



THE  
**LION'S MARK**

NEWSLETTER FOR SAINT MARK'S CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA

A COMMUNITY THAT GATHERS IN FAITH, SERVES IN LOVE, AND PROCLAIMS HOPE, THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

# FAITH, SCIENCE, HISTORY & SPEAKING IN TONGUES

FATHER SEAN MULLEN



**M**any people these days seem to assume that Faith and Science are on opposite sides of a continuum, or spectrum of narratives. By this reckoning, Science tells narratives that are made up of facts that can be proven. And Faith, by this reckoning, tells stories of things that are merely made-up, perhaps to fill in the blanks for which Science does not yet have the answers, or just to allow people to feel better about themselves, or something. This worldview aligns Science closely with Truth and Faith more closely with Fiction.

Christmas, seen through the lens of such a worldview, would tip the scales heavily toward Faith and, therefore, I guess, Fiction. An angel brings a message from God to a peasant girl. A child is born in a stable to a virgin mother. A star guides sages from afar to the site. An evil king seeks to destroy the child. How could such stories be true? Add to these stories the crass commercialism that has taken over whatever the meaning of Christmas might be, and what do you have—much that glitters, none of which is gold?

Contrary to much conventional thinking these days, sincere Faith need not stand in opposition to Science. And although the church proclaims that the Christmas story is true, this proclamation is not quite the same as

declaring that the details of the Christmas story are all historically factual. The language of Christmas is deeply symbolic language, intended to articulate a truth for which facts may not have existed. To wit: that the child Jesus who was born in Palestine long ago is the Son of God, at once human and divine; and that his life, given to the world, brings the promise of transformation, healing, and new life. The details of the story are all intended to convey this truth, and have been shared by generations of people whose lives were completely untouched by the disciplines of science and history, but who still had access to the truth of God's activity in the world.

Episcopalians almost never think that we speak in tongues, but actually, every year at Christmas time that's more or less what we are doing. When we tell the Christmas story, we are speaking in a language that today's world has largely disposed of: the profoundly symbolic language of the mystery of God's promise, God's love. And we believe that every word is true in the way that only such language can be, the angels, the virgin, the shepherds, the innkeeper, and even the evil king are the intertwined syllables we use when we are speaking in this particular tongue. And the child Jesus is the syllable that it is most important to pronounce, and that's easiest for everyone to recognize when they hear it.

It may be the case that many people these days have become disillusioned with the language of Faith, especially when it ventures beyond teaching simple lessons like the Golden Rule. If so, perhaps that's





because faith leaders have misused the language; or, have ourselves, set up a false dichotomy between the way we speak and the way scientists speak, as though we have nothing to say to one another. This trend is a shame, since people who tell the truth in their own ways ought to recognize one another, and rejoice that we share the same objective.

As it was in the days that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, there are people today who are not interested in the truth, and who will lie to you and me in order to advance their own purposes. Without wishing to be flippant or cynical, I'd say that broadly speaking, I suspect that most of those people are trying to sell you something - either literally because they are advertising to you, or figuratively because they want you to help them garner or protect power. Some of those who act in this dishonest way are religious leaders. No wonder people have become disillusioned.

An indispensable aspect of the Christmas story is how likely so many details of the story are to lead to failure. The peasant girl could have said, "No" to the angel. A virgin can't give birth, anyway, and certainly not safely in a stable. The sages might have lost sight of the star. The evil king might have succeeded in destroying the child. Ancient peoples, too, knew how fantastic it was to expect that such unlikely circumstances might accomplish the will of God. These are not modern insights of people who can

see the story with the benefit of science and history. Rather, the apparent impossibility of the details conveys the point of the story! The Christmas story is meant to show us how much God loves us, to what lengths God will go, what odds God will beat in order to give his love to us, in order to give his Son to us. The unprovable details of the story are meant to emphasize the truth of this point, not undermine the truth.

