

# *The Messenger*

A newsletter of

## **St. John's Episcopal Church**

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**Mark Preece, Interim Rector**

**December 2011**

*Building for the future with thanksgiving and praise*

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### *Message from our Interim Rector*

Dear Friends—

Every Christmas Eve we come in from the darkness and cold to listen once again to the accounts in the Gospel of Luke about the Holy Family's trip to Bethlehem, the search for a room, the shepherds in the fields, the angels, and the birth of the child in a manger. But there are two miraculous births at the beginning of Luke's gospel. We almost never hear about the other one, the birth of John the Baptist. Our Sunday lectionary skips right over the account of how Zechariah, a priest in the Temple, and his wife Elizabeth learned they were going to become parents in their old age.

One morning Zechariah is at work, offering incense in the sanctuary, when an angel appears to him. "Do not be afraid, Zechariah," says the angel, "for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John."

Understandably enough, Zechariah reacts with disbelief. "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man and my wife is getting on in years." Surely you have the wrong Zechariah! You must be looking for someone else, someone younger.

But the angel insists he knows what he was doing. "I am Gabriel," he says, "I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until these things occur."

And speechless Zechariah remains, throughout the months of his wife's pregnancy.

(continued on Page 2)

(Interim rectors message, continued)

At last, the child is born. When the time comes to name him, the authorities start filling out the paperwork with the name everybody expects: Zechariah, after his father. But Elizabeth stops them. “No. He is to be called John.”

They check with Zechariah, who writes his own answer on a writing tablet: “His name is John.” And suddenly Zechariah’s mouth is opened and he sings out the joy that had been building up in him during all those months of silence, as he waited for the miracle of the birth of his child. “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has come to his people and set them free,” he begins.

When Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in the Temple, he was just trying to bring him some good news. But Zechariah couldn’t hear it, He had his own expectations of the way the world worked. He was caught up in his job. He had made peace with the disappointments of his life. Maybe he was afraid of getting his hopes up.

Years later, Jesus would spend his adult life trying to bring good news to people, too. But most of them just couldn’t take it in. They were realists; they thought they knew the way the world worked. They were preoccupied with their desire for wealth or status or security. They had made peace with their disappointments. Experiencing hope was just too great a risk to take. They were afraid.

I like to think that when the angel took away Zechariah’s power to speak he was not punishing him, but giving him a gift. He gave Zechariah some time to ponder God’s promise. Every time poor Zechariah tried to speak he must have been reminded of the angel’s words and wondered about the meaning of God’s activity in his life.

And by the end of the time the angel gave him, Zechariah had just about figured out what it was that God was offering. He said,

*“In the tender compassion of our God  
the dawn from on high shall break upon us  
to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death  
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

Unlike Zechariah, we have to make our own time to prepare ourselves to receive the gift God is holding out to us at Christmas. That’s what Advent is for. *Lord, help us to pay attention.*

More than at any other time of year, I find myself dragged to and fro by events in the run up to Christmas. Family events, church events, school events, Christmas things I’ve always meant to do but never gotten around to, shopping – there’s more than enough to keep me running to catch up. And so there is no time when it is more important to take some time to *reclaim myself*, to look within for signs of life. Maybe this is true for you, too.

During Advent, you will find a sheet titled “Praying with the Advent Scriptures” in each

(continued on Page 3)

(Interim rectors message, continued)

**Sunday's bulletin.** This sheet contains texts taken from all the Sunday Advent readings (years A, B, and C), arranged so that we read a sort of "mini-Advent" each week. There will also be a few thoughts on praying with scripture and the odd prayer.

The first week's readings are all from Isaiah, the prophet who more than any other gave voice to the timeless longing of a people for *shalom*. In the second week we'll look at the other Advent prophets. Weeks three and four will be from the New Testament.

Please don't think of this as an addition to your To Do list! I hope you'll find that spending some time with each day's appointed lesson helps you to take a break from the activities and expectations of "the Christmas season", and to incorporate a little more Advent into your daily life. And it will be good to think of the St. John's family as being "on the same page" throughout the season, with the same words of hope echoing in our minds and hearts.

The readings in "Praying with the Advent Scriptures" will also provide the basis for our discussion time after the Wednesday noon Eucharist.

