

## ***THE EPISTLE – JANUARY 2010***

Dear Friends:

In the *Hymnal 1940* there is a section labeled “Hymns for Children”, and the first verse of the first hymn in that section goes:

Advent tells us Christ is near;  
Christmas tells Christ is here.  
In Epiphany we trace  
All the glory of his grace.

When this issue of the *Epistle* arrives we will be in the process of tracing the glory of God in the person of Jesus.

Most of us were taught in Church School or in confirmation class that the word “Epiphany” means something like “shown forth” with the idea that the child Jesus was shown forth to the gentile world coming to him in the guise of the three wise men. But like so many Greek words the meaning of the word for Epiphany simply cannot be conveyed by a single English word or two.

The root meaning of Epiphany is very reflective of the opening verses of the Gospel according to John in which the writer depicts Jesus as the life that was the light of all people, and he goes on to write: *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* So, as the Greek word Epiphany conveys, we have entered into the season in which Jesus will bring the light, or the glory of God’s grace will be given light. It will appear. It will become evident. All of these things are contained in the word Epiphany.

As the church calendar reminds us every year, the Feast of Epiphany is celebrated on January 6<sup>th</sup>, twelve days after Christmas, and so for centuries the evening of this feast has been a time for the enjoyment of good food, merriment, and the marking of the end of Christmas season. It moves us into the time when the God who has become incarnate in the person of Jesus is brought into the light, is made manifest.

All of this is reflected in the lessons that we will be hearing throughout this season. Interestingly, the season of Epiphany has an accordion-like quality to it in that the number of Sundays that make up the season expand or contract depending upon when Ash Wednesday is to be marked. This year, since Ash Wednesday falls on February 17<sup>th</sup>, Epiphany will be six Sundays in length.

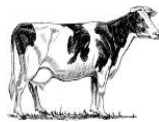
The Sunday after Epiphany is always marked as the Baptism of the Lord. It is the Sunday on which we always hear a Gospel lesson in which Jesus is proclaimed as God’s beloved, and we remember our own baptismal vows found in the Baptismal Covenant. On subsequent Sundays this year the Gospel lessons will tell stories of the signs of God presence in Jesus such as in the wedding at Cana story. Others will contain stories of

healings and other miraculous events and stories of Jesus being rejected by those from his own home town. On the last Sunday after Epiphany we always hear a version of the transfiguration story in which Jesus is reaffirmed as God's beloved.

In essence what this season does is move us very quickly from the nostalgia that is so often associated with Christmas to the adult Jesus as he begins his ministry in earnest and who in a very short period of time will be facing the agony of the cross. Epiphany is a transitional season, and it serves as a reminder that when it comes to fulfilling the vows of our own baptism there is little time for nostalgia. There is important work to be done, and we need to get on with it.

Allan+

**ADULT STUDY: HALLELUJAH – THE BIBLE AND HANDEL’S MESSIAH**  
The Adult Study Group will reconvene in February to continue its exploration of Handel’s *Messiah* during Lent. Come join the group and see how music and text (from Isaiah, Job, the Psalms, 2 Samuel, the Gospel of John, 1 Corinthians, and Revelation) combine to bring *Messiah* and the Bible alive. The Lenten Study Group will meet on Tuesday mornings, beginning February 23<sup>rd</sup>, from 10:30-12:00 in the Parish Hall. There will be six sessions. The Resource Book (to be provided) includes an orientation for new group members. **If you are interested in joining, please let JoAnn Palmer know by February 12<sup>th</sup>** to allow time for ordering and delivery of additional books.



We Have a

!!!

Thank you for the outpouring of support! The Episcopal Relief & Development cow is a reality. McKinley and Buck are more than pleased to be ordering a cow. It will make a difference in one family's life as they start a small business. Donna Guess and I express our gratitude with a cheer of, "Yeh!"

Carolyn

**JANUARY BIRTHDAYS:** *O God, our times are in your hand: look with favor, we pray, on your servants as they begin another year. Grant that they may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen their trust in your goodness all the days of their lives. BCP*

Robert Ellison, Jr.	1/12	Sallie Lindsay	1/22
Gloria Hood	1/19	Mary Jane Lever	1/30
Dee Dee Branham	1/22		

**DONATION TO THE ALTAR GUILD:** A donation was made to the Altar Guild by Harriette Palmer Peay in memory of Sara McCollough Palmer and her many years of devoted service to St. Stephen's. Harriette's gift, though specifically given in memory of Sara Palmer, reminds us of the thanks we owe to all the women who faithfully have served in this ministry through the years.

**OPEN DATES FOR ALTAR FLOWERS:** There are plenty of opportunities left to sign up for altar flowers (and greens). Flowers add beauty to the church and can be given to remember, honor or give thanks for people and events. The sign up sheet is on the bulletin board.

**2010 SOUPER BOWL OF CARING – FEBRUARY 7<sup>TH</sup>:** The Souper Bowl of Caring began (in Columbia, SC) over 20 years ago when a youth group offered this simple prayer: "Lord, as we enjoy the Super Bowl football game, help us to be mindful of those without even a bowl of soup." Since that day, over \$60 million has been raised for local charities across the country. *The Food Research and Action Center provides the following household-level data for South Carolina (2006-2008 Average): 13.1% experienced Food Insecurity and 5.2% experienced Very Low Food Security, ranking South Carolina 15<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, respectively, in the nation.* St. Stephen's supports Harvest Hope Food Bank each year through Outreach Funds, the people of St. Stephen's give specific food items to Fairfield County Food Bank, and St. Stephen's youth designate a local charity each year to receive the Souper Bowl of Caring collection. But, there is still great need, one that we can begin to address in 2010 by giving generously at this year's event. Ways to do this between now and February 7<sup>th</sup>: Set aside \$1 each time you say "I'm starving" or "I'm hungry"; decide on an amount to give, per person, each time you eat out; save your grocery receipts and give the amount you spent on impulse purchases or food items that added no nutritional value to your meals. If you won't be able to attend on February 7<sup>th</sup>, send your donations by a family member or friend, or by mail, or bring it the Sunday before. "*Come you that are blessed by my Father...for I was hungry and you gave me food...*" (Matthew 25:35)

SERMONS AVAILABLE...

If, for some reason, you can't attend a service but would like to receive a copy of the sermon, Fr. Belton and the Episcopal Church Women can make that possible. Contact Donna Guess via e-mail ([guessart1@sc.rr.com](mailto:guessart1@sc.rr.com)) or telephone (803-699-7998) and let her know. She'll send you a copy of the sermon, bulletin and inserts for that Sunday.