

# The Peppercorn

St. Peter's Newsletter

December 2011

Dear Friends in Christ,

Is it Christmas?

No, this is not the same question that little children might ask daily in December: *Is it Christmas yet?* Because, as we all know, it's not Christmas YET. By the time most of St. Peter's parishioners receive this Peppercorn, there will still be about three weeks until Christmas morning.

This is a different question: *Is it Christmas?* That was the address of a website I was directed to. Please look it up yourself. It's worth entering <http://www.isitchristmas.com> into your web browser. (Suffice it to say that the answer is a resounding "No." although you might be startled by the way this website answers the question.) When I followed that link earlier today, it led me to think that truly it is NOT Christmas. Not now, not yet. And maybe even Christmas isn't Christmas.

Let me explain what I mean by reciting some startling statistics I read this week. Did you know that Americans spend \$450 Billion on Christmas every year? (That's Billion, with a B. That's billion with 10 zeros. \$450, 000, 000, 000.)

No wonder the mall is mobbed. No wonder it's so to find a spot in the parking lot. No wonder that so many people's credit cards are maxed out. (According to a British report, it can take up to 12 years to pay off a holiday tab. At 18.12% interest, a moderately-sized credit load can eat up years of payments if you only pay the minimum each month.)

That's not Christmas. The word Christmas comes from the Medieval "Christ's Mass," which is what the celebration once was all about. It was a religious observance. Maybe you didn't know that so much of what we have come to expect from a 'traditional' Christmas celebration – everything from presents to parties to pine trees -- is a relatively recent development. In this country, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Puritans in Massachusetts actually passed a law forbidding the celebration of Christmas. Since the celebration of Christmas was not found in the Bible and the date of Christmas wasn't even fixed until sometime in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, our forebears frowned on Christmas as sinister and unbiblical. Most of what we think of as traditional Christmas festivities didn't develop until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. My point in this little history lesson is this: what we think of as a traditional appropriate and suitable "Christmas" is not only not essential, it isn't even really Christmas. So you don't need to feel as if you're doing something wrong if you are not celebrating the way you always did before. It's OK not to be feeling merry at this time of year.

Because the first Christmas was no merry celebration. Mary and Joseph were poor. She was almost certainly a teenager, and she was pregnant at a time when a complicated birth and delivery meant almost certain death for both the mother and the child. She was giving birth in a stable – unheated at the coldest time of the year, crowded with animals, in appallingly unsanitary conditions. She was far from her family and friends. Surely it was not what she had in mind for the birth of her first-born. Our culture has so sanitized and sentimentalized the manger that we fail to realize – this was a desperate situation.

But there, in the stable, is the real Christmas and the holy message of comfort, peace and hope. God loved us enough to enter our world and to share in the fullness of human condition. God took on human form and human flesh. God became one of us.

So Christmas is not Christmas -- our modern celebration of over-spending, over-drinking, and overeating is not Christ's Mass. To celebrate God's becoming one of us, maybe we could spend less but give more. Instead of giving *presents*, maybe we could give *presence*-- the gift of ourselves. Maybe if enough of us cut back on our Christmas spending, some of the funds expended on ugly sweaters could be diverted, and \$20 Billion could be raised to bring clean water to those places in the world where there is none. (See <http://www.adventconspiracy.com> for more on this.)

For more about Christ's Mass see "Gifts for life" at <http://www.er-d.org>, which is the internet presence of Episcopal Relief and Development. Or for more about the real celebration volunteer your time at a soup kitchen, or a hospital, or a school. Or say a prayer. Or pick up your Bible and read it. Or join in some of the Advent events here at St. Peter's (more later in this issue)

Since it's not Christmas...we can celebrate Christmas.

