The S. Stephen

ADVENT/CHRISTMAS

2017

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Nativity Icon, Andrei Rublev, 1405
Annunciation Cathedral, Moscow

Letter From the Rector

My Dear People,

The First Sunday of Advent (December 3, 2017) marks the beginning of a new Church year. The word Advent means "coming" or "arrival," and the season's dominant themes are watching, waiting, preparation, anticipation, expectation, and, above all, *hope*.

The Advent message of hope is one that our world desperately needs to hear. Hope differs radically from optimism, a naïve belief either that everything naturally works out for the best in the end, or worse, the notion inherited from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment that humanity is inexorably advancing by its own efforts towards a perfect world free from war, poverty, famine, and disease. Hope, by contrast, trusts not in human progress but in God's promises even when – especially when -- everything is falling apart and all optimism fails.

The Catholic tradition speaks of hope as one of the "theological" virtues. This means that unlike the "natural" virtues, which can be acquired by human effort and practice, hope is a gift that only God can give. Hope is the God-given response to God's promises: believing not only that they are true, but also that they are true for you and me.

In the thirteenth century, Saint Thomas Aquinas described hope as the golden mean between the excess of presumption and the defect of despair. Presumption takes God's promises for granted; despair simply gives up, supposing either that we are unworthy of salvation or that God is powerless to save if he exists at all. Unlike presumption or despair, however, hope assures us that if we do our part, God will do his.

Advent calls us to cultivate the virtue of hope by meditation on God's promises in Scripture, by prayer, and by making use of the sacramental means of grace that the Church makes available to us. This season of new beginnings affords us many opportunities to renew and rekindle the gift of hope in God's future.

If you have not already done so, please make the space available on your calendars to attend **Advent Lessons and Carols** on Sunday, December 3rd, at 5:30 pm. It is crucial for our regular congregation to make a good showing to help welcome and engage the good number of visitors and guests who show up for this service. Besides which, it is a wonderful way to mark the start of the season and begin our spiritual preparation for the Lord's arrival – at Christmas, at the end of time, and in our own lives here and now. For musical details, see James Busby's column *Quodlibet* (Page 13) in this issue of *The S. Stephen*.

Our annual **Advent Quiet Day** takes place on Saturday 9 December from 9 am to 2 pm. This year our own Priest Associate Fr. Michael A. Pearson will be giving the meditations. A light breakfast and lunch are included. To facilitate preparation, those planning to attend are asked to let Susan in the Parish Office know by Thursday the 7th at the latest (office @ sstephens.necoxmail.com, or 401-421-6702, ext. 1). A donation of $15 or more is welcome from each participant to help cover expenses.

Finally … this is one of those pesky years when Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday! (This happened last in 2006 and will happen again in 2023.) As the Prayer Book calendar and rubrics require, we shall keep the Fourth Sunday of Advent at both morning Masses. Then, in place of Coffee Hour, we invite all those able and willing to stay and help decorate the church for our Christmas services. Pizza and salad will be provided. A good time will be had by all.

Owing to the day's full schedule, as well as a decline in numbers of children of the appropriate ages, we are giving the Christmas Pageant a rest this year, and instead are offering a **Family Mass with Carols** at 5:30 pm. (This is by no means a necessarily permanent change, and we shall revisit the feasibility of the Pageant in the coming years.) Then, at 10:30 pm we offer the **Solemn Mass of the Nativity**, a.k.a. the Midnight Mass, featuring the *Missa ad Praesepe* ("Mass at the Crib") of George Malcolm (1917-1997).

Be not afraid. Look toward the East, O Jerusalem, and see the Joy that is coming to you from God. With all blessings and prayers for a hopeful Advent and a joyous Christmas. I remain, faithfully,

Your pastor and priest,

Fr. John D. Alexander

SURPRISING CONVERSIONS: WRITERS WHO EMBRACED ORTHODOXY IN A SECULAR AGE

Part 2: T. S. Eliot

By Phoebe Pettingell

When T. S. Eliot converted to Anglicanism in 1927, the literary world was shocked. His long poem, *The Waste Land* (1922) had made him, in the words of one critic, "the sceptic of the hour": the voice of a disillusioned generation that blamed its elders for the needless slaughter of the Great War. The welter of different voices in the poem seemed to represent the collapse of belief in those time-honored values that had given meaning to life: faith in human progress and decency, and in a God who controlled the destiny of humanity. Now, this voice of a lost generation was announcing himself a "classicist in literature, royalist in politics, anglo-catholic in religion." Furthermore, from the time of his conversion, his writing became suffused with his religious views. *The Times Literary Supplement* called him a traitor, the American critic Edmund Wilson, "a reactionary." Many literary figures of his generation never forgave him for what they perceived as a cowardly defection from the honesty of his earlier poetry. American critics were particularly ferocious, since at the same time Eliot converted, he also renounced his American citizenship and became a citizen of the United Kingdom.

