

the Magdalene

From the Desk of Fr. Neil...



THE BATTLE FOR CHRISTMAS

In terms of Christmas, it would seem I'm a little late compared to some of the larger stores and parking lots that have had their Christmas 'stuff' out at least since the day after Halloween... if not before. The Christian year closed just days ago on the 24th Sunday after Trinity (November 15th) and we are rapidly moving toward Christmas. I wonder sometimes how far people will go. I have almost begun looking for Christmas decorations to appear somewhere very early just so I can once again be dismayed at how Christmas is commercialized, mistreated, misunderstood, and even abused. I have begun to wonder how this will continue to evolve. Will Christmas decorations continue to go up earlier and earlier until they are just left up all year? If so, we will do even more damage to this glorious time of year.

As it is with many people Christmas time is my favorite time of year. But year after year we struggle to hold on to the feeling that Christmas is special. Perhaps it's because we let the secular side of it dominate and direct and shape our feelings about Christmas.

We are not necessarily in unique times however. In Stephen Nissenbaum's book *The Battle for Christmas* he traces the cultural history of "America's most cherished holiday." In the 17th century, the Puritans, between 1659 and 1681 banned and outlawed Christmas and fined anyone found 'celebrating' it, 5 shillings. They did this for two reasons. First, they found no Biblical support for the idea that Jesus was born on December 25th. Furthermore, Christmas was tied to and celebrated on and around other pagan winter celebrations. They thought that involvement in something that even looked like approval of pagan practices was dangerous at the least. As to the date, we can let the puritans have this as a reason although it's not necessarily a very good one to cause them to ban the holiday. But there is more to this story. They also had another reason which we can all probably support them wholeheartedly on. The celebration that they worked hard to suppress was not exactly like the one we celebrate today. Nissenbaum says it involved, "...behavior that most of us would find offensive and even shocking today – rowdy public displays of excessive eating and drinking, the mockery of established authority, aggressive begging (often involving the threat of doing harm), and even the invasion of wealthy homes."¹ This kind of behavior sprung up because of the time of year and all of the things that go along with the

St. Mary Magdalene Anglican Church
 205 So. Glassell Street
 Old Town Orange, CA 92866
www.stmarymagdaleneacc.org



Rev. Fr. Neil Edlin, Rector

Sunday Services:
 8am Mass
 10am Choral Mass &
 Children's Sunday School

Wednesday Service: 9am

¹ Nissenbaum, S. *The Battle for Christmas*. Vintage Books, Random House Inc. New York. 1996. P. 5.

winter season. Winter was the time when work was slow. Extreme cold weather was not quite there yet, but preparation for it was underway. "...plenty of newly fermented beer or wine as well as meat from freshly slaughtered animals – meant that it had to be consumed before it spoiled."² It is reported that in Lincolnshire in 1637, a man, "...selected by a crowd of revelers as 'Lord of Misrule' was publicly given a 'wife,' in a ceremony led by a man dressed as a minister (he read the entire marriage service from the Book of Common Prayer)."³ The Reverend Increase Mather of Boston noted in 1687, "The generality of Christmas' keepers observe that festival after such a manner as is highly dishonorable to the name of Christ. How few are there comparatively that spend those holidays (as they are called) after an holy manner. But they are consumed in Computation, in Interludes, in playing at Cards, in Reveling, in excess of Wine, in mad Mirth..."⁴ One century earlier, Anglican Bishop Hugh Latimer summed it up by saying, "Men dishonor Christ more in the twelve days of Christmas, than in all the twelve months besides." We may be less rowdy in our time, but certainly equally dishonoring to the true meaning of Christmas. In our day, the abuse of Christmas is in some ways more subtle.

So what can we do at this time as Christmas is once again in decline all around us? Stories of businesses not letting their employees say "Merry Christmas"... cities banning displays of Nativity Scenes. I think that Christmas can never be in decline truly, if we approach it for what it truly means. The message of Christmas, the message of the Incarnation, or God taking on human flesh and dwelling among us in order to die for us is the central tenet of the Christian faith. It has global, universal implications. And it can never be eliminated. Christmas as we usually celebrate it can be banned or abused, but the incarnation is a past event. It can't be

undone. Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary. You can never go back and remove that or ban that. It's a past event and it's a current reality. This is the one thing about Christianity that can never be taken away from us. We can be mocked and made fun of. We can lose our right to display Christmas decorations. But we will never lose Christ, for He dwells in us in a way that can never be taken away.

We should boldly proclaim that Christ has come in the flesh and boldly celebrate Christmas on December 25th. But we should not celebrate Christmas as a protest, to make a point or as a statement of fighting back. We should do it because Christ Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary and He lives and reigns now and forever. That can never be taken away. Christmas has survived in one way or another throughout history and it will continue to survive. If all of the decorations and displays were taken away, Christmas would still live on because it lives in the lives of those for whom Christ came in human flesh to redeem.

