

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



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February 2014

This Month's Cover

Our cover this month is Filippino Lippi's *Abraham*, a fresco in the vault of the Capella di Filippo Strozzi in the Santa Maria Novella in Florence. It is one of dozens of frescoes that he executed there between 1487 and 1502. We see the aged Abraham with his head bowed in deference to God. In his hand is the knife with which he prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. His left hand is over the altar, on which we see the ram that God supplied for the sacrifice in place of Isaac. Over his head are rays signifying the Glory of God, with the three longer ones denoting the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. At his feet are placards proclaiming him "ABRAAM PRĪARCH^A," "Abraham Patriarch."

A fresco is a painting made with water-based paint on wet plaster. As the plaster dries the paint penetrates it, producing vibrant colors that resist fading for centuries. If the plaster is properly laid and is not subject to damp conditions, it is one of the hardest of painting media. Unfortunately, many magnificent Renaissance frescoes have not withstood the humid Italian climate well, and have deteriorated badly. Most of Lippi's frescoes, however, are in excellent condition.

The chapel was originally owned by the Boni family, and was dedicated to Saint John the Evangelist. Filippo Strozzi acquired it in 1486, at the same time that he started the building of the famous Strozzi Palace. He rededicated the chapel to Saints Philip and James, and commissioned Lippi to decorate it.

Filippino Lippi (1457?-1504) was the son and student of the great Florentine painter Filippo Lippi (1406-1469), who died when the boy was about 12. Upon his father's death the boy finished his father's work in the Spoleto Cathedral, and signed some of the works himself. In 1470, at the age of 13, he set out for Florence to study with Sandro Boticelli, who was delighted to have a student with such brilliant talent. His style remained much like that of his father, although it is much more robust than that of either the senior Lippi or Boticelli.

His first major commission was the completion of the fresco cycle of Masaccio and Masolino in the Brancacci chapel of Santa Maria di Carmine. It is unclear whether the frescoes had been unfinished or damaged, but Lippi's work on them was so masterful that it is difficult to tell where his work began and that of the earlier masters had left off 50 years before.

Lippi worked in a number of chapels, but his masterpiece is the frescoes of Saints Philip and John in the Strozzi Chapel. His bold and sometimes almost bizarre effects mark him as one of the most inventive of all the Renaissance painters.

Lippi became fascinated with the relics of antiquity that were so often being discovered in Italy. Thereafter he introduced bits of antiquity into all his painting, even when they were completely irrelevant.

Lorenzo de' Medici described Lippi as "superior to Apelles." This was high praise indeed.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

The word mediocre is defined as ordinary, of only moderate quality, and not notable or significant. By that definition, I consider February to be a very mediocre month. Christmas and the New Year are over, and Lent and Easter are a long way off. The weather is dreary, and even people who like winter are beginning to tire of it. February offers neither Fall's busy-ness nor Spring's promise of "those lazy, hazy days of summer." We've even abolished the celebration of two of my childhood heroes, Washington and Lincoln, and combined their birthdays into the rather nondescript Presidents' Day (or is it President's Day?). It was not unwise to make it the shortest month of the year, so that we can get it over with as quickly as possible.

I suppose we have to accept the mediocrity of a month, but I am dismayed at how quickly our culture accepts mediocrity in its values and practices. Recently a Little League team made national news when it presented only one Most Valuable Player trophy instead of giving one to every member of the team. Many of the parents were aghast that one child had been singled out above all the rest. In the new Core Curriculum, a child is given credit for the wrong answer if he can show how he came up with that answer. The tendency today seems to be to do or allow anything whatsoever to avoid offending anyone or making anyone feel bad. This attitude can lead only to mediocrity. If everyone is to be treated the same regardless of their achievements, where

is the incentive to achieve?

This acceptance of mediocrity has also pervaded the Church. I do not mean just the Episcopal Church, but western Christianity in general. We have become so terrified of offending anyone that even immorality and outright heresy have become acceptable. We dare not condemn the sin for fear that the sinner might be offended. It strikes me that Jesus was not the least bit afraid to offend when he thought it would save someone's soul.