T. S. Eliot

Eliot was born in 1888, in St. Louis, Missouri, on the shore of the Mississippi River, whose "rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom" ("The Dry Salvages," I). He came from a distinguished New England Unitarian family and attended Harvard, and then the Sorbonne in Paris. He had planned to study in Germany, but the outbreak of the Great War made that impossible, so in 1914 he went to England instead. In 1915, he was introduced to a young Cambridge governess, Vivienne Haigh-Wood. They impetuously married a few months later. The repressed Eliot was initially attracted to her extroversion, and she, too, was an aspiring writer, who worked with him on his early projects. However, she suffered from a variety of ailments, and was deeply neurotic. Eliot took a position at a bank to support them. In 1917, he published his first book of poems, including "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," which catapulted him into fame as a leading Modernist poet. Modernism in the arts began as a reaction against nineteenth century Romanticism. Painting became impressionist rather than realistic, then abstract. Rather than telling a story, literature became evocative of the inner life: perceptions, images, and feelings. Eliot's Prufrock is a repressed Bostonian, bland on the outside but seething with interior feelings, unable to express them to a woman, not even certain as to what he wants.

Although he was embraced by the Bloomsbury set of Modernist writers and painters—Virginia Woolf and her husband Leonard published his early books—Eliot retreated more and more into a shell. As he had been a proper American, he became the stereotype of an Englishman of the time, wearing the formal, dressy clothing of his

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St. Magnus Martyr, London

banking profession. His marriage exhausted him. Vivienne rocketed from one health crisis to the next, often requiring rest home stays or treatments at expensive spas. Medications prescribed for her various aches and pains turned her into a drug addict. She was emotionally demanding, and they exacerbated each other's anxieties. A few of their friends were perceptive enough to discern that Eliot had an unusually strong need for order. Underneath the chaotic scenes of *The Waste Land* lies a longing for a purpose to existence. "I am afraid of the life after death," he said in 1923, puzzling his friends at the time, most of whom had long since given up any fear of hell or hope of heaven. The poem's hectic scenes are really a reflection of the torment of his marriage, as well as his longing for meaning to his existence. Its mention of the London Anglo-Catholic Church, Saint Magnus Martyr, where he sometimes went to seek peace and quiet in its "inexplicable splendor of Ionian white and gold" suggests he was already moving toward an acceptance of Christ.

Eliot accepted man's "total depravity," as defined in Calvinism, but he longed for some hope of atonement and redemption. At Harvard, he had discovered *The Baghavad Gita*, and *The Waste Land* ends with its Sanskrit promise of everlasting peace. Now, he was turning more and more to Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint John of the Cross. Anglicanism drew him because of its sense of moderation and balance, as well as its valuation of language. He admired the Elizabethan understanding of Church and State, and wrote essays in favor of a Christian society. Sophisticated enough to know that Christianity offers not personal fulfillment, but rather a way of turning one's thoughts from one's own shortcomings or obsessions to God's ways, he hoped for something to moderate his own violent feelings. For sins, one can do penance, and find atonement rather than suffering perpetual guilt. His conversion was not made in a spirit of emotional fervor, but rather in determination to take on a disciplined spiritual life that would move him toward salvation. He began attending daily early communion services, then asked to be baptized and confirmed in the Church of England (sacraments his Unitarian background had omitted). These rites were performed in great secrecy at the end of June, 1927, because he did not want a public fuss made of his conversion. Shortly after this, he began going regularly to confession and took a vow of celibacy which he maintained until his remarriage in the last few years of his life. To complete his new life, he separated from Vivienne, and refused to see her again. She eventually became so unhinged that her brother committed her to a sanitarium. In 1933, Eliot began attending the West Kensington parish of St. Stephen's, Gloucester Road, where he remained a member all his life and served as a church warden for 25 years.

Ash Wednesday: Six Poems (1930) was Eliot's first collection since his conversion. His style became more lyric and meditative, while his themes sprung from his newfound faith. He became particularly attached to the fourteenth century English mystics like the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing,* whose advice on prayer suggested new ways to use language. The long title poem uses the Medieval trope of Courtly Love, where the quest for the beloved stands in for the soul's search for God, in the tradition of Dante and Guido Cavalcanti. Eliot derives his first line, "Because I do not hope to turn again" from the latter. The verse is sprinkled with lines or fragments of lines from Scripture, The Book of Common Prayer and The Anglican Missal, the *Salve Regina*, and a Christmas sermon of the seventeenth century Divine, Lancelot Andrewes, who described

the baby Jesus in the manger as "the Word without a word." But without being familiar with these references, or understanding exactly what Eliot is saying, it is possible to be carried along by the music of his rhymes and rhythms, the way the poem twists and turns like a river, and come away with an impression of spiritual seeking, even if one can't quite put it into words.