Tidings of Comfort and Joy,

Frank+



**Blue Christmas:** 'Tis the season for merriment, laughter, fun, family, friends, and togetherness...or so they say. But what happens if you're not feeling 'merry' during the grand countdown to Christmas? What do you do if it's difficult to laugh, if you don't feel 'in the Christmas spirit'? For all kinds of reasons -- the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, health problems, the breakup of a marriage -- it can be hard to feel merry at this time of year. The annual Blue Christmas service at St. Peter's Church is our way of acknowledging the reality that for some, this is a lonely and difficult season. In prayers, quiet, candle lighting, music, and an informal service of Holy Communion we come together and meet God who loves us, knows our pain, and reaches out to us in our sadness, loneliness, and pain. All are welcome -- please invite family members, friends, and neighbors -- anyone who is 'blue' this Christmas season. Blue Christmas will be held at 7:30PM on Wednesday, December 14, 2011.

### THE JOURNEY

Here's a way to prepare for Christmas that doesn't involve going to the mall, spending money, baking cookies or listening to one more tired rendition of *The Little Drummer Boy*. For the next three Sundays of Advent, take a journey. *The Journey* is an adult learning program focused on the journey that Mary and Joseph took from Nazareth to Bethlehem just before Jesus was born. Offered in St. Peter's parish hall at Bible Café Sunday mornings at 10:20, the program begins with a brief DVD recording featuring pastor and teacher Adam Hamilton. Using footage filmed at historical and archeological sites in the Holy Land, the recording also contains reflections and meditations on the themes of this important story. The program will also offer time for questions, discussion and other include interactive elements. Take a journey of preparation this Advent. And you don't even have to leave Freehold!

## WEDNESDAY SERVICES

Every Wednesday at 9:00AM , a simple service of Holy Eucharist is held in the chapel. Usually, the readings and brief sermon focus on the themes of the season, but sometimes on the Saint whose day is celebrated on that date. The service concludes with prayers for healing when names on our parish prayer list are read, and intercessions are offered for all in need. Before the conclusion of the service, those present come to the altar rail a second time for the laying-on-of-hands and anointing for healing. This a time of quiet and contemplation – a good way to observe the Advent discipline of watching and waiting.



### Advent Meditations

Daily meditations for your reading and contemplation are posted each day in Advent, Monday-Saturday, on

<http://stpetersadventmeditations.blogspot.com>

Visit the website each day for an opportunity to read and respond to meditations and reflections by members of our parish.

### Women of St. Peter's

The Annual Holiday Bazaar sponsored by the Women of St. Peter's has come and gone. It was a success financially and a good fellowship event as well. We could not have done it without the support of the congregation and Fr. Frank. Our president, Carolyn Wilson, showed outstanding leadership and was everywhere helping in so many

ways she deserves a special mention. Next, we must send our grateful thanks to all the bakers who once again provided us with ample home baked goodies to tempt all who came through the doors. To those two talented crafty ladies, Linda Boyle and Dot Davis, special thanks for sharing your talents and the fruits of your labors. What a nice selection of handmade articles, such clever pieces for gifts and for the home. And of course, June Vawter, our jam lady deserves our gratitude. Her jams add so much to the baked goods table. Also we are grateful, once again, to Carl for being such a supporter, sharing his talent (and his jams among other things) as well as his capacity for hard work. For set up and break down there was the able assistance of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew and the Mayer "boys", Rob, Robbie and Andy really lent helping hands. A big "thank-you" to Sylvia and the Thrift Shop for sharing treasures found in the many boxes that have to be sorted every day.

On Saturday, the volunteers were treated to lunch with great sandwiches from both All Seasons Diner just up off Throckmorton Street on Rte. 9 and Perkins restaurant also on Rte. 9 in Freehold. That was really nice and there was enough for us to have "leftovers" on Sunday while cleaning up.

Special friends, Ellen and Paige once again joined us to lend their helping hands. Parishioners who are not able to attend our meetings joined in behind the tables, working to help make the bazaar a success. Special thanks to Lauren Lane, we know that a teenage girl can find more fun things to do!

This year we had "door prizes" which were donated by Delicious Orchards, Battleview Orchards and Cathy Vedder. We also had the dollhouse, our silent auction item. It was created from a kit by Donna O'Leary and family. What a great job they did, it was the focal point of the room in all its pink Victorian glory.

