

SANCTUARY

Newsletter of St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Elberton, Georgia

February Calendar

Holy Eucharist, 10:30 a.m. (Eucharistic prayer Form B for Epiphany, Form A in Lent)

Sunday School, 9:30 a.m., vestry room

Bible Study, Monday noon, vestry room

Feb. 8, Vestry meeting, 6 p.m., vestry room

Feb. 9, Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper, 6 p.m., Parish Hall

Feb. 10, Ash Wednesday, imposition of ashes (drop in), 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., St. Alban's

Feb. 10, Joint Ash Wednesday service, First Methodist, 6:30 p.m.

Feb. 14, First Sunday in Lent, SafeHouse Sunday

Feb. 17 & 24, Mar. 2 & 9, Lenten Soup Suppers, 6 p.m., Parish Hall

February Birthdays

Louise Martin, 7
Nancy Seymour, 15
John Keeler, 19

Prayer List

Ann, Ben, Betty & Richard, Brian, Debra, Dolores, Donna, Gail, Jackie, Jennifer, Kim, Macie, Nathan, Pat, Patricia, and others in our hearts.

Rector's Reflection



The season of Epiphany is a time when we should be surprised. It's the season where Jesus begins to show us who He is and gives us hints of what He came into the world to do.

We see Him stay behind after His parents leave Jerusalem and surprise them when they find Him and see what He's doing. We see Jesus surprise John the Baptist at the Jordan River and maybe even be surprised Himself when the sky opens and the Holy Spirit in bodily form descends. We see Jesus, reluctant at first, then with unbounded generosity, turn water into wine.

We know these and other stories we read, think about during the Epiphany season, but are we surprised by them? Probably not, but we should be. If we look at them as stories that happened a long time ago or that we've heard before, there's not a lot to be surprised about. If we look at them differently, we might find that there are still surprises for us in these familiar stories.

The way to look at them is not as old, familiar stories, but as stories that are for us in the world we live in. We read them and reread them, ask questions and discover new surprises each time. We probe them to see how they relate to our lives and find that they often poke us back in surprising ways.

Epiphany is a season for surprises. We just need to look for them and expect them. *Blessings, Fr. John+*

Bishop Whitmore will visit St. Alban's on June 26.

Annual Meeting

On January 10, twenty-nine attended Eucharist. After the service, twenty-six trooped downstairs for lunch and the annual meeting. Renee Hunt catered a delicious roast beef lunch with trimmings; dessert was banana pudding.

At the meeting Charles Romine, treasurer, passed out the yearly treasurer's report. Contributions for 2015 were \$58,476.14 (as compared to \$56,078.15 in 2014). During the year we took \$20,000 out of savings so that income totaled \$78,476.14. Expenses totaled \$77,935.16 (as compared to \$70,909.17 in 2014).

Fr. John gave a brief rector's report in which he emphasized the different sorts of services we had tried during 2015: ecumenical services for Easter and Christmas and services different from necessity (candlelit because power out and downstairs because no heat in church proper). He had favorable reports from all the different services, so we might think what different services we could try this coming year.

In the vestry election, Marilyn Slocumbe and Louise Martin were elected to fill the seats vacated by Nancy Seymour and Charles Duke.



Lent and Easter Schedule

Every year we look forward to our Palm Sunday and Easter services at St. Alban's. Preceding Easter this year, several joint services are planned with First Methodist and Holy Trinity Lutheran churches. On Ash Wednesday (Feb. 10) a joint service will be held at First Methodist at 6:30 p.m., sermon by the Rev. Karen Schwindler, pastor of Trinity Lutheran (imposition of ashes will be available on a drop-in basis from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at St. Alban's). On Maunday Thursday (Mar. 24) the 6:30 p.m. service will be at Holy Trinity, with Fr. John delivering the sermon. A Good Friday service will take place at noon on Mar. 25 at St. Alban's with the sermon by the Rev. Joe Watson of First Methodist. St. Alban's will also be the site of Saturday Mar. 26's Easter Vigil (7 p.m., sermon by the Rev. Joe Watson). In addition to the 10:30 a.m. service at St. Alban's on Easter Sunday (Mar. 27), there will be a community Easter Sunrise service on the grounds of First Methodist Church at 7:15 a.m.; Fr. John will deliver the sermon.

Our Lenten soup suppers will take place on four Wednesday evenings at 6 p.m.: February 17 and 24 and March 2 and 9. Programs will be on the topic "Why we do what we do," an explanation of the Episcopal Church. Fr. John says, "We believe that how we pray shapes how

we believe. We'll look at what we do from visual, verbal, movement, and spiritual viewpoints. These programs are for us as Episcopalians as well as the public. This is a good opportunity to invite your friends to come and explore with us. I'm looking forward to being with you."



Scenes from January 17: (above) Penny McLanahan on her way out of the vestry room as Sunday school lets out; (right) Allen Nicas on the lookout for the next person to greet. (Photos courtesy of Mary Randall and her iPad)



Sanctuary is produced
monthly by

St. Alban's Episcopal
Church
109 Brookside Drive
Elberton, GA 30635

Website: [www.stalbans-
elberton.org](http://www.stalbans-
elberton.org)

Tel.: 706-283-4563

Email:
stalbans@elberton.net

The Rev. John Keeler,
Rector
The Rev. Herschel
Atkinson,
Rector Emeritus

Carole Coggins,
Altar Guild Chair
Suzanne Moore,
Organist

Mary Randall, Verger

Vestry

Steve Jenkins, Sr. Warden

Louise Martin
Suzanne Moore
Allen Nicas

Debra Romine

Marilyn Slocumbe

Robyn Keeler, vestry
secretary

Charles Romine,
treasurer

Anglican Communion Meeting

On September 17 Fr. John talked in Sunday School about the results of the Anglican Communion meeting in London the week before. His feeling is that the only real result of sanctions voted against the U.S. Episcopal Church is the possible loss of committee appointments over the next three years.