"Ash Wednesday" also marked a secret shift that has only recently come to light. In his Harvard days, Eliot had come to know a young Boston woman, Emily Hale, with theatrical aspirations. Although he seems to have been in love with her, it is unlikely that he proposed—probably because he was planning to spend the next year abroad. On a trip to the United States shortly before his conversion they met again, and she became Eliot's new muse, the "Lady of Silences" of his new poem. He saw her as a figure akin to Dante's Beatrice: unavailable but with a promise of a love transcending ordinary human passion. Since Vivienne was still alive, and his kind of Anglo-Catholicism forbade divorce, marriage to Emily was out of the question. He may also have felt that her Unitarianism was incompatible with his Anglo-Catholicism.

Possibly because of his involvement with Emily, Eliot began writing plays, starting with his most lasting and best: *Murder in the Cathedral*, about the martyrdom of Thomas Becket, the twelfth century Archbishop of Canterbury, to be performed in Canterbury Cathedral. A drama teacher herself, she helped him make this move, although he had always been fascinated with theater. On one of her trips to England, the two of them visited Burnt Norton, the site of a manor burned down in the eighteenth century. The garden surrounding the house became the inspiration for Eliot's next poem, the first of his *Four Quartets*, all based on places significant to him. "East Coker" was the place from which Andrew Eliott, a seventeenth century ancestor, had embarked for New England. "The Dry Salvages" are rocks off the coast of Cape Ann, Massachusetts, where the Eliots had a home, but the poem also invokes the Mississippi River of his

St. Stephen's, Gloucester Road, London

Saint Louis childhood. "Little Gidding" is a seventeenth century chapel where Nicholas Ferrar and his household established a community of "holy living" in accordance with The Book of Common Prayer. Its life was interrupted by the English Civil War, and Cromwell's army destroyed the chapel's interior, but it was subsequently rebuilt, and remains a place of pilgrimage, especially for Anglo-Catholics. *Four Quartets* was Eliot's last major poetic effort, written during World War II. One section of "Little Gidding" invokes his work as an Air Raid Warden during the Blitz, and all the poems grapple with a civilization in the midst of destructive warfare, which the poet sees as a kind of penance. For Eliot, the mystery of the Incarnation embraces human suffering and our groping for some kind of understanding that will redeem it. Bombs falling on London are seen at the same time as the fires of hell, the purifying flames of Purgatory, and Pentecost's gifts of the Holy Spirit:

> Who then devised the torment? Love.
> Love is the unfamiliar Name
> Behind the hands that wove
> The intolerable shirt of flame
> Which human hands cannot remove.
> We only live, only suspire
> Consumed by either fire or fire.

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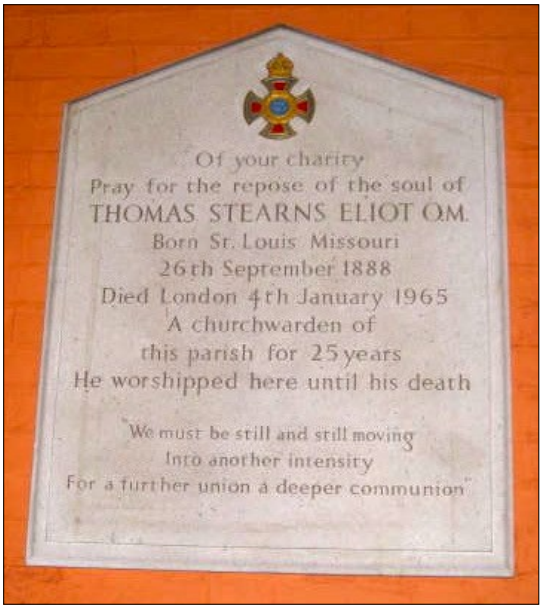
Eliot called these four poems "quartets" after the final string quartets of Beethoven, written after the composer had become deaf. As he pushed music to its limits—contemporaries found these pieces incomprehensible—so Eliot attempted to push language to the limits of expressing what is beyond expression except in fragments and glimpses. At the same time, they have become a spiritual classic as well as a literary one. The figure of Julian of Norwich, the fourteenth century anchoress and author of *Revelations of Divine Love*, becomes central to the conclusion of "Little Gidding," with her insight that

> Sin is Behovely, but
> All shall be well, and
> All manner of things shall be well

Eliot was responsible for making Julian's spiritual classic more widely known. "Little Gidding" was written in 1942, and although Eliot lived until 1965, he wrote no more serious poetry, although he continued with plays and essays. By the time of his death, he was generally considered the foremost poet of the twentieth century writing in English, and atheist college professors treated his verse with a reverence their ancestors reserved for Holy Scripture. When I was in college, we were exposed to, and shaped by, a wide range of Anglican writers, especially George Herbert, John Donne, and other Metaphysical poets, thanks to Eliot's influence.