Nothing about faith in Jesus Christ, or in the one, true, living God need stand at odds with science or history. And many people of faith have no desire or inclination to try to put our faith at odds with science, history, or any other kind of reason. Faith does not pick up where reason leaves off. But faith does try to contemplate and express the unknowable—like why God loves us so much, and why God acts the way God does.

Christmas is a time to engage our faith more deeply than usual. It's a time when we recite more easily than usual the stories of our faith, which means that it's a time when we can speak in the tongues of faith and symbolism to declare God's love. If you have never spoken in tongues before, just try reciting a part of the Christmas story—any part of it will do, with any details you can remember. You'll be speaking the profoundly symbolic language of the mystery of God's promise, God's love—and it will be beautiful!



## MUSIC AT SAINT MARK'S

ROBERT MCCORMICK

Just a few days before I write this article, our Boy & Girl Choristers joined the adults of the Parish Choir to sing Maurice Duruflé's peerless setting of the Requiem for the evening Mass on All Souls' Day. While there were still some accommodations due to the pandemic, it was rewarding to once again include choristers (our children who sing) in the choir. I give great thanks to God for his providence and gifts, especially over the past 18 months.

I give thanks as well to all our adult singers, choristers, and choir parents, for their faithfulness and dedication, and as ever to our marvelous Assistant Organist & Choirmaster Bryan Dunnewald for all his extraordinary contributions. It was announced recently that he will be leaving us in summer 2022 to take up a new position as Assistant to the President and Tonal Director of Schoenstein & Co., one of the world's premier builders of pipe organs. This is big news in the organ world, and it speaks to Bryan's gifts well beyond music-making that he has been chosen for such a distinguished role. It nearly goes without saying he will be enormously missed here. Bryan's wife, Maja Dunnewald, will remain in Philadelphia for graduate studies for an additional year, after which she will join him in Benicia, California, where Schoenstein & Co. is located. In time, we will have updates on the search for a successor to Bryan—he leaves big shoes to fill!

Advent Lessons & Carols will be sung at 4 p.m. on Sunday, December 5, by combined choirs. While it, too, will require some adaptations to our usual customs, I marvel with gratitude at how far we have come since a year ago. It is true that we are not yet back to where we'd like to be, but thanks to God and to vaccinations, we've come a long way! Christmas, too, will soon be upon us, along with a return to a more fulsome offering of liturgical music, notably Lessons & Carols on Christmas Eve, Midnight Mass with strings and full choir, and Mass on Christmas morning with choir.

I look forward to seeing many of you over the coming months, as we sing God's praises together. What a privilege it is—even with some precautions still in place (precautions I am impatient to leave behind)—to again worship God with singing, as is indeed meet and right, and our bounden duty.



## ANTI-RACISM DISCUSSION AT SAINT MARK'S & THE FEAST OF ABSALOM JONES

Through February 16 twice a month on Zoom, Father Mullen is leading a discussion on antiracism, approaching the fact of racism as a sin, and guided by several texts, we are exploring our experience of racism, and our feelings about racism, as well as how to respond to the effects of systemic racism in the world around us and even in the church. The discussion takes place the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month at 6 p.m. and a link is in the Thursday evening email or on the website. We'll be joined by Bishop Bill Franklin for our final discussion on February 16, discussing how racism affected the early days of the Episcopal Church.

February 13 is the feast of Absalom Jones, the first black Episcopal priest, who died on that date in 1818. Jones was ordained here in Philadelphia, but his path to ministry in this church and in this city was not an easy one. In 2022, February 13 falls on a Sunday, and we will deviate from the normal rules of precedence to keep his feast on that Sunday as a way of helping to focus our prayers and intentions on addressing the sins of racism and seeking reconciliation, by God's grace and mercy. The guest preacher that day will be Father George Brandt, who was rector of St. Michael's Church in Manhattan for 17 years, and who has also served the church in Chicago, Buffalo, Atlanta, and Central Africa. Father Brandt has written extensively about Afro-Anglican history and experience.