As Christians, whether clergy or laity, we are called to be leaders of Christ's Church. And as leaders, if we are to achieve the best for Christ and for the souls for whom we are responsible, we must strive for the very best. We need to be guided by the old axiom that "good enough is never good enough." In politics, compromise is essential for anything to be accomplished. But when it comes to the One True Faith deposited once and for all with the Apostles, compromise has no place. We cannot negotiate God's Truth in order to adapt to changing cultural values—rather, it is our duty to maintain constant pressure on the culture to adapt to God's values. Anything less leads to spiritual and moral mediocrity, and that leads to Hell.

The Church is the only hope for the salvation of mankind. It is God's gift to us, and it is not to be taken lightly. Each of us must not only live by the Church's teachings, but be prepared to stand up for them, refusing to allow them to sink into mediocrity.

Father Rick Losch

Be Wordly Wise

The Distaff Side

We all know what a spinster is (or at least so we think), but what about a webster or brewster? The suffix *-ster* was an early way to make a masculine word into a feminine form. A spinster is a female spinner (it was not until the 18th century that the term spinster came to mean an older unmarried woman). A webster is a female weaver, and a brewster is a woman who makes beer. A later feminizing suffix is *-ess*. Today we might call a woman spinner a spinneress. In fact, after a long evolutionary journey from Latin through French, the female form of master became mistress (“masteress”).¹

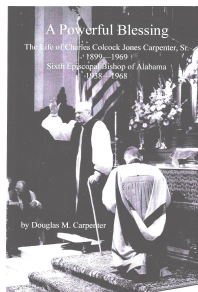
In spinning, the unspun flax or wool is wound on a long staff, which is then usually attached to a spinning wheel. The fiber is pulled off this staff and spun into thread. It is known as a distaff, from the Old German *dise*, “wad of flax,” and the English “staff.” In the early Middle Ages the task of spinning moved from being a man’s trade to being a chore of the women of the household. At about the same time, since the women spun the fiber on a distaff, the noun “distaff” also came to be used as an adjective referring to women. Thus the women of a household were referred to as “the distaff side.”

Richard R. Losch+

¹ How “mistress” came to be used for a man’s illicit female consort is unclear, although Weekly suggests that it may have been a euphemism for less complimentary epithets.

Bishop Carpenter

Many Alabamans will remember Bishop C.C.J. Carpenter, the sixth Bishop of Alabama, who held the diocese together during the turbulent Civil Rights era. Bishop Carpenter was a physically huge man, but even more he was “larger than life.” Although a strong believer in civil rights, he managed to maintain détente between the civil rights activists and the segregationists when Alabama was being torn apart by the struggle, and when there was a real threat that the Diocese itself might split over the



issue. His son, the Rev. Douglas Carpenter, has written a fascinating biography of his father. Entitled *A Powerful Blessing*, the book contains 335 pages of stories and 26 full-page pictures of the man who has become an Alabama legend. You can obtain a signed and inscribed copy for \$28 (shipping included) from Doug Carpenter, 3037 Overton Rd., Birmingham, AL, 35223, (205) 381-3553, carpenter.doug7436@att.net. It is also available at the Episcopal Bookstore at the Cathedral Church of the Advent (they accept credit cards).

Richard R. Losch+

Talk is cheap—except when Congress does it.

ECW News

Here are some upcoming activities for the St. James' ECW:

- Super Bowl Po'boy Sale, February 2. This year the ECW is selling both ham and cheese and turkey and cheese po'boys. The sandwiches come with tomatoes, lettuce, chips, and a homemade dessert, all for the unbelievable price of \$5. Orders will be taken up to Sunday, January 26th. Pickup for the sandwiches will be Sunday, February 2nd from noon to 2. Each ECW member is asked to provide about 3 dozen desserts by Friday, January 31st or Saturday, February 1st.
- Sucarnochee Folklife Festival Baked Goods Sale is scheduled for Saturday, April 19th. We'll be selling both candy and baked goods again. Details will be set at the March and April ECW meetings.
- The US 11 Antique Alley and Yard Sale is scheduled for May 15-18, 2014. This 502-mile-long yard sale along US 11 stretches from Meridian, Mississippi to Bristol, Virginia. Members are urged to keep the yard sale in mind as they clean closets, garages, and attics.