A man of contradictions, Eliot was both a leading Modernist—a movement whose motto was "Make it new"—and a lover of bygone eras, especially the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Despite his love of the Anglican *via media*, his temperament never outgrew that of his Puritan ancestors with their fierce hatreds and passionate religious fervor. In certain respects, he was a difficult person. His behavior to the women in his life was unadmirable, at least until his late remarriage, and he has justly been accused of anti-Semitism, although not of the active kind espoused by his friend Ezra Pound. To give him credit, he wrestled with this prejudice after the horrors of the Shoah became known. His last years were blessed by a happy marriage to his longtime secretary, Valerie Fletcher, in 1957, and she proved an excellent caretaker of his literary estate after he died. At the same time, this came as both a shock and disappointment both to Emily Hale and another English female friend, both of whom had expectations of him. I find many of his essays rigid and narrow, and am not an admirer of his later plays. Be that as it may, his best poems are arguably the greatest English writing since Shakespeare. One can study them over and over and never get to the end of their meaning. In turn, they have exposed generations of readers to a vast body of Christian literature that reinvigorates our own belief.

Little Gidding



T. S. Eliot Memorial Plaque, St. Stephen's, Gloucester Road, London

WERE ANIMALS REALLY PRESENT AT THE NATIVITY?
(And Does it Matter?)

By Fr. Alexander

Jesus in Manger with Ox and Ass, Sarcophagus Relief, c. 408, Basilica of Saint Ambrose, Milan

In 2007, Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams caused a stir when he pointed out in a TV interview that we do not know at what time of year Christ was born. The Church chose December 25 as the Feast of the Nativity because it was already the date of a Roman winter festival. Nor do we know, he continued, how many wise men came from the East bearing gifts. The New Testament says neither that they were three nor that they were kings. He also remarked that nowhere do the Gospels indicate that the birth of Jesus took place in a stable or that any animals were present.

Still, representations of the birth of Christ in song, story, painting, and carving—not least in Nativity sets—depict the Baby Jesus lying in a straw-filled manger with Mary and Joseph looking on, an ox and ass nearby, shepherds arriving with their sheep, and three kings en route with their camels and gifts. The birth narratives in the canonical Gospels mention the manger but not the ox and ass; Saint Luke mentions the shepherds but does not say they brought any of their sheep or lambs; Saint Matthew mentions wise men from the East bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh but says nothing about kings or camels. Where, then, do these extra details of the story come from? Are they just imaginative accretions with no basis in the Scriptural text?

Not quite. Beginning with the Apostles and Evangelists, early Christian preachers and writers understood the Old Testament as prefiguring and prophesying the New Testament. This way of reading Scripture may seem foreign to us, but it was integral to early Christian ways of thinking. Details of the Old Testament prophesies could readily be applied to the New Testament events to which they seemed to point.

The enumeration of the wise men as three is an inference from their three gifts; the notion that they were kings comes from Psalm 72:10: *"The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall pay tribute, and the kings of Arabia and Saba offer gifts."* As for the camels: *"A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD"* (Isaiah 60:6). Since the fulfillment of prophecy was pivotal to the Christian argument that Jesus was the Messi-

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ah, it seemed fitting to appropriate these Old Testament images to artistic depictions of the Nativity and Epiphany. As early as the fourth century, carvings on Roman Christian sarcophagi show the three magi (not yet kings) bearing their gifts with camels in tow.

Adoration of the Magi, Sarcophagus Relief, 4th century, from Cemetery of St. Agnes, Rome, Vatican Museums

The earliest artistic representations of Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger—also on fourth-century sarcophagi—always depict an ox and ass close by. This detail comes from a relatively obscure text from the Prophet Isaiah: *"The ox knows its owner, and the ass its master's crib; but Israel does not know, my people does not understand"* (1:3). Here the word "crib" means not a baby's cradle but a feeding trough or manger. A saying of Jesus in Matthew specifically links oxen, asses, and mangers: "*You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it?"* So, when Luke described the the newborn Jesus *"wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger"* (2:7, 12) it was a natural biblical association for Christian artists to include an ox and ass in the scene. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint (LXX)—which for the early Church was the authoritative text of the Scriptures—a verse from the Prophet Habakuk reads: *"you shall be known between the two living creatures"* (3:2), which, again, Christian commentators saw fulfilled in the ox and the ass. Since the Jewish Law considered oxen ritually clean and donkeys unclean, Church Fathers such as Ambrose and Augustine interpreted the ox and ass as representing the Jewish

Nativity with Shepherd, Sarcophagus of Marcus Claudianus, c. 330-335, Palazzo Massimo, Rome

and Gentile peoples, symbolically brought together and reconciled in Christ.