Thanks Be to God, Alleluia !

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Luke 1:26-33.

² IBID.

³ IBID.

⁴ IBID.

SHORT STUDIES

WHEN WAS JESUS BORN?

Despite all the festivities celebrating New Year's 2000 as the 2,000th year since Jesus' birth, most scholars are certain that he was not born in that hazy period between 1 B.C. and 1 A.D. (remember, there is no year 0). In fact, he was probably born several years before then—a seeming paradox if ever there was one! But remember that "Before Christ" was a term established several centuries after Jesus.

The current dating system, which places January 1, 1 A.D., a week after Jesus' birth, was established in about 525 A.D. by Dionysius Exiguus (Dennis the Little), a Scythian monk, who hoped to repair a division in the church over the dates of Easter by preparing a new calendar. Rather than use the then-standard Diocletian system (counting the years since the reign of this late-third-century emperor, who had persecuted the Christians), Dionysius decided to count from Jesus' birth. To do this, he used an earlier calendric system, which dated to many centuries before Jesus' time—a Roman system based on the establishment of Rome. He fixed Jesus' birth date as December 25, 753 A.U.C. (*Ab Urbe Condita*, from the founding of the city of Rome). It is not known how Dionysius chose that date. One theory is that he based it on the Book of Luke, which states that "Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work" (Luke 3:23) and that this occurred "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius" (Luke 3:1). Tiberius's reign began around 767 A.U.C., or 14 A.D., so 754 A.U.C. became 1 A.D. Dionysius's system of counting years gradually caught on: Charlemagne made it nearly universal in the ninth century, and the calendar we use today maintains Dionysius's calculations, with a few adjustments made by Pope Gregory in 1582. (Why December 25th was accepted as

Jesus' birthday is even more obscure; it may be related to the Roman festival of Saturnalia, which was celebrated on that date. It may also be related to the Jewish tradition of performing circumcisions one week after a birth— in Jesus' case, on January 1.)

But Dionysius had miscalculated. As Matthew's Gospel tells us, Jesus was born during the reign of Herod the Great. Herod died in 4 B.C., as is known from outside sources, such as Josephus, and from the dates of contemporaneous Roman leaders. This means that Jesus must have been born before 4 B.C. Various calculations, based on astronomy, history and the Bible, have come up with dates between 7 and 4 B.C.—which means that we are already a few years into the second millennium! But that won't change anyone's plans, or their calendars.

© 2009 Biblical Archaeology Society

The Nativity



Artist unknown, circa 1100's

ORDO CALENDAR ACTIVITIES

Advent is the beginning of the Church Year. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas day, which is the Sunday nearest November 30, and ends on Christmas Eve. The liturgical color of Advent is Purple.

The word Advent means "coming" or "arrival." The focus of the entire season is the celebration of the birth of Jesus the Christ, and the anticipation of the return of Christ the King in his second coming.

Advent means more than simply marking a 2,000 year old event in history. It is celebrating a truth about God, the revelation of God in Christ whereby all of creation might be reconciled to him. As we focus on past and future, let us make this Advent a spiritual journey as we affirm that Christ has come, that He is present in the world today, and that He will come again.

Read Matthew 1:18-24

GUILDS, GROUPS & EVENTS

WOMEN'S DEVOTIONAL PLANS FOR THE NEW YEAR

Please consider joining with us as we gather on the **first Sunday of each month from 9:15 to 9:55**. We begin with a time of sharing and lifting up to God our prayer requests and needs. This prayer time is casual, confidential and very blessed. After prayer, Bible based teaching is shared, often with lively input. Upcoming themes will include "Dealing with Fear", "Pride – the Queen of sins", "Getting guidance from God – for kooks or everyone?", "Worry - what can a

girl do?", "Bible Study – boring, overwhelming or easy for all?", "Gaining purity in real life'.

Your friends and Christian sisters look forward to first Sunday meetings with you in the Parish Hall.

OUTREACH DISCUSSIONS BEGIN

Discussions on Outreach recipients and projects for next year have begun. Fr. Neil has reappointed Violet Younis to the position of Church wide Outreach Coordinator. Her significant work in connecting with Mary's Kitchen and the Orange Senior Center as well as our mission abroad has been exceptionally valuable to continuing our overall goal of promoting "Christian Evangelism within our local community and the wider Church". With the addition of the Craft Guild's contributions, SMM has now assisted in reaching out to our local hospitals and continues to reach out to our soldiers, both past and present.

If you are interested in faith based service work, can knit, sew or crochet, serve up food, or do light handyman work, **please contact Violet if you want to get involved for the upcoming year.**

CHRISTMAS IS UPON US

GOD'S HARVEST FOR MARY'S KITCHEN

Our Outreach Project for Advent this year, God's Harvest for Mary's Kitchen, began on November 22 and continues to through December 20th.

