

# *The Epistle of St. Paul's, Bristol Parish*

## *Petersburg, Virginia*

December 2011

Dear St. Paul's Friends,

Probably because I am an ordained person who is often dressed in clerical garb, i.e. "wearing the collar," I am frequently approached by people asking religious questions. These questions usually start with something along the lines of, "I've always wondered..." or "I have a dumb question to ask you..." I've yet to hear a dumb question, however, as every questioner who begins in this manner has been sincerely looking for a thoughtful and caring response. It is a wonderful privilege for me to be allowed into the deeper thoughts and feelings of another human being.

As I attempt to engage a questioner with a sympathetic ear and an open heart, I find myself at times frustrated by my difficulty in speaking the right words or at least the words that clearly express my thoughts and responses. More often than not, "a dumb question" comes from a bit of hurt or confusion that has remained unexamined for a very long time. I hear what is being asked on the surface, "the presenting issue," but I also sense what is going on at an emotional level, although indistinctly. Sometimes this intuitive response rises up into my mind as an image or picture and sometimes as words or even a brief phrase. Depending on my comfort level with the person, I will either share the image or words as they come to me or try to articulate for them what is in my mind.

All of this is to say that even God finds it necessary to come "in the flesh" to express himself clearly to his people. All of God's efforts to speak to the Israelites through Moses and the prophets sometimes leave his message of eternal love unheeded. Every once in a while someone does take God's words into his heart: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Aaron, Joshua, Ruth, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, Joseph, and Mary. Doing so changes every aspect of their lives. But the rest of us, those who hear God's word in our hearts and then follow the other voices, urges, and leadings, miss out on living the extraordinary life of our biblical heroes. The Incarnation, the fact that God pours into Jesus all of his divine power and wisdom, is difficult for us to comprehend. This is, however, the true meaning of Christmas: that God loves us so much that he wants to make this love unmistakably evident to us in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

April and I were looking at Lowe's for some white Christmas lights and walked through the "Holiday Decorations" aisle on our way to the lighting section. We looked up above the top shelf and stared in disbelief at the inflatable lawn figures. Stepping out from a wooden outhouse was Santa Claus! We both looked at each other and said at the same time, "Now, what does Santa leaving the bathroom have to do with Christmas?" I then said, "I think society has finally become completely disconnected from the power and significance of Christmas. There is no meaning whatsoever left."

My prayer for all of us as we deliberately move through the four quiet weeks of Advent is that we allow the Holy Spirit to prepare our hearts to receive the baby Jesus. May the glory and the beauty of the Christ child be nurtured within our souls and help each of us to grow into the full stature of Christ. May the singing of our favorite Christmas carols open our hearts to receive the love of God. May our worship of the Infant King draw our minds into contemplation of his incomprehensible and yet healing love for us. Finally, may the full meaning of Christmas be born anew in all of us.

Peace, Rick

## *Highlights of December Events*

**Sunday, December 4<sup>th</sup> – Advent II**

**UTO Ingathering**

12 Noon – Vestry Meeting

**Sunday, December 18<sup>th</sup> – Advent IV**

4:00 p.m. – Advent Lessons & Carols

5:30 p.m. – Christmas Celebration Dinner

**Friday, December 9<sup>th</sup> – Friday for the Arts**

6:30 p.m. – Christmas Concert by Candlelight

7:15 p.m. – Live Nativity on the Front Lawn

**Saturday, December 24<sup>th</sup> – Christmas Eve**

10:30 p.m. – Carols and Festive Music

11:00 p.m. – Festive Holy Eucharist

**Sunday, December 25<sup>th</sup> – Christmas Day**

10:30 a.m. – Holy Eucharist

(No 8:00 a.m. service)



### *Christmas Concert by Candlelight*

*Friday, December 9<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m.*

*as part of Friday for the Arts*

Rebecca Perlstein, Soprano

Edward Schutt, Organ

### *Advent Lessons & Carols*

*Sunday, December 18<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 p.m.*

*with*

*Christmas Dinner to follow at 5:30 p.m.*

*Santa Claus will be making a special visit  
to St Paul's during Dinner.*

Adults: \$10      Children (6-12): \$6

Children (5 & Under): No Charge

To make a reservation for the Dinner,  
please call the Parish Office or fill out a  
Reservation Envelope and return no later  
than *Wednesday, December 14<sup>th</sup>*.