Join us as we carry out our fellowship, outreach, and fundraising activities in the New Year. As always, we appreciate your support.

Sharon Underwood

*You are never too old to
learn something stupid.*

Evening Prayer and Parish Supper

February's Evening Prayer and parish supper will be on Wednesday, February 19th at 6:00 p.m. and will celebrate the Epiphany season with a Mardi Gras dinner. Signup sheets for Creole and Cajun dishes and other foods, and for those who plan to attend, will be posted in the parish house kitchen so that we may know how many for whom to plan. Wine will be furnished. For more details, please speak with Hiram Patrenos or Candace Strickland. As always, there will be plenty of good food and fellowship. Please make your plans to attend. Please note that in observance of Lent, we will not have a supper in March or April, but plan to begin a new season of suppers on the third Wednesday of May.

Hiram Patrenos

ECW Antique Alley Yard Sale

The Episcopal Church Women will have a yard sale in May during the Highway 11 Antique Alley Yard Sale. Everyone is encouraged to keep this in mind as they clean attics, storage buildings, and closets. Furniture is especially sought during this sale and we will be happy to help you move any items you wish to contribute. If you have contributions please do not leave them in the parish hall, but speak with Hiram Patrenos to arrange to get the items to our storage space.

Hiram Patrenos

Beer and Civilization

There is strong evidence that the desire for beer was a primary force in the development of agriculture. Even though barley is a much more difficult crop to grow than most other grains or vegetables, it appears that it was one of the first grains to be domesticated and planted over 10,000 years ago. The planting of fields marked the end of the nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle of the stone age, and led to the domestication of animals (particularly cattle for food and skins, and as work animals). This in turn led to the domestication of sheep and goats and the training of dogs to herd them. Once fields were planted, people tended to stay in one place and build houses. This led to the development of villages and towns, and laws and social structures to maintain order. That, of course, was the beginning of civilization. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to say that the discovery of beer was a primary cause of civilization.

In ancient times beer was not just a social drink. It was a dietary staple, and a highly nutritious food—in some respects it could almost be called a super-food. The process of malting the barley¹ and fermenting it greatly multiplied the calories provided by the barley alone. It also produced a

wide variety of essential nutrients, and the alcohol killed many of the dangerous bacteria that lurked in the generally tainted water available at the time. Considering the short availability of nutritious food in the ancient world, beer gave a lot of “bang for the buck.”

Beer was used to pay workers, and was an important part of brides’ dowries. It was the standard treatment for stomach problems, coughs and constipation (one Egyptian medical document explains how to give a beer enema). It was also poured into open wounds to drive away the evil spirits that cause infection.

The beer in ancient times was very sour, although it was often sweetened with dates or honey. These would be boiled with the malted barley, which was then cooled in preparation for fermentation. Because of the lack of refrigeration and bottling technology, ancient beer lost its carbonation very quickly. It was flat, and was drunk at room temperature. It was very strong, however, with a high alcohol content. Nonetheless there was little public drunkenness. Intoxication was not deemed a sin, but a divinely induced spiritual state. As such it was a religious experience, and was not entered into lightly, but only under serious and controlled circumstances.

The chief brew-master in any city or in the royal household was a man of great power, wealth and influence. Ancient taverns were social centers much as British pubs are today, and the taverner was a respected member of the community.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Malting is the process of germinating the grain, then drying and lightly roasting it as soon as the first sprout appears. This was then mixed with flavoring (hops in modern times, often sweeteners or no flavoring in ancient times). It was boiled to produce what is called a wort, then then cooled and fermented for 3-5 days, filtered, and stored for consumption.

One God

One of the most basic and important prayers in Judaism is the *She-ma*. It is from Deut. 6:4, and is incorporated at least once into every prayer service. Observant Jews are taught to say it at least twice every day. It is considered a *mitzvah* (blessing) if it is the last words said before going to sleep, and the last words said before death. The prayer is usually translated, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One."¹ The last word of it in Hebrew, *echad*, is usually translated either "one" or "alone," but there is actually no English word that accurately conveys the full meaning of the Hebrew word. Perhaps the best translation would be "Unity," but without explanation this could be confusing.

