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The Spirit of Christmas

BY REV. DANIEL C. GREEN

IT IS COMMON AT THIS TIME OF YEAR to hear the term “the Christmas spirit,” and while no one takes the trouble to define it exactly, no doubt all of us could come up with some words to describe it as it is popularly known: generosity, warmth, and kindness, cherishing tradition, giving good cheer. We certainly hope that this Christmas brings at least some of these lovely qualities to you and your home. But it does seem necessary to point out that they could just as easily apply to a pagan celebration of the winter solstice. So what is it about the spirit of this holiday that makes it characteristic of Christmas?

The obvious answer to that question is Christ, and everybody knows this, whether or not they have any faith in Jesus. So every year we hear the exhortations to “put the Christ back in Christmas” and so on, which are probably just annoying to the people who prefer their Christmas without any. But even for those of us for whom the Nativity is more than a quaint old legend, or a set of figurines, but is the heart of the matter, lingering questions remain: is all this simply the celebration of Jesus’ birthday? Or is there something more to it than that? And what, if anything, does this “something more” have to do with the “spirit of Christmas”?

To answer these questions, we have to stop thinking about Christmas as an isolated date on the calendar, or even a season of twelve days, of which December 25 is just the first. We have to see that Christmas only makes sense in light of the season of Advent which precedes it. Advent means “coming”, or “arrival,” and it begins the Christian year by reminding us of what was at stake in the coming of Jesus: why it was necessary in the first place, and what was involved in getting ready for it to happen. For many of us the month leading up to Christmas is pressure-packed with festivities and preparations for the big holiday, and Advent has that quality also, in the sense that it is pressure-packed with meaning.

But without going into all of Advent’s symbolic richness, we can say that two figures stand above all others as those who prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. They are John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary. And while it is not easy to see what the wild prophet of the Jordan and the maiden of Nazareth have in common, there is something. Both of them, in different ways, reveal that what is coming with Jesus is the Holy Spirit. “I baptize you with water,” says John to the crowd, “but one is coming after me who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” When Mary asks the angel Gabriel

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Christmas at St. John’s

*Almighty God, you have poured upon us
the new light of your incarnate Word:*

*Grant that this light, enkindled in our
hearts, may shine forth in our lives...*

— *Book of Common Prayer*

Sunday, December 23

- 11:30 am – Decorating the Church

Monday, December 24

- 5:00 pm – Family Christmas
Celebration with Holy Communion
- 10:00 pm – Festal Christmas Eucharist

Tuesday, December 25

- 10:00 am – Christmas Lessons and
Carols at Elim Lutheran Church,
504 Baker St.

The 5:00 pm **Centering Prayer** services on Tuesday, December 25 and Tuesday, January 1, and the 9:30 am **Centering Prayer** and 12:15 pm **Holy Eucharist with Healing Prayer** services on Wednesday, December 26 & Wednesday, January 2 **will not take place.**



Please see page 6 for additional
December Events

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how it can be that she will conceive a son, he answers "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." "Now, wait a minute," you may be saying, "Pentecost, not Christmas, is the day when we celebrate the Holy Spirit," and you wouldn't be wrong. But while it does make points of emphasis here and there, God's story is never compartmentalized. The fullness of the Holy Trinity is present and active in everything that happens. So this Christmas, if you want, you can try making a place in your heart for the Holy Spirit, the Spirit that proceeds from God on high and came to be present and active for us on earth in the person of Jesus. Let it be born anew in you, and awaken in response to the Spirit in others, whether they identify as Christian or not. Let it light a fire in your heart and your imagination, to enter a new year with the resolve to live in its beauty and power. Because Christian or not, the people of the world are in deep need of the spirit of courageous truth and committed love, of soul-healing and unity-in-difference, of comfort, compassion and peace—the Spirit of Christmas.

Decorating for Christmas

JOIN IN decorating the church and parish hall for Christmas on Sunday, December 23rd at 11:30 am. This is a rewarding community activity for people and families of all ages. For more information, contact Heather Oehm at heather@oehm.com or 707-280-4333.



You may also help purchase poinsettias, evergreens, and other materials to decorate the church and Parish Hall for the Christmas season. Donations of any amount are welcome, and may be accompanied by a dedication in memory of a departed loved one or in celebration of a blessing. Clip out the donation form below, or find one at the back of the church or on the information tables outside the library and in Cram Hall. Please write legibly, especially when spelling personal names. The forms can be returned in the offering plate, along with payment to St. John's marked "Christmas flowers," or delivered to the office. In order to be included in the Christmas service bulletins, the dedications must be received by 2 p.m. on Wednesday, December 19th.

