

THE RECTOR'S CHRONICLE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL

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Dear Parishioners and Friends,

“Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” Herod, who thinks that *he* is king of the Jews, is understandably provoked by the question when the Magi put it to him, since he has no new-born son. The Magi, on the other hand, assume that since Herod is the current king, he will know about the new-born, future king. That much seems obvious.

There is also, however, a small but significant detail here: the title used by the Magi, “King of the Jews.” Herod understands this to refer to the Messiah, and calls the experts in the Law and the Prophets to answer the question of where *Christ* should be born. He does not ask them about the King of the Jews, but about Christ. The Magi come seeking the King of the Jews, not knowing that they are really seeking the Messiah, the King of Israel. Their natural knowledge of the King from the star needs the additional, revealed knowledge of Scripture to reach a full understanding of the Child's identity. They learn at least some of this from the chief priests and scribes whom Herod summons. From the prophet, they are directed to Bethlehem, which is confirmed by the reappearance of the star. They find the Child, worship, offer their gifts of mystic meaning, and return home another way, changed by their worship of the King.

Later, another Roman ruler in Jerusalem writes a title and nails it to a cross over Jesus' head: *This is the King of the Jews*. Jesus is executed for being the King of the Jews. The chief priests had accused Him of this crime to Pilate. They had themselves found Him guilty of the blasphemy of claiming to be the Messiah even though He had no army or power, and no prospect of driving out the Romans and establishing Himself over the kingdom of Israel. He was obviously no King, no Messiah. To suggest otherwise was blasphemous. They complained to Pilate about the title: they wished to execute a pretender, not a real king. Pilate's response: “What I have written, I have written.”

At the beginning of His life, the Magi come seeking the King of the Jews. At the end of His life on earth, Jesus is put to death as the King of the Jews. In both cases, the narratives make clear that Christ (Messiah) is implicit in the title, King of the Jews. He is sought in the first instance, and killed in the second, for being Christ. And while the Magi seek this King to worship and offer gifts, they (inadvertently) bring death in their wake. Herod, not less than Pilate and the later chief priests, does not want the King of the Jews, the Christ, to remain alive. We see that to be Christ the King is to have enemies. And His enemies end up being homicidal – whether Herod killing babies, or Pilate giving in to political expediency, or the chief priests condemning the Savior their God has sent to them.

It remains for us to be sure we are *not* Christ's enemies – which means being His subjects (the only alternative; there is no middle ground). He must be our King, for if we refuse Him for our King, we make ourselves His enemies. Fortunately, He is a kind and loving King, always more concerned for our good than for His own majesty (He did die for us, after all). He will forgive us our many failures as His faithful subjects. His service is perfect freedom.

Quiet Day

There will be an Epiphany Quiet Day on Saturday, January 9th, 9:30-2 at All Saints' in Wynnewood. While this serves as a substitute for the Advent Quiet Day which we were unable to schedule, it is also an opportunity for a Quiet Day in a season when we do not usually have one. This gives us a chance to reflect on the themes of Christmas and Epiphany in the context of the quiet which allows us to be drawn closer to our beloved Lord. The Quiet Day follows the usual format: Mass at 9:30 with a light breakfast (and talking) following. Silence begins with the first address, and continues until we conclude at 2. Please bring lunch. If you need directions or details, please ask.

Also coming up is the annual Christmas Party. Since a number of people go away for Christmas, we wait a bit to have the parish party. It is the Sunday in the Octave of Epiphany, January 10th, and follows the ten o'clock Mass. Come join us! (The Christmas Pageant has been postponed a year – the weather got in the way of necessary rehearsal time.)

Coming Events

On the Third Sunday after the Epiphany, January 17th, Bishop Campese will be with us for an Episcopal Visitation and *Confirmation*. We have four young people ready and desirous of being confirmed, which, God

willing, will occur at the ten o'clock Mass. In addition, I expect that Bishop Campese will preach at ten o'clock, and be present with us at eight. He'll no doubt celebrate one or both Masses as well, though I have not gotten all the details arranged yet. I trust you will all be here to welcome him, and to celebrate with the confirmands, who have been working hard to prepare for the event. Thanks also goes to Martha Eischen for teaching their class. Also of course, to Bishop Campese for making the trek up here in the bleak mid-winter from sunny (it's always sunny at Disney World) Orlando.