Echad refers to a composite unity. It is used to indicate the unity of a bunch of grapes, for example, and is also used to denote the unity of the feminine and masculine that occurs in marriage—Gen. 2:24 says, "...and they become one (*echad*) flesh." In the story of the Tower of Babel, it says that "the whole world had one (*echad*) language" (Gen. 11:1), implying that all mankind was unified with a common tongue.

The statement that God is One (*echad*), therefore, is far more than a simple declaration that there is only one God instead of many. It is a clear affirmation of his unity with all his creation in spite of the corruption that sin has brought into that creation to break it. Because of that unity forgiveness and redemption are possible, and ultimately that broken creation will be purified and made perfect.

Christian theologians have considered another aspect of this concept of divine unity. That is the unity of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in the one (*echad*) Divine Nature of God. It is interesting that the ancient Jewish symbol for God was a triangle, denoting God's blessings flowing down to earth. This is the basis of the so-called "Star of David" or "Solomon's Seal" which is an ancient Jewish symbol and is the official symbol of Israel today. Christian scholars argue that the ancient Jews unconsciously perceived the tri-unity of God long before the Doctrine of the Trinity was revealed to the Church.

Richard R. Losch+

Altar Flowers

We need volunteers for altar flowers through March 2. There will be no flowers on the altar during Lent, but we will need volunteers again after Easter (the Altar Guild provides the Easter flowers). You can provide your own, or arrange with our florist to provide them. If you are willing to help, please contact Carolyn Patrenos.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ שמע ישראל יהוה אלהינו יהוה אחד: *Shema Yisrael, Adonai (Yahweh) elohenu, Adonai (Yahweh) echad*. It is customary to use *Adonai* ("Lord") wherever the sacred Name of God (יהוה, *Yahweh*) appears in the Hebrew Scriptures. In English translations this is often indicated by using LORD or GOD in smallcaps. A Mediaeval error in translation is the name *Jehovah*, which is not a Hebrew name of God, but a mixture of the consonants of *Yahweh* (the Name of God) and the vowels of *Adonai* ("Lord").

The Sign of the Cross

One of the most ancient of Christian gestures is the sign of the cross, sometimes called “crossing oneself” or “blessing oneself.” Today it is used in the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and many Lutheran Churches, and to some extent in the Methodist Church. Most Protestant groups reject the practice, although it is beginning to reappear in some of them.

The sign is made in three forms: by an individual tracing the cross from forehead to breast, and shoulder to shoulder; by a priest or bishop tracing it in the air as a sign of blessing or absolution of the people; and by a priest when he traces it with his thumb at baptism on the forehead of the candidate, and at anointing the forehead and other body parts.

The first references to making the sign of the cross are in the writings of the early Church fathers, where there are descriptions of priests making the sign in blessings. It is not clear when the practice of individuals making the sign upon themselves began, although there is no question that it was very early. It probably began as a sign by which Christians recognized one another, and early literature indicates that there was a great variety in ways to do it. The one thing that was uniform, however, is that it was always done with the right hand, and the cross was traced from forehead to breast, and then from shoulder to shoulder. The symbolism is basic—it simply denotes placing the cross upon oneself in response to Christ’s command, “Take up the cross and follow

me” (Mark 10:21). Some interpret it as dedicating the mind, body, heart and soul to Christ.

In ancient times there were several descriptions of how to hold the hand, but today there are generally only two, one practiced in the West and one in the East. In the West, the cross is usually traced with the whole open hand, and moves from the left shoulder to the right. In the East, the thumb and first two fingers are together to represent the three Persons of the Holy Trinity, and the last two fingers are folded down to represent the Divine and Human Natures of Christ; the cross is traced from the right shoulder to the left. While the West remains firmly “left-to-right,” the Eastern formation of the hand is becoming increasingly common in the West. It is not clear why there is a difference in which shoulder is touched first, but the most commonly accepted theory is that the practice originated in the East, and was later copied in the West. When the Western Christians saw it they imitated it, but since they were facing those who did it, they copied it in a mirror image.