Christmas Flowers 2018

HELP PURCHASE poinsettias, evergreens, and other materials to decorate the church and Parish Hall for the Christmas season. Donations of any amount are welcome, and may be accompanied by a dedication in memory of a departed loved one or in celebration of a blessing.

You may clip out the donation form below, or find one at the back of the church or on the information tables outside the library and in Cram Hall. Please write legibly, especially when spelling personal names. The forms can be returned in the offering plate, along with payment to St. John's marked "Christmas flowers," or delivered to the office. **In order to be included in the Christmas service bulletins, the dedications must be received by 2:00 pm on Wednesday, December 19th.**



ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, PETALULMA, CA

Christmas Flower Donation

Name _____ Amount _____

Dedication (please print legibly) _____

Please place completed form in the offering plate on Sunday along with your payment. Write "**Christmas Flowers**" in the memo line. You may also deliver the form and payment to the Parish Office. Deadline for dedications to be included in the Christmas service bulletins is **December 20**.



WISDOM of the Ancients

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From the December, 1905 edition of *The Instructor*, the monthly newsletter of St. John's, Petaluma, along with an advertisement for Hale's Good Goods: "We have a complete line of Pretty and Useful Presents."

In the midst of the planning and buying, the search for gifts and the joy of making others happy, the excitement and bustle everywhere which year after year grows more marked at the approach of Christmas, we are prone to forget the real, the abiding reason for our joy. The material side of life, with the spirit of commerce, and the demand upon our energies for effort, obscure from us what we so much need to see—the spiritual meaning of our existence. Why, then, is Christmas the day of good cheer, good tidings, and abounding love? Why do we look forward to it with hopeful hearts and happy minds?

Because to us a son is born, unto us a child is given, and His name is Jesus Christ. He shall save us from our sins and redeem us from the power of death. Year after year this wonderful truth is brought home to us in the feast of Christmas Day, the birthday of the Redeemer. How does it affect us and with what feelings do we render thanks to God? Are we found in His temple joining in the hymns of praise, giving of our blessings the share which belongs to Him, and thanking the Father for His love so great, so wide, so free?



ST. JOHN'S ENCOURAGES your acts of generosity toward any worthy causes that you support. And we don't want to add to the number of solicitations you are receiving via the post or your email for tax-deductible contributions before the end of the year. Nevertheless, we would like to use this space in the parish newsletter to remind you of several opportunities to support of the mission of Christ here in Petaluma and around the world.

St. John's Annual Fund is the financial life-blood of our mission, enabling us to have full-time clergy leadership, Sunday service musicians, and other staff, and to keep our buildings open and our office running. Contributions from our members and friends are what enables our continued active presence in downtown Petaluma.

St. John's Building Fund addresses the capital needs of the parish property.

The Rector's Discretionary Fund enables the Rector to assist individuals in need in our community, and meet ministry expenses not otherwise provided for in the budget.

Episcopal Relief and Development works with church partners across the USA and around the globe to provide disaster relief and ongoing development assistance for the world's poor (www.episcopalrelief.org). During December your donations are matched dollar-for-dollar by lead benefactors. ERD also has a Gifts for Life program that enables you to make life-changing gifts in the honor of a loved one to communities in need.

The American Friends of the Diocese of Jerusalem provides support for the schools, hospitals, centers for disabled children, and other programs of the Episcopal Church in the Holy Land (afedj.org)

Invitation to Lead & Serve

AS WE BEGIN a new church year, some members of the vestry of St. John's are complete their final months of service. **Geri Olson** and **Jerry Taylor** were elected to three-year terms at the annual parish meeting in early 2016, and Emily Betts was elected in 2018 to fill out the remaining year of an unexpired term. During their time on vestry they deepened their practice of spiritual leadership in the church while helping to oversee the physical and financial assets of the parish corporation, and to guide and support the programs and mission of St. John's. If you have not served on the vestry, or have not done so in a while, the rector

and vestry members invite you to consider prayerfully whether you may now be called to this vitally-important work. The next three years will be an important time for St. John's, as we invite, welcome, and incorporate new members, strengthen our capacity for mission, and form new partnerships in the broader community. For more information, speak to the rector or any current member, all of whom would be delighted to share their perspectives and answer your questions about this rewarding ministry. ■



EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Pathways Pilgramige

NOW GOING ON its fourth year, the **Pathways Youth Pilgrimage of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California** will be based this summer in Humboldt County and will explore matters of social and eco justice as we journey to the Redwood Coast, visit historical indigenous sites, local churches, and meet with people in these communities who are engaging in the work of reconciling us and creation to God

Pathways 2019 is an event open to all youth finishing grades 7-12. Belonging to the Episcopal Church is not a requirement.