### *Christmas Eve*

*at*

*Saint Paul's*

*Special music provided by  
St Paul's Choir*

*Carols for the congregation  
will begin at 10:30 p.m.*

### *The Festival Holy Eucharist*

*celebrating*

*The Incarnation of Our Lord*

*will begin at 11:00 p.m.*

### *Annual Meeting held November 13<sup>th</sup>*

"We are turning the corner!" was the theme of this year's Annual Meeting as the Rector and the Wardens of the Vestry made their yearly reports to the congregation. Sr. Warden Tom Raines gave initial voice to the meeting's upbeat theme when he said, "We at St. Paul's have faced some difficult circumstances in the past, but I truly believe that we are turning the corner and looking forward to a much brighter future!" Tom cited the many new outreach ministries that have been undertaken and supported by members of St. Paul's. He also noted the favorable increase in hospitality shown to newcomers as cause for celebration. Jr. Warden Chris Johnson reported that there was no extensive damage to the property from either the earthquake or Hurricane Irene. Chris gave special thanks to Mike Smith for the many hours of volunteer expertise that he has given to St. Paul's. Steve Tuck presented the 2012 Budget on behalf of his brother Mike. The challenging news from Steve's report was that the Vestry had placed a hard cap of \$90,000 on the amount of money that can be drawn from the Robertson-Bernard Fund. The remaining money will need to be raised in Pledge and Plate contributions. The Rector noted the overall spiritual health of the congregation and the need to continue looking for new ways to care for each other and the outside community. Thank you coffee mugs were given out to several members of the congregation in appreciation of their various ministries. Jason Chandler, Elizabeth Chandler, Chris Johnson, Steve Tuck, and the Rector all took part in performing the skit, "The Commandment Committee" to add a note of levity to the proceedings. Finally, three new members were elected to serve on the Vestry: John Maclin, Heath Myers, and Steve Tuck. The three off-going Vestry members: Jason Chandler, Justin Keeler, and Denee Tuck were thanked for their three years of service.

### *OCW December Lunch*

The Old Coots & Wannabes will meet for lunch at The Demolition Café on Bank St. at **11:30 on Tuesday, December 6<sup>th</sup>**. *Come and enjoy!*

### *Offerings for Greens and Poinsettias*

It is not too soon to make your contributions for decorating the church in the name or memory of a loved one. Donating for this special effort *now* will allow us to purchase just what we need to make the church look absolutely beautiful for Christmas! Look for the special contribution envelopes in the Narthex and the Middle Foyer.

### *Offerings for Christmas Music*

If you would like to contribute toward the cost of special music for the Christmas Eve service, please consider making a contribution in honor or in memory of loved ones. Contribution envelopes are available in the Narthex and the Foyer.

### *2012 Flower Chart*

The 2012 Flower Chart will be made available on Sunday, December 4<sup>th</sup>. The cost of flowers will remain the same next year: \$40 for the Main Altar, \$30 for the Chapel Altar and \$60 for both altars on the same date. Please sign up on a first come – first serve basis.

### *December Birthdays*

1 <sup>st</sup>	Bette Poarch
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Hibernia Cuthbert, Bob Zemp
5 <sup>th</sup>	April Greenwood
8 <sup>th</sup>	Ted Ruhnke, Marie Spencer
14 <sup>th</sup>	Liam Chandler
15 <sup>th</sup>	Andy Sheetz
16 <sup>th</sup>	Joe Aldrich
17 <sup>th</sup>	Jackie Blake
22 <sup>nd</sup>	Charles Lindsey, Jr. Shirley Van Landingham
24 <sup>th</sup>	Martha Lee Romaine
27 <sup>th</sup>	Cade Cannon
30 <sup>th</sup>	Sam Cuthbert

### *December Anniversaries*

2 <sup>nd</sup>	Andy and Pam Sheetz
4 <sup>th</sup>	Robbie and Cary Cannon

### *Did we miss your birthday or anniversary?*

Please forgive us! If we did, let us know. We may not have had the information. As a parish family, we really do want to remember each person's birthday and anniversary.