Finally, if you're looking for daily devotions during Advent, you might also explore the always wonderful Sacred Space ([www.sacredspace.ie](http://www.sacredspace.ie)), an online prayer and contemplation site maintained by Jesuits in Ireland.

May our eyes be opened a little more this year to the good news God is always trying to get us to accept, to tender compassion of God streaming into our lives.

Peace,

Fr. Mark.

## 2012 Pledge Commitments and Gratitude

Sometimes it's difficult to remember just how blessed we really are. I, like everyone, certainly have days where it just doesn't appear like anything is going quite right—every direction we turn, there's some obstacle or difficulty in the way. During times like these, it's particularly difficult remembering that God is always providing us precisely what we need to be faithful, and that perhaps we need to struggle with that to find His blessing.

It's also certainly easy, or easier, to allow the negative aspects of our lives to dominate our thoughts, and a challenge to remember all that we have to be thankful for. It sometimes requires deliberate effort as related by author and journalist Todd Aaron Jensen in his book On Gratitude:

"You can count [what you don't have or what you've lost forever], and it's an easy thing to do, and if you're always only counting then you're always never at risk

(2012 Pledge Commitments and Gratitude continued on Page 4)

(2012 Pledge Commitments and Gratitude continued)

of losing anything ever again.

Except even when you think you've lost everything, you're never without. In fact, this is the perfect moment to allow gratitude to be your guru, to whisper with grace small words of thanks for everything—*anything*—in your life. Begin like this:

*I am alive.”*

Mr. Jensen found a way of maintaining the proper perspective:

“As a journalist, it is my job to listen...*Really* listen. What I found: Listening feels good. It feels great. I receive so much by simply being more present. This is an enormous gift I have been given. The more I listen to the gratitude of others, the more grateful I feel in my own life and the more compelled I feel to share with others that which has been given to me. You cannot listen to the gratitude of others without being reminded of the great gift that is your own life, without experiencing a profound ignition of your own passions and curiosities about the world in which we live, without discovering anew or for the first time high magic and low puns and great possibilities and unexpected delights that exist right here and now in this universe. *Your* universe.

To listen to and be moved by others' gratitude, then more importantly, to share in turn, might launch a revolution of sorts, a minor movement toward a higher consciousness that puts at a premium the simple act of counting our blessings and sharing them with others. How beautiful would this world be if we counted all that we have and not what we've lost or never had? Your gratitude means as much as anyone else's... The world is listening. Wherever you are, let it begin now, like this:

*I am grateful for...”*

During this Pledge Commitment season, we ask you to stop and consider what you're grateful for, and if you're willing, to jot down up to five things... five blessings you've received this past year for which you're thankful. We also ask, if you're willing, to share your blessings with your parish family by placing your anonymous list in the baskets located at the front or back entrance of the church—a public acknowledgement of some of the gifts you've received. And, if you're so moved, write a simple prayer for St. John's in the year ahead; a blessing you wish for your parish family—for those next to you in the pew, for those kneeling with you at the altar rail.

For it is in sharing and gratitude that St. John's will continue to be the thriving community it is, and in the sacrifice of our thanksgiving to God that we will continue toward the Kingdom.

With gladness and singleness of heart,

Steve

## *Altar Guild*

The Altar Guild requests caretakers for the month of December. You may sign up for the month of for a Sunday or two. The list is on the bulletin board in the downstairs hallway.

Also needed: folks to commit to Altar care for next year. You may leave a note in my mailbox or initial the list on the bulletin board.

Thank you,  
Anna Sease

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## *St. Margaret's Guild*

### *Christmas Bazaar*

Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 9am to 2 pm.

We need baked goods, trinkets and treasures, Penny Social items, crafts to sell.

Please come for soup, salad, pie luncheon 11:30 to 2:00

Ladies, please come and help! Even an hour, especially at lunch time, allows us a break to eat (and maybe scope out the competition!)

### *REECH donation*

Every year, the St. Margaret's Guild sends a donation to REECH, the Randolph Ecumenical Emergency Housing group. We started this several years ago in lieu of buying a swag for over the altar at Christmas.

This year, with the vestry's permission, we are challenging the congregation to match our \$100 donation. Pat Lawrence will collect donations throughout Advent, with the hope of sending \$200 (or more) to REECH. (Please make checks out to REECH) In this time when many are facing hardship from the economy and the after effects of Hurricane Irene, I think it will be appreciated!