The fourth century sarcophagi often depict shepherds at the Nativity but not sheep. Saint Luke says that *"in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night"* (2:8); after the angel of the Lord announced Christ's birth to them, *"they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger"* (2:16). The Gospel text

The Nativity, Byzantine Style Mosaic, 12th century, La Martorana, Palermo, Sicily

leaves unclear whether the shepherds brought any sheep or lambs with them. Traditional Eastern Orthodox icons of the Nativity—such as that by Andrei Rublev in Moscow's Annunciation Cathedral (1405)—typically telescope spatially distinct scenes into one panoramic view: Mary and Jesus occupy center stage with the ox and the ass; off to one side the angel announces the birth to the shepherds with their sheep in the field, while from other side the magi (now three kings) approach from afar (on horses, not camels!). By the early Renaissance, however, the Italian artist Domenico Ghirlandaio includes a shepherd holding a lamb at the manger in his *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1483-1485). The symbolism is fairly straightforward: Jesus is both the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14) and the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36).

Adoration of the Shepherds, Domenico Ghirlandaio, 1483-1485. Church of the Holy Trinity, Florence

Another feature of Orthodox iconography is the placement of the Nativity in a cave. Some early Christian writers noted that Jesus at his birth wrapped in swaddling cloths and resting in a manger in a cave prefigured Jesus at his death wrapped in a shroud and resting on a slab in another cave. Mary's use of a manger as a cradle for her newborn does suggest that the birth took place in some sort of shelter for animals; in that region caves were often used for that purpose. As early as 160, the Christian apologist Justin Martyr wrote:

> But when the Child was born in Bethlehem, since Joseph could not find a lodging in that village, he took up his quarters in a certain cave near the village; and while they were there Mary brought forth the Christ and placed Him in a manger, and here the Magi who came from Arabia found Him. (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 77)

Since Justin grew up in Palestine, it is possible that he knew and visited the cave he mentions. In the following century, the theologian and philosopher Origen of Alexandria (185-254) added the following:

> In Bethlehem the cave is pointed out where He was born, and the manger in the cave where He was wrapped in swaddling clothes. And the rumor is in those places, and among enemies of the Faith, that indeed Jesus was born in this cave who is worshipped and reverenced by the Christians. (*Contra Celsum*, 1:51)

According to Saint Jerome (347-420), after the Jewish Bar Kochba Revolt of 132-135 the Emperor Hadrian made the traditional site of Jesus' birth into a shrine of Adonis in an effort to suppress all vestiges of Judaism and Christianity in the region. The cave was thus in pagan hands when Justin and Origen wrote, but local Christians still remembered and pointed it out as Jesus' birthplace.

In 327, the Emperor Constantine commissioned the construction of a Christian basilica over the site, which was completed in 339, rebuilt by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian in 565, and has been restored, renovated, and expanded repeatedly in the centuries since. Directly underneath the basili-

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ca's high altar is the cave where, according to tradition, Jesus was born, known as the Grotto of the Nativity. Jerome spent his last thirty years living in an adjacent cave where he completed his Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate. Already in Jerome's lifetime, the Grotto of the Nativity had become a destination for pilgrims from all over the Christian world.

Grotto of the Nativity, Maxim Vorobiev, 1833, Museum of Pskov, Russia

Six centuries later, in 1187, the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem fell to Saladin, and Bethlehem came under Muslim control that would last until 1917. It is probably more than a coincidence that in 1223 Saint Francis of Assisi created the first Nativity scene at Greccio in Italy. If European pilgrims found it difficult to visit Bethlehem, then perhaps Bethlehem could be brought to Europe. (A similar dynamic drove the development of Stations of the Cross recreating the Jerusalem *Via Dolorosa* in European churches a few centuries later.)

In 1219, during the Fifth Crusade, Francis had traveled to the Middle East to preach in both the Crusader and Muslim camps at Damietta, Egypt. After meeting Francis, the Sultan Kamel-el-Melek gave him a safe-conduct to the holy places, but we do not know if he managed to visit Bethlehem before returning to Italy in 1220. Either way, at Christmas of 1223 Francis decided to replicate the Nativity in a hillside grotto in the village of Greccio (about halfway between Rome and Assisi). With the Pope's permission, however, Francis went beyond anything that had ever been done in Bethlehem or anywhere else. Assisted by the villagers, he set up a stone manger filled with straw, and brought in a live ox and donkey. His aim was to demonstrate the harsh conditions into which Jesus was born, in contrast to the materialism and greed then rampant in Italy. On Christmas Eve, people from the surrounding region formed a torchlight procession to the grotto, where one of the friars celebrated Mass and Francis, vested as a deacon, chanted the Gospel and preached with great emotion. In the earliest account, that of Saint Bonaventure (1221-1274), the infant Christ miraculously appeared in the manger, and Francis tenderly took him up in his arms before Mass proceeded. In one stroke, Francis had set the precedent for three enduring devotional practices: the Christmas pageant, the living Nativity, and the Christmas crèche. Nativity scenes featuring either carved images or live actors and animals gained huge popularity and quickly spread all over Western Europe.