Following is part of a Guardian article of Thursday January 14; the writer is Harriet Sherwood, religion correspondent.

A permanent split in the global Anglican communion over gay rights has been averted after archbishops overwhelmingly agreed to impose sanctions against the liberal U.S. church and issue a statement in support of the "traditional doctrine" that marriage should be between a man and a woman. The punitive measures and conservative statement came after four days of "painful" talks in Canterbury aimed at moving the world's 85 million-strong Anglican fellowship beyond deep divisions over homosexuality between liberals and conservatives.

An agreement, published on Thursday evening, said the U.S. Episcopal Church's acceptance of same-sex marriage represented "a fundamental departure from the faith and teaching held by the majority of our provinces on the doctrine of marriage." In a passage that dismayed liberal Anglicans, the agreement explicitly added: "The traditional doctrine of the church, in view of the teaching of scripture, upholds marriage as between a man and a woman in faithful, lifelong union. The majority of those gathered reaffirm this teaching." Under the agreement, the U.S. Episcopal Church has been banned from representation on key bodies and barred from voting on issues relating to doctrine or strategy for three years. However, it will remain a member of the Anglican communion.

The text acknowledged the "deep pain" of the divisions within the communion but adds: "It is our unanimous desire to walk together." However, one senior church source described it as a "very fragile agreement."
(continued on p. 5)

Anglican Communion Meeting (cont'd)

Members of Gafcon, a group of conservative Anglicans deeply opposed to same sex marriage and gay rights, have been agitating for sanctions to be imposed on the U.S. Episcopal Church for twelve years, since the consecration of a gay priest, Gene Robinson, as bishop of New Hampshire. In a statement, Gafcon leaders added: "In particular, it must be recognized that the continuing brokenness of the communion is not the result simply of failed relationships, but is caused by the persistent rejection of biblical and apostolic faith. . . . We are therefore disappointed that the primates' statement makes no reference to the need for repentance."

The agreement will be seen by some as a success for Justin Welby, the archbishop of Canterbury, who had called the church's leaders to Britain amid expectations that the Anglican body would in effect dissolve because of fundamental disagreements over gay rights. Welby and his supporters are expected to present the agreement as one of reconciliation.

The deal, however, triggered an anguished response from many liberal Anglicans. "This decision will bring real pain," Michael Curry, the presiding bishop of the U.S. Episcopal Church, said. "For many who have felt and been rejected by the church because of who they are, for many who have felt and been rejected by families and communities, our church opening itself in love was a sign of hope. And this will add pain on top of pain." He also remarked, "Our commitment to be an inclusive church is not based on a social theory or capitulation to the ways of the culture, but on our belief that the outstretched arms of Jesus on the cross are a sign of the very love of God reaching out to us all."

This week's debate was described as passionate and emotive, but not acrimonious—although there were a "number of critical moments," according to one insider. At the heart of the split is the difference in view between liberal churches of North America, which recognize gay marriage, and African churches, led by Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria, which support the recriminalization of homosexual activity. A small number of archbishops voted against the move and some abstained, but in the end only the archbishop of Uganda walked out of the summit, after failing to win backing for a resolution calling for the voluntary withdrawal from the U.S. and Canadian churches.

Welby wants the Anglican communion to focus on important issues such as religious violence and climate change rather than differences over sexuality (which seem unresolvable). He summoned the thirty-eight leaders to Canterbury to consider a proposal that, in the face of intractable strife, the communion refashion itself as a loose confederation of churches rather than adherents to a common doctrine.

Underlying the overt disagreements over sexuality and gay rights is a resistance in some provinces to the dominance of more liberal churches in the United States and the United Kingdom. Some church leaders in countries in the global south, whose churches are growing in contrast to declining congregations in the U.K., resent being expected to fall into line with their former colonial masters.

Christian Site Destroyed in Iraq

Satellite photos have confirmed what church leaders and Middle East preservationists had feared: St. Elijah's Monastery, the oldest Christian monastery in Iraq, has been reduced to a field of rubble—yet another victim of the Islamic State's relentless destruction of heritage sites it considers heretical. One expert pinpointed the destruction between August and September 2014. New photos show that the 1,400-year-old monastery's stone walls "have been literally pulverized." Stephen Wood, an imagery analyst, reported, "Bulldozers, heavy equipment, sledgehammers, possibly explosives turned those stone walls into this field of gray-white dust."

St. Elijah's Monastery was believed to have been constructed by Assyrian monks in the late sixth century. It was later claimed by a Chaldean Catholic order. In 1743, its monks were given an ultimatum by Persian forces to convert to Islam. They refused, and as many as 150 were massacred.

Father Paul Thabit Habib, a Catholic priest from Mosul who now lives in Kurdish-administered Irbil, says that "the monastery attracted all the people from Mosul—Christians and Muslims. All the poets, historians, and travelers wrote about this monastery. It became a very important place for the history of the Church in Iraq."

In the 1970s, the monastery became a base for the Iraqi Republican Guard, and in 2003 one of its walls was damaged by the impact of a T-72 tank turret that was hit by a missile during the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. The U.S. Army itself used the monastery as a base before a chaplain recognized its importance and a commander ordered it to be cleared.



(Above) Satellite images showing the site of St. Elijah's Monastery in March 2011 and September 2014. (Left) St. Elijah's Monastery, or Deir Mar Elia, the oldest Christian monastery in Iraq.