On Septuagesima, the last Sunday in January, we'll have another Sunday *adult forum* during the coffee hour after the ten o'clock Mass. Christmas turns our attention to the Incarnation, so this will be a good time to spend a half-hour with the early Christological heresies. Christology helps us face the question of how Jesus can be both God and man. This is a hard question, since in our experience, God and man are mutually exclusive categories. While the early Christians were quite clear about Christ being divine and human, there were some misguided attempts to explain how it should be understood. These helped the Church to define the true conception of Christ's nature and person. I hope that our taking a brief look at some of the misguided conceptions will help keep our thinking within the boundaries of truth. The Incarnation is something we can and should understand, but not entirely comprehend.

Also coming up is a *youth night* at the rectory, scheduled for January 23rd. We begin with supper at 6, followed by a program of great interest and excitement. The topic is so exciting that I dare not reveal it here. We'll conclude (with prayer) by 8:30, so everyone can get home in good time for a good night's sleep before Sunday. We hope all the parish youth will attend.

Annual Meeting

For those of you who are members of the parish: this is your notice of the Annual Meeting of the congregation and vestry election. (Friends of the parish are most welcome, but do not get the legal notice.) It will be held on Sexagesima, February 7th, at 11:30 at the Chapel of Peace at West Laurel Hill Cemetery, as our By-Laws appoint.

There are three seats open on the vestry, for three year terms. Two of the incumbents, James Altena and John McCann, are ineligible for re-election, since they are completing their second terms. As you may recall, when we set up the By-Laws for St Michael's in 2006, we felt that it would be good to have vestry term limits, so no one can serve more than two terms consecutively. When we first elected a vestry for St Michael's in 2006, we began staggered terms. Thus the first vestrymen then drew straws so that three served a one-year term, three a two-year, and three a full three-year term. James and John served shortened first terms, and so now conclude their second. I am grateful to them for their faithful service on the vestry of St Michael's since its inception (and on that of St James the Less before that). James has also been serving as Clerk of the vestry. We will miss them both – on the vestry, though not in the parish!

The third incumbent, Mark Johnson, is completing his first term, and has been nominated for re-election. In addition, the vestry has nominated Pat Lincoln and Chris Jordan for the other vacancies. Other nominations are welcome. Nominations should bear the signatures of five voting members of the congregation, and be given to James Altena (as Clerk of the vestry) or to me, no later than January 24th, which will allow time for the names to be circulated before the meeting. The election is by ballot, and nominations from the floor and write-ins are not permitted by our By-Laws. Nor is there provision for absentee ballots.

I am grateful to Mark, Pat and Chris for their willingness to serve. Being on the vestry is not a reward for faithful service to the parish, nor a chance to enter into the circles of power. It is rather a matter of service, and sometimes a demanding one. This is especially true at this stage in our common life, when we are facing significant decisions about our future.

I trust that all pledge cards have been returned. If not, please do so as soon as possible. The 2010 budget will be finalized at the January vestry meeting on the basis of what we have in hand.

Kudos

Thanks goes this month to:

- Barbara Freeman, Millie Berghaus, Pat Lincoln, Beth and my mother for doing the last *Chronicle* mailing.
- West Laurel Hill Cemetery for their continuing hospitality for Sunday services, as well as for Christmas Eve.
- Al Richardson, the weekday caretaker at the Chapel of Peace, for coming in Christmas Eve to open up for us. Al retired the end of December: we wish him all the best.
- Mr Bell, the Sunday caretaker at the Chapel of Peace, who shows up bright and early every Sunday to let us in.
- Janis Wilson, for helping to drive Homework Club kids to church on Sunday.
- Steve and Nanciann Woodward, for a grant to support Homework Club after the expiration of our Heuer Foundation grant.

Faithfully,