Saint Francis and the Christmas Crib at Greccio Artist and date unknown

And so we come full circle. Were animals present at Jesus' birth? The canonical Gospels do not say either way. The picture of the Nativity in our popular imagination is the product of the

organic development of artistic and devotional tradition over centuries, beginning with reliefs on fourth-century Roman sarcophagi, continuing with Byzantine icons and Renaissance paintings, and culminating in modern-day Nativity displays.

This accumulation of artistic convention and popular devotion contains deep wisdom that we would be foolish to dismiss out of hand. Successive generations of Christians have interpreted the animals' significance in various ways. In the early centuries, they served apologetic purposes by demonstrating the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. They soon took on various allegorical meanings, such the ox and ass representing the Jews and the Gentiles, or lambs pointing to Jesus the Lamb of God. For Saint Francis, the animals signified the poverty, simplicity, and humility of the Incarnation.

What theological insights can we glean for our own day from the animals surrounding the newborn Christ? I want to suggest that this imagery expresses the truth that the Son of God became Incarnate to redeem not only humanity but all creation. *"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us …"* (John 1:14). Flesh (Greek: *sarx*) is not unique to human beings but is shared with the rest of the animal creation. Apparently, human beings and mice have in common something like 90 percent of the same DNA.

One insight of contemporary ecological consciousness is that as human beings we need to see ourselves as an integral part of God's creation, rather than as set separately over and above it (Genesis 1:28 notwithstanding). To this end, it helps to remember that the uncreated Son of God came down from heaven to share not only in our human condition but also in the life of the natural world itself. In the manger of Bethlehem, he is welcomed and adored not only by his fellow human beings but also by his fellow creatures.

The image of the animals gazing on the Christ child signifies the beginning of the fulfillment of such biblical prophecies as: *"The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together"* (Isaiah 40:5)—not just all humanity but all flesh. The manger scene symbolizes what Saint Maximus the Confessor (c. 580—662) called "the cosmic liturgy"—all creation joining in the worship of the Son of God. Other biblical texts such as the Song of the Three Young Men depict the sun, moon, stars, mountains, hills, streams, oceans, plants, animals, fish, and birds joining together in the praise of God: *"O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise him and magnify him forever"* (verse 35). Saint Francis himself takes up the theme in his beloved "Canticle of the Sun."

The good news of Christmas is that God the Son came into our world to redeem fallen humanity from sin and death. But we must not imagine that our eternal destiny can be separated from that of the natural creation of which we are a part. The Bible describes the life of the world to come not as an escape from this present world, but as *"all things made new"* (Revelation 21:5).

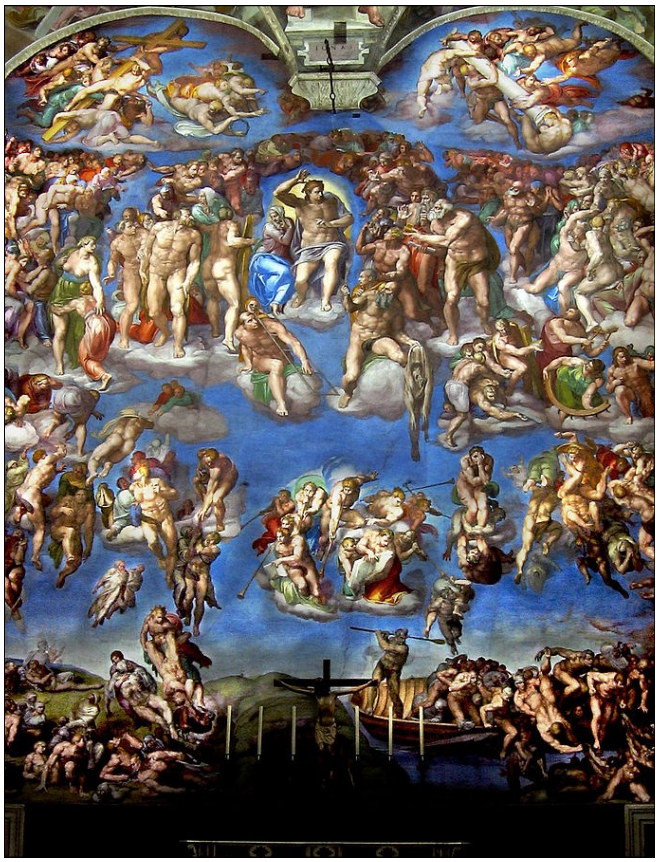
We do not know whether any animals were actually present at the Nativity. Yet the iconography of Christian devotion symbolically expresses the truth of the Incarnation in ways that transcend the literal details of the biblical text. Christ came down from heaven to redeem all creation. The next time we look at the Christmas crèche, we do well to take a moment to linger over the ox and the ass, the sheep and the camels—and give thanks for the promise of a world restored and made new in Christ.