## CHILDREN AND FAMILY

For the first time since early 2020, children and youth gathered for formation together, in person, masks at the ready. Anticipation was in the air, as were the expected questions: who would be there? How would our gatherings look these days? Could we keep one another safe while learning and growing in our faith and love of almighty God?

These past two months of formation have yielded much good learning and certainly much good discussion. Children and youth in our Schola, Young Disciples, and Connect groups have persisted valiantly, and so far, the precautions we've taken to support one another have proven safe and effective. It has been so heartening to find that despite the continued oddities of our current pandemic reality, our formation students are bringing their whole hearts and good spirits along with them.

Throughout it all, we keep in mind the true goal of any program of Christian formation: welcoming children into the love of Christ and equipping them to follow Jesus' great commandments with joy. All formation is oriented toward helping children to love God with all their heart, all their soul, all their mind, and all their strength, and to love their neighbors as themselves. While it is good to know and to teach about Christian history and our liturgical tradition, all knowledge is in service of loving God and, by extension, caring for others. We do not seek to make good students, but good disciples. This is always a humbling opportunity! On the one hand, the stakes are high. We know that teaching and learning from our children is a vital heartbeat in the life of our church. On the other hand, this is liberating. It helps us keep things in perspective when perhaps the day's discussion seemed to go a bit off the rails. Perhaps we didn't make it through the five questions we'd hoped to explore, but maybe we stopped at that first question for an enlivening and revelatory discussion about our faith.

The enlivening and revelatory discussions continue at Saint Mark's on Sundays. If your child or children haven't yet joined us, we hope we will be able to welcome them soon. Children of all ages may join in their cohort at any time throughout the year, and we look forward to hosting additional events and trips in the new year as we give thanks for the blessings of vaccines and (God willing) continued improvement in our community's health. In the meantime, we are praying for all of you. May this time of changing seasons and chilly days be a refreshing reminder of God's love and care.



### PREPARING FOR ADULT BAPTISM, RECEPTION, OR CONFIRMATION

Bishop Gutierrez will be visiting for the Feast of St. Mark's on Sunday, April 24, and will be confirming and receiving parishioners. Adult baptisms will take place at the Easter Vigil on Saturday, April 16. *(Those who participated in classes during the pandemic but have not yet been baptized, confirmed, or received, should be in touch with Mother Johnson to plan for this year).*

For all those who wish to explore their faith more deeply in relation to these options, classes will last an hour and will be held on Sunday afternoons from January 16 to April 3, after Coffee Hour. There will be readings and informational videos made available to you online so you can prepare for our weekly conversations. We will talk together each week about aspects of belief, worship, and community life. We would love to have you join us even if you are very uncertain about making such a commitment.

Please contact Mother Johnson to let her know that you might be interested and to talk about whether these classes might be right for you. Informational Session: Sunday, January 16 at 1 p.m. Please come if you are at all interested in joining this process. We will get to know each other, and we'll talk informally about what classes will be like. This "first class" requires no preparation or commitment but it's essential for beginning the process. Formal weekly classes will begin the following Sunday, January 23 and will run through April 3.



## A WORD OF THANKS FOR **25 YEARS** OF PRIESTHOOD

An old mentor of mine used to say to his parishioners that if you were looking for him you could find him somewhere between the altar and the people of God. It sounds like a very simple model for ministry, but in fact it is a somewhat rare pattern in the Episcopal Church where most of the clergy do not actually spend much time at the altar. For me, moving between the altar and the people of God at Saint Mark's has defined my priesthood. Saint Mark's has made me the priest that I am. This December I will give thanks to God for twenty-five years of ministry in the priesthood. Fifteen of those years have been spent as rector of this great parish, and nearly twenty years of my ministry have unfolded between the altar on Locust Street and the people of God out there in the world.

