known Jesus since childhood who could have known it.¹ If Jesus were indeed born on December 25, they could well have been a source of that knowledge.

In trying to determine Jesus' birthday from Biblical rec-

¹ It is highly likely that the Apostles James and John were Jesus' first cousins, their mother Salome (not the dancer) being Mary's sister. Their business partners and best friends, possibly from childhood, were Peter and Andrew, who therefore may also have known Jesus all his life.

ords we must first consider the birth of John the Baptist. Priests served two one-week “courses” in the Temple each year. John’s father, the priest Zacharias, served the “Course of Abias” (Lk. 1:5). This meant that he served the second week of the month of Tishri (late September).¹ John was conceived immediately after he returned, thus placing John’s birth at the end of June (the Church celebrates it on June 24). From there on the dating is simple. Luke tells us that the Blessed Virgin went to visit Elizabeth (John’s mother) just after she conceived Jesus, and that Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John. If John were six months older than Jesus and he was born June 24, then that means Jesus was born six months later on December 24/25. Move backward nine months and that brings us to March 25, which is the date on which the Church has celebrated the Miraculous Conception of Jesus since at least the second century.²

Fathers may forget their wedding dates and their children’s birthdays, but no mother does—she can tell every tiny detail of it years later. There is little doubt that the Apostles would have heard the story from Mary, and that the first century tradition of Jesus’ being born at midnight December 24/25 was told often to the other disciples.

These arguments will by no means settle the question, but they are well worth considering. In seminary we were taught the spring/fall argument, as most still are today. It made sense at the time, but I recall one professor who held to the December 25 date. Unfortunately, he never shared his argument for it with us, but simply said, “Read your Bible and study your history.” With the help of Dr. Taylor Marshall and others I have done so, and I am ready to reconsider my old position.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ The exact date would vary. The Jewish calendar is lunar, so by our calendar the dates vary somewhat from year to year.

² The Miraculous Conception of Jesus is not to be confused with the Immaculate Conception, which refers to the conception without original sin of the Blessed Virgin Mary by her parents Saints Anne and Joachim.

Sacrifices and Scapegoats

In ancient Israel on the Day of Atonement there was a fascinating and theologically very important tradition. Two young male goats were selected. They had to be perfect—with absolutely no known flaw—and as nearly identical as possible. If a person other than their own herdsman could tell one from the other they were not sufficiently similar. They were brought to the Temple in Jerusalem where they were ritually washed and prepared for sacrifice. Once they were ready the High Priest selected one by the casting of lots and offered it to God as a sacrifice. This was a great honor for the goat, although I doubt that he appreciated it. The High Priest cursed the other, reciting over it all the sins of Israel during the past year, and cursing it with the responsibility for them. It was then taken out into the desert and released. Left alone to face starvation, thirst and predators, it was not likely that it would survive. In some accounts of the tradition this goat was taken to the wilderness and thrown over a cliff to its death. The Hebrew name of this goat is unclear, but it is generally considered to be *Azazel* (אזאזל), which is also traditionally the name of a fallen angel (Enoch 13). This derives from the Hebrew *azel* (אזל), “remove.” The Greek Septuagint translated it *tragos apompaios* (τραγος ἀποπομπαιος), “goat sent out.” In 1530 William Tyndale, in his English translation, rendered it scape-goat, which in 16th century English meant escape goat. The word scapegoat has been almost universally used in English translations ever since, and has come generally to mean someone who is held responsible for some ill.

This tradition is theologically important is that it applies so perfectly to Jesus. He was the perfect offering (the Passover lamb without blemish in place of the sacrificial goat), and also the “scapegoat” that took our sins upon himself. “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed” (Is. 53:5).

Richard R. Losch+

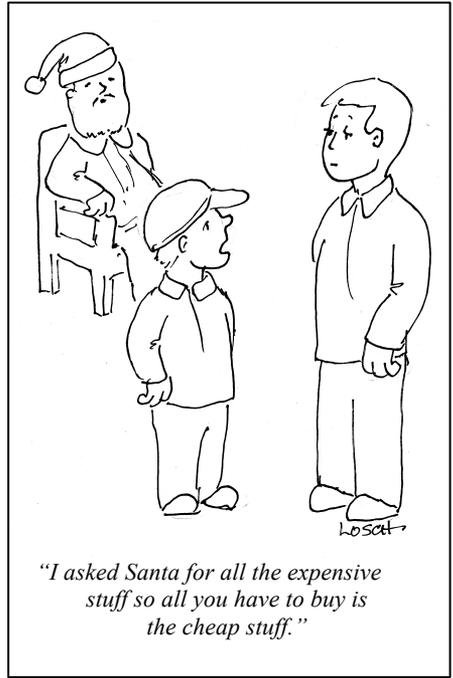
Huh?

A headline in the August 11 *Boston Globe* read, "Woman found abandoned in hospital as baby searches for mom." That one blindsided me for a minute, too. Apparently a woman who had been abandoned as a baby is now searching for her mother. That editor needs an editor. So does novelist K. B. Wagers, author of *Behind the Throne*, who wrote, "Portis told us everything. Then Princess Cire told us the rest." That seems to me to be a rather excessive bit of information.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



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