



TWO WORSHIP SERVICE ON SUNDAYS

8:00 a.m. Rite I; 10:00 a.m. Rite II

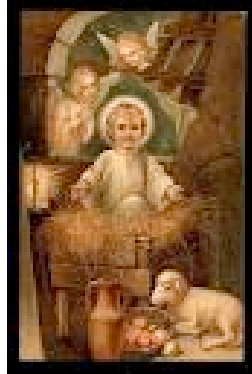
CONTACT

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF SAINT JOHN'S PARISH – December 2012

*Vision Statement: Saint John's Episcopal Parish - A Welcoming Community for All:
Seeking God's Word • Responding to God's Call • Working for Love & Justice*

**New Year's Day
Worship at 9:00 a.m.**

**Come Celebrate
the Feast of the
Holy Name of Jesus**



The Rev. John McDermott will be our preacher and celebrant on Sunday, January 1st as we celebrate the first Eucharist of 2012.

In addition to being the first day of the new year, January 1st is also the Feast of the Holy Name. In Judaism, male babies are formally named and circumcised when they are eight days old. Good Jewish parents that they were, Mary and Joseph saw to it that the tradition was fulfilled for Jesus.

Because the Holy Name of Jesus is a "major feast" of the church, when it falls on Sunday it takes precedence over the regular Sunday readings. So the story may be unfamiliar to you, but it is one worth hearing.

**Enjoy an Extra Two
Days of the
Christmas Season**

**We'll Celebrate the
Epiphany on
Sunday, January 8th**



8:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist, Rite One
10:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist, Rite Two
The 3 Kings Procession
Epiphany Party at Coffee Hour
Blessing of the Church for 2012

The Epiphany is January 6th and marks the end of the 12 day long Christmas Season. However, we're extending Christmas for two days in order to celebrate the Epiphany on Sunday, January 8th.

Our children will process the three Wise Men to the stable to meet and worship the Infant Jesus. We'll follow worship with an Epiphany Party, and we'll bless Saint John's for the New Year. House blessings are an Epiphany Season tradition, so we'll send you home with instructions and chalk to bless your home.



Martin Luther King, Jr., Weekend

**nightwatch
in the cathedral**

Jan. 15-16, 2012

*An overnight lock-in
from 5 p.m. Sunday
to 4 p.m. Monday*

Saint John's Youth Group Attending Nightwatch Lock-In at Grace Cathedral, January 15th & 16th

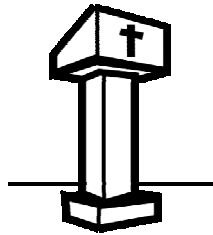
7th-12th graders from around the Diocese of California will come together at Grace Cathedral for the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Weekend Nightwatch Lock-In.

They'll spend the night making friends, playing games, and deepening their faith together — and sleeping in the Cathedral, of course. On Monday morning, the group will join the Martin Luther King Jr. Parade in San Francisco.

There's a new component for Nightwatch this year — a mission and service project option in San Francisco on Monday afternoon from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Space is limited at the project sites, so get your materials now from Trish Brown (925.693.0266, or 4trishabrown@comcast.net)

Christmas Eve 2011

A Sermon Preached
By The Rev. Peter Champion



Beasts, Shepherds and Astonishment

When was the last time you stopped and thought about the manger scene which is such a familiar part of our Christmas celebration? Here's the one our children set up at our 5 p.m. service. We see Jesus, of course, along with Mary and Joseph. We see townsfolk, and we see sheep and shepherds. But tucked away in the scene are two figures a manger scene wouldn't feel complete without. I'm talking about the ox and the donkey, or as we often hear it referred to, the ass.

If you compare the scene with what's described in Luke's Gospel, you'll discover that there is no mention of the ox and ass. Neither is there one in Matthew's description on the birth of Jesus. Yet, from the earliest depictions of this scene, we almost always see these two creatures—usually sitting comfortably in the background, with the ox chewing its cud, and with benign looks that could almost be called smiles on their faces. Some early pictures even show these two with bent front knees, almost bowing in an ungainly way. I can't tell you how much of a smile I get from that mental image.

And here's an amazing thought—other than Mary and Joseph, the ox and ass were the first to see the baby Jesus. Not exactly what you'd expect for the Savior, the Messiah, the Son of David. For such an important birth, we'd imagine the first ones to see the baby would be rich and powerful people. Perhaps kings or religious leaders. Or the Roman emperor. Or the three wise men. But an ox and an ass? Why is that?

Some of the early church fathers asked that question. One of them, Origen, conjectured that the animals were first because they are docile and obedient, in contrast to stubborn and willful and disobedient humans. I like that, but I'm not sure it tells the whole story.



And the next ones to see the baby? Luke tells us that it was a group of shepherds who'd been guarding their flocks by night in the fields. The announcement was made to the shepherds by an angel, and they were surrounded by a heavenly host singing praise to God. As they visited the babe and saw him exactly as described by the angel, they too were filled with wonder. Again, we're left asking why that is the case.