We'll sing **Evensong at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, December 7**, which is the Eve of the Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. My old professor and friend, Bishop Neil Alexander will come to preach that evening. And then we'll repair to the Armory of the First City Troop (at 23rd and Ranstead Streets) for a reception. I hope you'll be able to be there, so I can give thanks not only to God, but to so many of you who have helped me to grow in ministry on the way.

FATHER SEAN MULLEN



## UPCOMING EVENTS

### DECEMBER 11

10 A.M. TO 2 P.M. ADVENT QUIET DAY

### DECEMBER 12

4 P.M. ADVENT FESTIVAL FOR FAMILIES  
AND CHILDREN

### DECEMBER 14

6:30 P.M. 20S/30S SIMPLE SUPPER

### DECEMBER 19

4 P.M. SAINT MARK'S SINGERS  
CONCERT: RED VELVET CHRISTMAS

### DECEMBER 24

4 P.M. A FESTIVAL  
OF NINE LESSONS & CAROLS

### DECEMBER 24

11 P.M. SOLEMN HIGH MASS  
OF THE INCARNATION  
PRELUDE BEGINS AT 10:30 P.M.

### DECEMBER 25

10 A.M. CHORAL HIGH MASS  
OF THE NATIVITY

### JANUARY 4

6:30 P.M. 20S/30S SIMPLE SUPPER

### JANUARY 6

7 P.M. SOLEMN HIGH MASS  
ON THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

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# ADVENT AT SAINT MARK'S

## JULIAN OF NORWICH

Born in 1343, a woman who was known by the name of her church, St. Julian's, lived the life of an anchoress. That means she lived in a cell attached to the church, in which she prayed and wrote and gave counsel to those who came to speak with her. During a severe illness she had an experience with God that she called "shewings": rich combinations of vision and understanding and affect and presence upon which she spent many years reflecting and writing.

Because Julian's showings are focused on the Crucifixion, it's typical to turn to her work during Lent. This year, though, we want to spend time with Julian and her writings during the season of Advent. The loving presence of God that Julian experienced, with all the joy and comfort it brought her, will be our companions this Advent as we look at time and suffering and love through the eyes of our crucified savior.

We will be drawing on the work of theologian Amy Laura Hall, whose book *Laughing at the Devil: Seeing the World with Julian of Norwich* provides an accessible and encouraging introduction to Julian's writings. You don't have to read the book to be part of the Sunday Forum series—or the Advent Quiet Day on December 11—but if you are looking for a spiritual practice this season Hall's book would be a wonderful way to deepen your focus in preparation for the Feast of the Incarnation.

Join one session or come to all of them, read or don't read, but join us this Advent for a joyful and prayerful exploration of one of the church's great spiritual guides.

Questions? Contact Mother Johnson.



## ADVENT QUIET DAY

DECEMBER 11, 10 A.M. - 2:30 P.M.

Spend an afternoon in prayer with Julian of Norwich. Our Quiet Day will consist of teaching and prayer in short sessions on the schedule below. Lunch will be provided at no cost, and all sessions will take place in the church. If you can't stay for the whole afternoon, you are welcome to be here for part of the day.

Join us for 10 a.m. Mass and stay for a period of quiet refreshment for your soul.

After Mass, teaching, prayer, and discussion will unfold in response to these simple words and images:

- ⊕ **A Garland of Thorns**  
11 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.
- ⊕ **The Homely Love of the Trinity**  
11:45 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
- ⊕ **Lunch** 12:30 p.m. - 1 p.m.
- ⊕ **Light**  
1 p.m. - 1:45 p.m.
- ⊕ **All Shall Be Well**  
1:45 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Registration is not required but Mother Johnson would be grateful to hear from you if you are interested in attending or if you have questions.

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# 10A.M. FORUM

## JULIAN IN THE FORUM

THROUGH DECEMBER 19

NOVEMBER 28 ADVENT ONE

### An Introduction to Julian of Norwich.

Come hear about Julian's era, the spirituality she practiced, and what makes her so distinct among our great spiritual teachers.