Much more information is available at <http://www.norcal-episcopal.org/pathwaysyouthpilgrimage>

Scholarships are available to ensure access to this experience for all interested youth.

Please be in touch with the Rev. Sarah Quinney (Sarah@norcalepiscopal.org) if the cost is a barrier.

Dates: June 16-21, 2019

Location: Humboldt State University

Participants: Those finishing grades 7-12

Cost: \$600 per participant (this includes charter bus transportation to and from Humboldt State University, all transportation to and from pilgrimage sites during the week, all entry fees to parks and sites, and all meals and lodging at Humboldt State University). A **deposit** of \$75 per participant is due with application.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 26

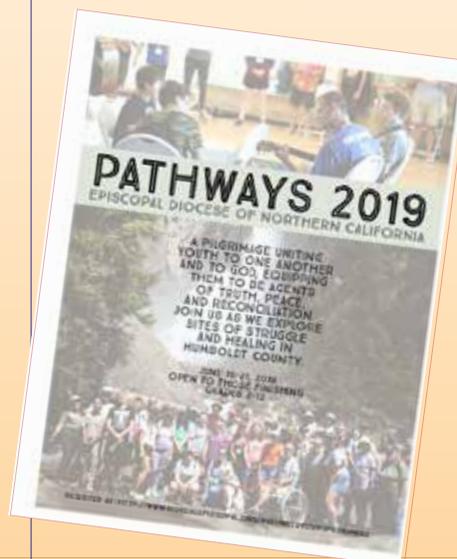
Habitat for Humanity

THE SECOND Petaluma Ecumenical Habitat for Humanity build day planned for December 1 has been re-scheduled to Saturday, January 26, we will be joining with members of Elim Lutheran and First Presbyterian churches of Petaluma



to continue finish work on the interiors of the homes we worked on in September at the Harris Village Project at 2863 West Steele Lane in Santa Rosa. If you would like to participate and have not already done so, you first need to register as a volunteer at <https://www.habitatsoco.org/get-involved/volunteer/>

For more information, contact **David Irvine** at d.irvine@habitatsoco.org



NOVEMBER 9 & 10, 2018

Diocesan Convention News

On November 9-10, our clergy and lay delegates attended the 2018 Convention of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California in Redding. Getting there involved driving through the huge plume of smoke pouring downwind from the Camp Fire in Butte County, which had begun the morning before. It just so happened that the convention included an in-depth presentation on disaster response from the US program officer of Episcopal Relief and Development, which had been planned for months as a follow-up to the other recent disasters that had already earned us the designation of a "high-hazard diocese."



All of us who were present wished the rest of you could have been there to witness the vitality, unity, and sense of purpose that our diocese manifested in its convention. The presence of young people was particularly inspiring, representing a variety of new and emerging ministries by and for youth and young adults, including members of the Lutheran-Episcopal Volunteer Network based at the Belfry campus ministry at UC Davis, and participants in last summer's Pathways Youth Pilgrimage. These and other projected activities, including two service trips to Honduras in summer 2019, are developing leadership gifts in the up-and-coming-generation that are re-shaping our church's sense of who we are and what is possible.

This is also reflected in the new generation of clergy in the diocese, several of whom were elected to governance positions on the Board of Trustees and Standing Committee. These and other, more established lay and clergy leaders will have their hands full as we make the transition from Bishop Barry Beisner, who gave the final address of his episcopacy on Friday evening, to the election of a new bishop in February. This was understandably the topic of much discussion at convention. There was no more than the expected amount of anxiety about the transition, however, and many shared the hope that this will be a deeply-reflective process of discerning God's will for the ministry of the entire diocese, rather than a partisan struggle to advance particular opinions or preferences.