I'd like to suggest that animals and shepherds were the first to see the baby Jesus exactly because they had no status in the society of the time. The notion of animals as pets is of some antiquity, but most domesticated

animals were, and often still are, considered tools. Humans lavished little affection on animals—they were there to be used and, when no longer useful, to be disposed of.

Shepherds were considered undesirables because they lived out in the fields with animals rather than in homes with families. They were dirty and smelled. They were morally suspect because of the suspicion that, minus female company, their relationships with their sheep were perhaps less than chaste.

Did God allow domestic animals and unsavory shepherds to see the newborn first to show that he recognized their innate dignity, even when society didn't? Wouldn't it be just like God to upset the apple cart like that?

On this past Wednesday night, Susan and I took part in a Las Posadas service at the West County Detention Center in Richmond, where hundreds of people are incarcerated on behalf of ICE—the Immigration and Customs Service. A group of us have been gathering there monthly as a way of witnessing to the dignity of these people—documented or not—and to stand in solidarity with them. One of the participants was a Latina woman from La Santissima Trinidad Episcopal congregation in Richmond. As she began to read her lines, she started to weep. Javier Torres, her priest, came over and stood next to her, silently placing one hand on her shoulder. Several of us followed his lead and the woman was able to read her part. It was a powerful experience of how unvalued and disrespected some of our brothers and sisters are made to feel.

Perhaps the animals and shepherds were the first to see the holy infant because they are the ones who are the least invested in things the way they were, and the most open to recognizing when God is doing something new and radically different. The animals and shepherds were the most able in their world to experience astonishment at what was happening. Astonishment that upsets complacency and makes us shake ourselves out of the sleepy sentimentality that too often passes for faith.

Looking at the story this way helps us get beyond the sentimentality that Dan Clendenin calls "one of the greatest obstacles to genuine Christmas faith." Seeing the manger as an expression of God's care for the least and the lowest as well as the more socially acceptable. And seeing the manger this way helps us see the world in a new way. Animals and shepherds, angels and a baby mean that nothing will ever look the same again.

So whatever you've brought with you to church this evening, whether it is joy or sadness, a feeling of being valued or devalued, respected or disrespected—know that the manger is God's way of telling you that you are a person who is loved and whose dignity deserves to be respected.

And knowing that about ourselves, we are invited to leave here this evening to see the world around us—all of it—with new eyes. May we carry the message—in word and deed—that all people are God's beloved.

Harry Pavelis Is Having Surgery on January 9th



Our organist Harry is having knee replacement surgery on Monday, January 9th. He'll be off on January 15th, 22nd and 29th. Substitute musicians will provide musical leadership. We wish you well, Harry! We'll be praying for you and look forward to having you back with us as soon as you're able!



Changes Afoot In the Church Office

Our Parish Secretary, Betty, asked that her schedule be reduced from 4 mornings a week to 3 beginning in 2012. The Vestry agreed to her request. **Betty's new schedule will be 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.** That means that, depending on Fr. Peter's schedule, vacations, holidays, etc. the office may sometimes be unstaffed on Tuesdays. Please be prepared to leave a voice mail on Tuesdays if you don't reach a live person, and rest assured that your call will be returned.



Annual Meeting

**Sunday, January 29th
Combined Worship at 9:00 a.m.
Brunch and Annual Parish Meeting
2011 Review
2012 Budget
Vestry and Deanery/Convention Delegate
Elections
Rector's Report**

Please also note that the Office will be closed on Mondays January 2nd and 16th in observance of New Year's Day and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

Saint John's Book Club's Next Meeting is Sunday, January 22nd



Saint John's Book Club next meeting will be Sunday, January 22nd at 7 p.m. at the Wygal home. They will be discussing *Green Age of Asher Witherow* by M. Allen Cunningham. This is an historical novel set in the early years of the Black Diamond and Diablo Mountain area. All are welcome.



It's Saint John's 50th Anniversary

SAVE THE DATE... Saturday evening, April 28th

Saint John's 50th Anniversary Celebration with Bishop Marc and Dr. Sheila Andrus will be Saturday Evening, April 28th (more details later).

Do you have old photos, newsletters, bulletins we could borrow? If so, please let Fr. Peter know.

Saint John's Episcopal Parish 2011 Vestry	
Matt Chamberlain	Sr. Warden
Jeff Harris	Jr. Warden
Matt Brown	Clerk/Communications
Gary Carr	Communications
Richard Evon	Finance/Stewardship/ Membership Growth
John Ferrante	Worship
Corky Francis	Building & Grounds/ Worship
Karen Hansen-Smith	Fellowship
Sherrie Hidalgo	Youth/Christian Formation/ Worship
Kathy Rosen	Christian Formation/Youth/ Music
Cindy Molander	Treasurer