DECEMBER 5 ADVENT TWO

**Julian and Time: How the past, present, and future became one for Julian in the saving love of Christ.** We say that Christmas is in some ways a "second coming" of Jesus, and we associate Advent with apocalypse. Come learn about how Julian experienced time as belonging to God in Jesus.

DECEMBER 12 ADVENT THREE

**Laughing.** Julian comments about one of her visions: "At this revelation I laughed heartily...I wished that my fellow Christians had seen what I saw, and then they would all have laughed with me." Let's talk about joy and laughter as Julian understood them.

DECEMBER 19 ADVENT FOUR

**Spiritual Safety.** In what way is God good for us, exactly? How should we understand Julian's emphasis on blood and suffering? What does the Crucifixion have to do with Christmas joy?

DECEMBER 26

*No forum.*

## JANUARY IN THE FORUM: THE MASS

This series looks carefully at what we do in the Mass, over five weeks. It's a great way to deepen your knowledge and your participation in Sunday worship. Come ask questions about everything from how to hold your hands at Communion to what we are doing when we "glorify" God.

JANUARY 2 GLORY TO GOD

In this discussion of the opening moments of the Mass, we will talk about gathering, processing, singing (when we are able) and glorifying God in our prayers.

JANUARY 9 THE WORD OF GOD

How does scripture enter into the fabric of our lives at the Mass? How are the readings for the day determined? What is a sermon? Why do we follow the sermon with the Creed, prayers of petition, and a rite of absolution?

JANUARY 16 THE CANON OF THE MASS

How is the Eucharistic Prayer structured? What is consecration? What are the actions of the celebrant at the altar during this prayer, and why are these actions performed?

JANUARY 23 HOLY COMMUNION

This is your place to come ask questions about the Eucharist, about why we receive it the way we do, how beliefs about the Eucharist vary among Christians, and what we are saying when we say the prayers and the "Amens" in this section of the Mass.

JANUARY 30 BLESSING AND DISMISSAL

What does it mean to be sent out into the world at the end of Mass? We'll have a wrap-up discussion during this session, too, so that you can bring your questions and observations from the whole series.



# 20s/30s MINISTRIES



In October, members of the 20s/30s ministry community were blessed to share fellowship, food, and a celebration of the Mass at the home of Joshua Cojerean and Nathan Welty. Joshua and Nathan's warm hospitality and skillful cooking set the tone of a celebratory evening. How good it has been to be together in person again.

The months ahead bring fresh opportunities for gathering and study. In December, our Simple Supper will be accompanied by a special service of Jesus' "Seven First Words" that our ministry resident, Ben, is developing to welcome us into the Advent season's promises of hope and anticipation. In the third week of Advent, the 20s/30s community is invited to an Advent party at the home of Mother Frazier and her husband, Mark. Details regarding the December festivities will be announced in the coming weeks.

In January, the 20s/30s ministry is invited to join us for a new Bible study that will take place online on Thursday evenings at 7:30 p.m. While it has been wonderful to gather in person again for most activities, members of our community have found that certain forms of fellowship do indeed thrive online. The Bible study will be shepherded by a group that includes clergy, ministry residents, and others, so if you are interested in leading or assisting, please contact Mother Frazier.



SAINT MARK'S CHURCH  
PHILADELPHIA

1625 LOCUST STREET  
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103

## RED VELVET CHRISTMAS

DECADENT MID-CENTURY  
CAROLS FOR CHOIR

**SUNDAY DECEMBER 19, 4 P.M.**



Saint Mark's Singers hopes you will join us for an evening of tasty harmony, smooth lines, and some real dessert too.

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Rehearsals begin in February for our May 15 concert. If you've been thinking about joining the Singers, please email [bdunnewald@saintmarksphiladelphia.org](mailto:bdunnewald@saintmarksphiladelphia.org)