Throughout most of the history of the Church the sign of the cross was used in all liturgical ceremonies, as well as in private prayer. It was not associated with the so-called “popish” customs that the Reformation was so anxious to discard. In fact, Martin Luther spoke strongly in favor of its use, although his successors soon abandoned it. It was an integral part of

Anglican worship until the 17th century. As the Protestant influence in Anglicanism grew, liturgical expression came to be more and more simple. The Baptists, Puritans and Reformed movements, on the other hand, rejected all aspects of traditional liturgical expression, including candles, statuary, vestments, kneeling, and making the sign of the Cross.

There are strong traditional conventions guiding the use of the sign of the cross by a priest in various liturgical situations, although there is no set rule as to when an individual uses it. There are several places in the liturgy where it is common, however, and it is a worthy spiritual practice. It is easy even for the most devout for the mind to wander, and physical acts such as standing, kneeling and making the sign of the cross tend to cause us to re-focus on what we are doing and get us back "on track." This is as true for the priest at the altar as it is for the worshipers in the pews. There are a few general guidelines as to when to make the sign of the cross:

- At the beginning and ending of prayer.
- Whenever a blessing or absolution is pronounced.
- At any prayer for the dead.
- Before and after receiving the Blessed Sacrament.
- In any prayer when the receiving of God's blessing is mentioned (such as in the Prayer of Consecration, at "be filled with thy grace and heavenly benediction").
- At the close of the *Gloria* and the Creed, at the beginning of the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis*, and

when the phrase "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" is used.

- In general, it is appropriate to do it any time you feel so moved.

Many people, after touching the shoulders, either kiss their hand or move to the center and touch their breast. These are relatively recent additions, and are not traditional. It is not necessary or even correct to "go back to the middle" when making the sign of the cross, either when doing it on oneself or when tracing it in the air as a blessing. Kissing the hand afterward is a carry-over from the Rosary, in which one traces the sign of the cross on oneself with the Rosary's crucifix, and then kisses it.

Richard R. Losch+

Saint Valentine's Day

Although February 14 is still often called "Saint Valentine's Day,"¹ it has not been observed by the Church as a holy day for many decades. Saint Valentinus died as a martyr on the Via Flaminus, north of Rome, sometime around a.D. 270. He did not become recognized as the patron saint of courtly love until the Middle Ages, by which time a huge number of often very imaginative hagiographies (biographies of saints) had been published. Almost nothing is known of him. He was declared a saint in 496 by Pope Gelasius I, who included him among those "whose names are justly revered among men, but whose acts are known only

¹ It is Valen-*tine*, not Valen-*time*, as many uninformed people pronounce it.

to God.” Gelasius set his day as February 14.

There are actually three Saints Valentine, all of whom were martyrs. Two are buried along the Via Flaminia, one being a priest and the other the Bishop of Interamna (modern Terni). The third died with a number of companions in the Roman province of Africa. Nothing more is known of any of them, although a large collection of legends about them has appeared over the centuries. Most of them are pure fiction.

Legend has it that the priest from Rome was condemned to death for defying the emperor. Supposedly Claudius II decreed that only unmarried men could serve in the army, and thus banned the marriage of any able-bodied Roman (there is no historical record of this decree). The priest Valentinus secretly married couples, and was thus sentenced to death. Another legend says that the bishop Valentinus refused to sacrifice to the pagan Roman gods, and was condemned to death. In prison he miraculously healed the judge’s daughter of blindness, thus enabling her to marry. The judge brought him to Claudius II, who befriended him. When Valentinus tried to convert Claudius to Christianity, however, he was condemned to death. On the day of his execution he left the judge’s daughter a note signed “Your Valentine.” These and other legends about Saint Valentine were compiled centuries after his (their) death, and have no reliable historic or even early legendary source. Most of the legends

about Valentine originated in the 14th century with the publication of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Parliament of Foules*. It was at this time that St. Valentine’s name came to be associated with romantic love.