Other highlights included a presentation on the transformation of St. Matthew's church in Sacramento. Once the largest congregation in the diocese but now, having seen their membership shrivel as the area around them changed radically to become one of the poorest and most ethnically diverse in California, they have taken the leap of repurposing their premises to become a food bank and social service and outreach center for the entire community. We also heard a report from Canon Andrea McMillin about actions of this past summer's General Convention. Reminding us that a lack of response to inhumanity and injustice in our world implies acceptance and agreement, she reported on resolutions that passed regarding human rights in general, and more specifically systemic problems within and outside the church of racism, transphobia, gender bias, and exclusion of people with disabilities, as well as issues of immigration, refugees, and asylum and ecological justice. ■

THE BELOVED DISCIPLE

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The digital version is at
www.saintjohnsepiscopalpetaluma.org/page/newsletter

Comments & requests for an email subscription may be made to
saintjohns.episcopalchurch@gmail.com

Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Northern California,
 The Rt. Rev. Barry L. Beisner

Rector, The Very Rev. Daniel C. Green

Senior Warden, **Jerry Taylor**

Junior Warden, **Walter Lederhaus**

Clerk, **Linda Lee Boyd**

Vestry Members: Emily Betts, Adam Klein, Ellen Monck,
 Geri Olson, Rebecca Smith and Jacqueline C. Woytych

Newsletter Production Editor, Victoria Temple

The **Mission** of St. John's Episcopal Church is to
 Bring Christ to Life:

Celebrating the mysteries;

Honoring the beauty and wisdom of every person;

Healing the soul;

Serving the peace and renewal of the Earth.

St. John's Episcopal Church
 40 5th Street, Petaluma, CA 94952 707-762-8872

Peace & Justice Committee News

Dear Friends: Tonight the City Council unanimously voted to require an EIR from Safeway on their gas station project. This is very good news; the council listened well to the people who spoke up and were present, 90% of whom were in opposition to the station. There was a clear sense of moral courage and clarity in the room about doing the right thing which is not always the most convenient thing or the money maker. It was an unusually fine example of the democratic process working for the people.



Generally an EIR takes from 12 to 18 months to complete. Safeway pays for it, but they cannot choose the agency which completes the report; it's up to the City Council. That choice, of course, will be an important one - to choose an unbiased agency with integrity - Just wanted you all to know about this hopeful turn of events. Thanks to John, Sue, Joanne and Larry for being there tonight. In Christ's Peace, **Frances Frazier**



ALSO IN DECEMBER

■ **Celtic Evensong**, "Advent and Saying Yes to Life" Sunday, December 9, 5:00 pm In the Sanctuary

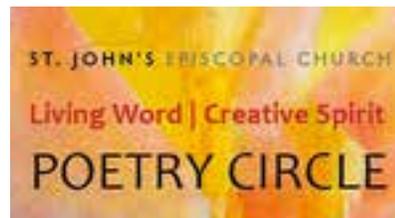
■ **Monthly Labyrinth Walks**

"Release and Renew"
Sunday, December 30, 5:00 pm In Norm Cram Hall
Please register through the Veriditas website by clicking [here](#).

Ancient Times

Despite words like modernism, post-modernism and the like
We live in ancient times
Milky Way, Andromeda hurtle towards one another
On a trajectory of collision and super-heated exchange
We live in ancient times
After billions of years of cooling
Birth on a truly cosmic scale
A new massive galaxy will emerge
We live in ancient times
After 13 billion more years, the new galaxy will be formed
What does then have to do with now?
A fair question it seems for someone who lives
In ancient times

bt **Jonathan Hiller**, 11/18



■ The **Living Word-Creative Spirit Poetry Circle's** next meeting is **December 21** as the Winter Solstice begins and the Sun pauses before starting to increase the light of day again at Christmas. We welcome

new members to come share their own or their favorite poems, as we celebrate the birth of the inner light that can overcome all darkness, here in this darkest time of the year. 7:00 pm in the chapel.

■ The **Riddles of Our Humanity Study Circle** will discuss "The Trinity, a Doctrine of Experience" on Sunday, December 23 after the 10:00 am Eucharist in the Library. All are welcome to join in. Contact **Larry Temple** if you would like to read the chapter from "Free From Dogma" before hand; but since it is "born from (our) experience" not necessary in order to join in.

ANNUAL Advent Wreath Making AT ST JOHN'S FOR 2018



Following a soup supper, young and old gathered in the Parish Hall on the last Sunday in November to continue the St. John's tradition of making Advent Wreaths together for the Advent season, followed by a surprise visit by St. Nicholas! A bit thank you to Sunday School teacher **Allison Adams**, who coordinates this special event. Thanks to Juli Lederhaus for the photos!