The response has been overwhelming. We will continue to collect canned fruits, canned

vegetables and canned beans, as well as peanut butter and jelly until the last day of Advent.

As you shop for the Holiday meal, prayerfully consider those who cannot, and give generously.

THE MEN'S BREAKFAST & CHRISTMAS PREP GATHERING

On **Saturday, December 5th at 8:30am**, all men are invited to have breakfast together at Blue Frog Bakery. Afterwards, the group will set up the church Christmas Tree, Advent wreath and crèche. Please contact Lou Carlson, if you plan on attending.

CHRISTMAS TREE TRIMMING

On **Sunday, December 6th** following the 10am service, everyone is invited to participate in trimming the Christmas Tree in the Narthex and Parish Hall. There will be lots of Christmas goodies to eat and plenty of Christmas cheer.

CHRISTMAS CAROLING

On **Sunday, December 13th**, we will be strolling and singing Christmas Carols around Old Town. This is lots of fun if you have not participated in this activity before. We stroll for about one hour then break up for lunch around 1pm. If you plan on participating, please try to wear red, green or Christmas fun attire.

WHAT GOES UP MUST COME DOWN

Please be prepared to stay a short time longer after the **10am mass on January 3rd** to tear down the Christmas tree.

The Creche will remain through Epiphany, **January 17th**. Please contact Lou Carlson if you have a few minutes after second service on that day to help remove and store it away. We need at least one man to carry it upstairs.

THE WOMEN'S GUILD PARTY

Don't miss the best fellowship event of the year on **Wednesday, December 2nd from 7pm-10pm**. Girls, put on your best Christmas sweater, bake your favorite Christmas cookies and come to Mary Jo Osborn's House for the Women's Guild Party. There will be wonderful refreshments, appetizers and plenty of holiday chatter.

Be sure and bring a wrapped gift (\$15 or less) for the notorious Gift Exchange. Who knows...maybe you will be the one to steal the nutcracker !

THE MEN'S FELLOWSHIP GROUP GET-TOGETHER

On **Wednesday, December 2nd from 6:30pm-9:30pm**, while the girls are eating brownies the men will be gathered at the church Parish Hall for an evening of Christmas Pizza, cookies, ice cream, etc. and fun.

THE NEWS REPORT.....

GOD BLESS BISHOP ANDREW

What can you say about a man whose faith is so strong that he spends every day of his life bringing the Word of God to Christians living in a country that is more than 96% Muslim.

Everyone that spoke to Bishop Andrew was moved by his steadfast faith and commitment to carry on. During a conversation about his family, he told us that he was a 3rd generation Christian and that his son will become the 4th generation after he is educated. Please pray regularly for this man who walks in the footsteps of the Disciples.

**OUR YEAR-END NEW2YOU JEWELRY
CRAFT & CLOTHING SALE
TRULY A MIRACLE !**

On Saturday, November 14th, 20 volunteers joined together to either prepare, set up, make, sell, or tear down for this Outreach Event. Never before have so many of our parishioners been moved to help in some way to raise money for our Mission in Pakistan. The Sale day began slow and it never really picked up but we carried on. We all enjoyed lots of chatter with old friends and customers stopping in. Sometimes we are truly the instrument of God’s work. The Total Sales were \$1,465.

BEST BURGERS IN TOWN

Thanks so much to the Men’s Club volunteers that grilled hot dogs and hamburgers after the second service and the women that made the delicious accompaniments. This was the best Sunday Brunch ever.

CRAFT GUILD PLANNING SESSION

On **November 15th**, the Craft Guild began planning for next year’s service project. Recipients included the active military, disabled veterans, UCI Medical Center trauma patients and our Military Chaplains. If you are a crafty person, I highly recommend you attend the final planning meeting in January.

CALENDAR AT A GLANCE

DECEMBER 2015		
Women’s Guild Fellowship Event	12/2	7pm – Osborn home
MCF Group Event	12/2	7pm – SMM Church
Men’s Breakfast and Set up Christmas	12/5	Sat 8:30am – Blue Frog Bakery
Tree Trimming	12/6	11:15am
Christmas Caroling	12/13	11:30am
Vestry Meeting	12/9	7:00pm
Christmas Eve Service (Thursday)	12/24	5:30 pm with Music
Christmas Eve Services (Thursday)	12/24	11:00pm with Choral Music
Christmas Day Mass (Friday)	12/25	8:00am with Music
JANUARY 2016		
Holiday Teardown Party	1/3	After 2nd Mass
Men's Fellowship	1/3	9:00am - 9:30am
Women's Devotional	1/3	9:15am - 9:50am
Men's Group	1/10	11:30am
Women's Guild	1/10	11:30am
Vestry Meeting	1/13	7:00pm
Craft Guild-Planning Session	1/17	11:30am
Annual Meeting/Brunch	1/24	After 2nd Mass
Brown Bag Lecture – Anglican Worship Service, Part 3	1/31	11:45am