HERE COMES ADVENT

by Nancy Gingrich

We have just celebrated the beautiful All Souls Requiem. The music was stirring, the sermon was thought-provoking, and the black vestments and catafalque were a visual reminder of the solemnity of the occasion.

Memories of the departed cannot help but come flooding into mind. Some are painful and may produce a tear. Others may rest with a gentle sadness on the heart and bring a wistful smile. Often they come at the same time and tangle into a jumble of emotions.



Detail, The Last Judgment, Michelangelo, 1536-1541, Cappella Sixtina, Vatican City

The idea of praying for the departed may be uncomfortable for some, sounding a lot like idolatry. However, we pray for them, but not to them. The sermon we heard on All Souls Day given by Fr. Pearson and the recent writings of Fr. Alexander highlight the very early example of Judas Maccabeus praying for the souls of the dead (II Maccabees 12:42-46). The Guild of All Souls does this same thing on a monthly basis. We pray for the dearly departed and their safe passage as they complete preparation to join the joyous heavenly celebration with God.

Now we are entering the time of earthly preparations for the upcoming holiday season. Soon we will be entering the expectant season of Advent. As we do, we cannot help thinking of those who won't be with us any longer. How are they? Where are they in their journey? Oh, how we wish we could see them again! We pray for all the Heavenly Host to encourage and comfort them. We remember them in our daily prayers.

When I became a widow I felt at loose ends. After all the days of caring for my husband, now I had no focus, no direction. Then I was introduced to the Guild of All Souls. Now I believe my loved one is facing the hardest task—the job of looking back on his life, including the good, the bad, and the ugly. The review of a human lifetime of sins of omission and commission is painful and requires the strength and will to atone and be purified. I came to understand that now more than ever our departed need us to pray for them. They need our encouragement and the intercession of the Saints. As a Christian, this is my ongoing job. The support of my prayers is necessary and a continuous expression of my love for my spouse, my family, and the wider circle of God's flock. Advent prepares us for Christ's coming. It is the Good News, the hope and belief of Christians everywhere. The birth of our Saviour and His subsequent death and resurrection is why we can be solemn and yet joyful celebrating the All Souls Requiem. As Christians, we will be able to see out loved ones again. This time, because of His birth, we will be re-united and in the presence of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. O come let us adore Him!

Quodlibet

by James Busby

quodlibet (kwäd'lə bet') n [ME fr. ML quodlibetum, fr. L quodlibet, fr. qui who, what + libet it pleases, fr. libere to please] 1. a piece of music combining several different melodies, usually popular tunes, in counterpoint and often a light-hearted, humorous manner - Merriam Webster

REQUIEM REDUX

With Duruflé Requiem on Remembrance Sunday still fresh of memory, I want to again thank those who contributed to Special Music last year. This permitted larger scale offerings like Stravinsky Mass with instruments on Pentecost and the Duruflé. People seemed so moved by that work in particular and have asked about our guests as well, so I include the following:

Gale Fuller, mezzo-soprano soloist in Pie Jesu movement, enjoys a varied career as director of the voice program at Wellesley College and as performer. Her published bio includes the following:

"Gale Fuller has enjoyed a career in concert and opera for over thirty years, gracing the stages of many of our American regional opera houses and orchestras, and venturing beyond the borders to include singing engagements in China, Japan and Germany. Hailed by audiences and critics alike for the sumptuousness of her singing, she has been described as the 'sultriest voice in town' by the Boston Globe.

"In the past few seasons, Ms. Fuller has been lauded for her performances at the Cabrillo Festival in California under the baton of Marin Alsop in programs of contemporary works, such as Thomas Ades', *America: A Prophecy* and *Sophie's Suite*, of Nicholas Maw. She also returned to China for performances of Elgar's, *Sea Pictures*, along with recitals and master classes in five cities."

She has performed many leading operatic roles with such companies as Boston Lyric Opera, San Diego Opera, Opera Colorado, Austin Lyric, Sacramento Opera, Opera San Jose, Opera South, Syracuse Opera, Opera Boston and the Lake George Opera Festival among others. Gale and I came of age together musically and it's been my supreme pleasure to act as her vocal coach since her grad. school years. Among my favorites of her performances are Mahler's Symphony 8 (Symphony of a Thousand) in Boston's Symphony Hall, repeated at Carnegie in New York. She's the only singer thus far for whom

Gale Fuller, mezzo-soprano

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I'll play Ravel's daunting Schéhérazade on the piano! I'm so grateful she could join us.