The 18th century priest and hagiographer Alban Butler (author of *Butler’s Lives of the Saints*) argued that Gelasius’ selection of February 14 was to counter the pagan Roman festival of Lupercalia, which by the 5th century had degenerated into a tawdry sexual orgy. Modern scholars generally contest this idea.

Because there is no doubt that at least one Valentinus was martyred in the age of persecution, Saint Valentine remains in the Roman Catholic list of saints (the “Roman Martyrology”). His feast was removed from the Roman Calendar in 1969, however, because so little is known about him. February 14 nonetheless remains a popular day of celebration in the secular calendar. Today the epithet “Saint” is generally dropped, and it is simply known as Valentine’s Day.

Richard R. Losch+

Candlemas

In the Christian calendar, February 2 is the Feast of the Purification. In the Middle Ages it became customary to bless all the candles for the coming year on that day, thus it is also called Candlemas. It did not come to be associated with weather until the late Middle Ages, and its association with the groundhog is a modern American tradition. The ancient Romans celebrated the feast of Luperca-

lia in mid-February, although by Imperial times it had moved to the beginning of the month. The festival was also known as the Festival of Purification or *Februa*, from which the name of the month is derived. It is believed to have originated as a sacrifice to keep away wolves (*lupus* is Latin for “wolf”), and it involved the sacrifice of goats to the god Lupercus, the god both of flocks and of wolves. In later years it was associated with the two lewd gods Amor (Cupid), the lascivious god of sexual encounters, and Faunus, who was half human and half goat (the Roman equivalent of the Greek god Pan or Satyr). Priests called Lupercani would sacrifice two goats, douse themselves with the blood and make thongs of the skin, then run through the streets of Rome laughing and symbolically flailing people with the thongs to purify them of their offenses to the gods. The Roman gods were not offended by promiscuity, and by Christian times the festival had become an unrestrained orgy.

According to ancient Jewish law, a woman was ritually unclean for forty days after giving birth. This meant that her social contacts were severely restricted, and she was not allowed to enter the Temple or any holy place. At the end of the forty days she would undergo a ceremonial purification. It was also customary at that time to offer the first-born son to the Temple, to be raised by the priests as a servant of God. By Jesus' time this offering was purely ceremonial and was never actually accepted. Since

St. Luke records Mary's purification and presentation in association with his account of the birth of Christ, it was appropriate to celebrate the Purification forty days after they celebrated Christmas. When the Christmas celebration came to be fixed at December 25, then the Purification would fall on February 2, right at the time of Lupercalia. It was singularly appropriate that the Roman feast of “purification” should be replaced by that of Christianity. Just as Christmas slowly drowned out the December orgy of Saturnalia, so did the Purification eventually drown out Lupercalia. The Feast of the Purification is considered the official end of the Christmas season.

There is a mediaeval tradition, first traced to Scotland, that if it rained on that day there would be an early spring. This eventually grew into the superstition that if the groundhog sees his shadow on that day there would be six more weeks of winter.

In the Middle Ages it became customary on this feast to bless all the candles that would be used in the church for the coming year. Because of this the Feast of the Purification came to be known as Candlemas, a name by which it is still known.

—Richard R. Losch+

Hmmm. . .

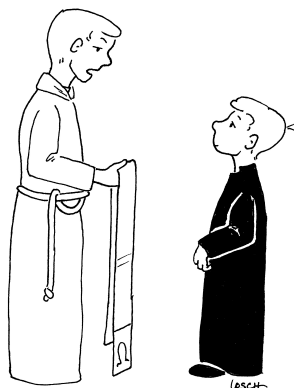
A restaurant in Winchester, England has a sign offering “Kebabs, Burgers, Vegetarians, Barbeque.” It is comforting to know that vegetarians are back in the food chain.

Don't Forget
+ INTERFAITH +
MEN'S
BREAKFAST
FEBRUARY 2
7:45 A.M.
Mark your Calendar

LIVINGSTON FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



*"Jamie, I wish you would not refer to
the Ten Commandments as 'Morals
for Dummies.'"*



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