Thanks for your help,  
Pat Lawrence

### *Food Shelf Sundays*

Please bring food donations the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday every month. The food shelf greatly appreciates our help! And our dollars buy even more food than what our donations cover because of the food shelf's buying power. 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday – Dec 18

**PLEASE NOTE – OUR HELP IS NEEDED MORE THAN EVER DUE TO THE DAMAGE CAUSED BY HURRICANE IRENE !! Thanks, Pat Lawrence**

## *Community Notes*

### *>Randolph Community Suppers<*

The Community Supper for November will be held on Tuesday, December 27th at Bethany UCC Church. This month will be a soup and garden salad meal  
Doors open at 5 pm

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### *Message from our choir director*

On Sunday, December 18<sup>th</sup>, the final Sunday in Advent, the choir will be singing two or three anthems throughout the service in joyful preparation for the celebration of Christmas.

One of the texts is an excerpt from the poem *Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day*, written by that most famous of people, anonymous. The first known publication of these words is 1833, but, based on the style of the words, speculation is that the text dates from the 16<sup>th</sup> century or earlier.

The poem is written in first person as Jesus tells the story of his life on earth and in heaven. Here is the first verse:

Tomorrow shall be my dancing day  
I would my true love did so chance  
To see the legend of my play  
To call my true love to my dance  
Sing oh my love, my love, my love  
This have I done for my true love.

This verse refers to the birth of Jesus and to his death. It also uses the imagery of Jesus as lover. His true love is the church, and the people who make up the church. The play is the cycle of the events in his life which we, the church, study and celebrate yearly. And the final phrase “This have I done for my true love” to the fact that Jesus died for our sins as the perfect act of love.

Peace

Jane

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### *Pastoral Care Committee*

The Pastoral Care Committee was postponed until November 30<sup>th</sup>. Report of that meeting and other issues will be reported in January. A service was conducted at the Joslyn House on November 28<sup>th</sup> with communion administered to 8 attendees.

Respectfully submitted – Mickie Richardson

## *Anniversaries - December 2011*

### **Birthdays:**

Dec 13	Betsy Arnold	Dec 18	Cecile Smith
Dec 15	Judy Gardner	Dec 26	David Gaston
		Dec 28	Marcia Stone

### **Wedding:**

Dec 2      **Linda Nagy and Matthew Hannon**

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### *Vestry of St. John's*

Steven Eubanks, Senior Warden  
Ray Mayer, Junior Warden  
Linda Nagy

Nancy Wright  
Susan O'Malley  
Ellen Baker

Treasurer, William Arnold

Receipts Treasurer, Jane Eubanks

Clerk, Pat Mayer

Delegates to 2011 Diocesan Convention – Gay Gaston, Ellen Baker, Mickie Richardson  
Alternate Delegates – Susan O'Malley, Neil Richardson, Marcia Stone

Please visit our website <http://stjohnsrandolphvt.org>

Our e-mail [info@stjohnsrandolphvt.org](mailto:info@stjohnsrandolphvt.org)

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## *Sunday ministries*

	<u>Eucharistic Minister</u>	<u>Readers</u>	<u>Ushers</u>
Dec 4 10 am	Christine Gilbert	Linda Nagy	Pat & Ray Mayer
Dec 11 10 am	Pat Mayer	Christine Gilbert	Carol & Ken Merrill
Dec 18 10 am	Ray Mayer	Anna & Lee Sease	Pat Lawrence
Dec 24 5 pm	Gay Gaston	Jane Eubanks	Susan O'Malley
Jan 1 <sup>st</sup> 10 am	-Morning Prayer-	Mickie Richardson	Susan O'Malley

  

	<u>Oblations</u>	<u>Intercessions</u>	<u>Coffee Hour</u>
Dec 4 10 am	Carol & Ken Merrill	Mickie Richardson	Gay Gaston
Dec 11 10 am	Anna & Lee Sease	Anna Sease	Ellen Baker
Dec 18 10 am	Christine & Jim Gilbert	Lee Sease	Jennifer Curtin
Dec 24 5 pm	Ellen & Phil Plumb	Nancy Wright	None
Jan 1 <sup>st</sup> 10 am	Mickie & Neil Richardson	Neil Richardson	Mickie Richardson