WEDDING BELLS

In the Schola, the biggest non-liturgical news is the wedding of alto Celia Tafuri and baritone Devon Russo, held in Trinity Church, Newport on 29th October. An altogether beautiful and touching event, Celia and Devon met in Middle School, attended URI together, endured Devon's years at Manhattan School of Music in grad. school, and are now residing in East Greenwich.

Devon and Celia Russo

Celia is a first-grade teacher in North Kingstown, where she enjoys integrating the arts into her classroom. She is native to Rhode Island and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education and a Bachelor of Music in Voice Performance. She enjoys singing with Schola Cantorum at S. Stephen's and also sings with the Boston Symphony's Tanglewood Festival Chorus, Collegium Ancora, and the Brookline Consort. Along with her interests in music she also studies dance and has choreographed operas for local colleges and dance companies.

Since Devon's introduction in *Quodlibet* last season, he has appeared in the Boston Early Music Festival and been engaged by the Connecticut Lyric Opera's Young Artist Program where he will be featured in many roles. He also busies himself on the faculties of Community College of Rhode Island and South Shore Conservatory (Massachusetts).

Both Celia and Devon are talented delights, joys with whom to work, and I'm grateful for their presence. Congratulations and best wishes, you two!

LESSONS AND CAROLS

The Service of Advent Lessons and Carols is read and sung on 3rd December at 5:30 and all the repertoire is listed in your music brochure. Do please make note and tell your friends as well. As usual, this is given in memory of Morgan Henning Stebbins and her son Cameron Duke Stebbins, the appreciated donation of an anonymous friend. Morgan was such a generous soul both in her devotion to singing in Schola and her annual gift of this event in Cameron's memory. She often gave a party before L and C to assure there'd be some fresh faces at church and I never fail to be touched remembering her at this time.

The repertoire this year speaks for itself, but I will mention we'll be doing Franz Biebl's *Ave Maria* which we recorded on the CD *The Angel and the Girl Are Met*, but haven't sung in some eleven years according to my records. The text based both on The Angelus and Ave Maria, was written for a firemen's chorus in Munich in 1964 as a contest piece for that group. It lived in relative obscurity until the Cornell University Chorus, visiting the Bavarian Radio where Biebl was music director, was given a copy of it. Shortly thereafter the men's group Chanticleer recorded it and it became a hit, both in USA and Germany. Around the time of the recording I was given a copy by Chanticleer counter-tenor, Ken Fitch, a former choirman of mine, and I've loved

programming it since, always in the original version for the singing firemen!

WHY, POLYPHONY?

When I assumed responsibility for writing Quodlibet with the October 2012 issue of *The S. Stephen*, I commenced asking the question "Why, Polyphony?" of whomever might be around. (Polyphony being the musical style of the renaissance, meaning literally multiple voices. It is the style of which we do a goodly amount and what I think we do best.) In that issue my query was answered by both distinguished colleague Edith Ho, Emerita at The Church of the Advent, and long-time S. Stephen cantor, Peter Gibson. I've asked this on handsful of occasions and have been delighted with the answers. Sunday last, Brent Whitted, tenor, was visiting for the first time since 2006, he being engaged acting professionally, teaching, and singing in London. Brent has returned to USA to teach theater at Kent Place School in Summit New Jersey, and his thoughtful answer is as follows:

"With its ficta, cross relations, suspensions, melismas, and cadences mimicking forms of rhetorical speech, polyphony comes across to me—a musical dilettante—as the most plausible and natural musical equivalent to human conversation. The contours of what is said, implied, and inferred in human conversation form an elaborate network of transacted meaning that polyphony expresses in terms of overlapping and intersecting musical voices—each ebbing and flowing in its relative dominance from one moment to the next. Whereas homophony offers an artificially simultaneous expression of the collective unconscious, polyphony explores the paradoxical interdependency of human voices in concerted conflict."

I appreciate your offering, Brent.

Brent Whitted, tenor

IN CLOSING

I remind you we are blessed by an embarrassment of riches at S. Stephen's that can't be taken for granted or presumed to flourish without nurture. The late George Guest, choir trainer *par excellence* and Master of Music at St. John's College Cambridge, spoke of the great music of the church - sacred polyphony - being something we Anglicans think of as precious jewels, polishing and protecting until the Roman Catholic Church might want them back!

With that I shall leave you. James

The S. Stephen is published by S. Stephen's Church in Providence, 114 George Street, Providence, Rhode Island; Phone: 401-421-6702, Email: office@sstephens.necoxmail.com; Editor-in-Chief: The Rev'd John D. Alexander, Rector; Copy Editor: Phoebe Pettingell, Phoebe1446@aol.com; Layout and Design: Jacob M. A. Ihnen.

S. Stephen's Church in Providence
114 George Street
Providence, RI 02906