Well, I know someone has been left out, so a general thank-you to every single soul who priced, set-up, organized, baked, "jammed", sewed, shopped, cleaned up and helped get the Parish Hall back to normal. Please know that your efforts were very much appreciated by the Women of St. Peter's.

**Youth Outreach Gathering:**

On December 17th our youth in grades 7 through 12 will gather to make chocolate candy and treats that we will sell at church on Sunday the 18th. We will also do a craft to give as "favors" at our December 23rd community supper and make up Christmas stockings for the homeless men in our emergency housing program.

Please save this date and plan to help us out that day. We will be gathering at 12PM and working together until our shared supper at 5PM.

This will be a great opportunity for our confirmation classes to get service hours. We can also use lots of help from parents as well!

Please plan to join us! This promises to be a full and fun day of fellowship and Christian service, and a perfect way to usher in Christmas week!

You need not stay the entire time; whatever time you can give will be greatly appreciated! Contact Deacon Catherine at [deacon@stpetersfreehold.org](mailto:deacon@stpetersfreehold.org) for more information or to confirm your plan to attend!



**Christmas Memorials**

If you would like to order memorials this Christmas, please include this form with your check to St. Peter's Church. The Deadline for flower memorials is December 11th. We suggest a minimum contribution of \$20.00 per memorial.

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

Your name:

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In Memory of :

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## GOLDEN RULE FUND

Back at the end of the summer, this area of New Jersey was hard-hit by the Tropical Storm Irene, and much damage was done. One place that suffered particularly serious damage was St. Peter's Episcopal Church in the nearby town of Spotswood, where a creek running through their property overwhelmed its banks and flooded the lower level of both the church building as well as their parish house. Much of the damage was uninsured.

Through the generosity of the people of this parish, we were able to send \$1000 to support their efforts of rebuilding their property. This correspondence arrived recently in our mailbox:



“We  
**believe**  
that we are  
saved through  
the grace of  
**the  
Lord  
Jesus**”  
*(St. Peter: Acts 15:11)*

**St. Peter's Episcopal Church**  
SPOTSWOOD, NEW JERSEY

“We who are many are one body, because  
we share one bread and one cup”  
*(Tracton Anthem -1982 Ingerwal)*

ST. PETER'S IS SO GRATEFUL FOR  
YOUR SUPPORT AS WE MOVE FORWARD IN THIS  
GRACE-FILLED RESTORATION.

YOUR WILLINGNESS TO HELP EMPHASIZES THAT NONE  
OF US ARE EVER TRULY ALONE BUT WE ARE INSTEAD  
ALL ONE IN CHRIST.

GOD'S PEACE BE WITH YOU,

THE REV. MARSHALL K. SHELLY - RECTOR  
LAURA BONAMICI - SR. WARDEN  
AND THE VESTRY:  
ART CAMPBELL, DIANE CHIARELLA, KATHIE EVANS,  
BRETT FAGAN, MARIA FERGUSON,  
DOROTHY GABBETT, WARREN HIMICH, ERIC PERTSCHUK

## SUNDAY SERMONS

If you missed a Sunday because of work, illness, or travel, you don't need to miss the Sunday sermon, which is now posted on our website, <http://www.stpetersfreehold.org>. Click the link on the homepage and you should be taken to YouTube where the video has been uploaded.



## *Christmas Services at St. Peter's*

Saturday, December 24: *Christmas Eve*

4:00 pm Family Eucharist

with music from Peter's Rock, congregational carols, and a children's sermon.

7:00 pm Holy Eucharist,

with congregational carols and music from Jubilation Choir and Bellissima Ringers.

10:00 pm

Festival of Lessons & Carols and Choral Eucharist

with congregational carols and music from St. Peter's Choir and King's Peal.

Sunday, December 25: *Christmas Day*

9:00 am Holy Eucharist,

a quiet service in the chapel.