



The Shepherd's Staff

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Christmas Preview in Chico

Bishop Hansen has reported that an annual Chico event sponsored by the downtown business association, **The Christmas Preview**, usually held on a Sunday late in November, was postponed to the 2nd of December this year due to the still-burning Paradise/Camp Fire and its smoky atmosphere. St. Augustine's had determined to give a place for Christ in Christmas, following the city's huge tree lighting and all the stores opening with festivity.



St. Augustine's sits just at the edge of the commercial core of Chico, visible from a jeweler's shop and the city parking garage. So, the parish lit the night with LED luminaria, set up a PA system for the church choir in our tower entry, and greeted the night with Christmas carols, flute and organ solos, and Laurel Posey singing "Mary did you know?" Bishop Hansen played and sang his original song, "Bethlehem Child."

People gathered, entered the church and were greeted with windows festively set with candles and holly leaves and berries. Deacon Brian Faith and members of the church greeted visitors with an introductory pamphlet and answered questions about the age of the building, the manner of our worship, and how we differ from Roman Catholics.

The parish printed 100 pamphlets, complete with an invitation to Christmas Eve midnight Mass, in full color but ran out mid-way and had to print 50 more. Cookies and hot spiced cider rewarded the folk who had so enjoyed a look at the little church they'd never seen inside, and they left happy, taking hope and joy into the night.



Christmas Pageant at St. Thomas, San Francisco

A joyous Christmas pageant was performed at St. Thomas' Anglican Church, San Francisco, on December 23 during the 10 a.m. Mass, including faithful families—Conrads, Frings, Judsons, and Soters—who returned with their children and grandchildren. Thanks be to God for his gifts of grace! For the American Church Union script used in many of our APCK parishes, visit www.AmericanChurchUnion.com and click on "Our Parish Christmas Pageant, a Traditional Telling."



News from Saint Joseph's Berkeley

Zeng Zengrong was baptized at St. Joseph's on December 9. He is a doctoral student in Organic Chemistry at Cal and joined our community a few months ago. We love having this faithful young man with us, who has come all the way from Singapore. He is studying to be confirmed.



Mark McClay has been a faithful member of St. Joseph's parish for many years. He graduated in Classics from Cal and is nearly finished with his doctorate. He is leaving us for a teaching position at the University of Miami. Mark is a man of many talents for he plays the organ and has helped us out on many occasions. We shall miss him, but he has promised to return to his St. Joseph's family and will always remember us.

Saint Mark's Portland Greening the Church and Christmas Pageant



A Christmas Eve Sermon

I have never liked the cold. In fact, the only times I ever welcomed the cold was early in the mornings, when I used to fish in the High Sierras but when I had to catch that 5:00 a.m. train to get to my former teaching job, I was not (no pun intended) a happy camper. But one thing I noticed in the High Sierras or in the early morning before dawn was the brightness of the stars in the heavens. I would gaze into the sky and I would be connected to the ancients who lived under bright, starry skies all their lives. When I was in my teens, I was taken to the Griffith Park Observatory and watched a presentation of how, using complicated calculations and historical star charting, astronomers were convinced that there was a wandering star in the sky at the time Jesus was born.

It is a wonderful coincidence then that Saint Luke's Gospel (Luke 2.1ff) is the ancient Gospel appointed in the old English Sarum Rite (as well as the Latin or Roman Rite) for the first or Midnight Mass of Christmas. [It was also appointed in the first 1549 Prayer Book, dropped in 1552 but restored in the American Prayer Book in 1892) It touchingly tells the story of that starry, cold Christmas night that changed the world we live in forever – even for non-believers. The birth of the Saviour contrasts the mighty Roman Empire with an insignificant village called Bethlehem, the ancient city of David. We are told that the King of kings was born in a stable and laid in a manger because there were no rooms available in the local inns. It was cold, and the Baby was wrapped in swaddling clothes or narrow strips of cloth; and most certainly not of the best quality.

And nearby, there were shepherds shivering in the cold and watching their sheep under that starry night. And suddenly an angel appeared among them in great brightness and they were terrified. But the angel called to them and told them not to be afraid because the Saviour, Christ the Lord is born in the City of David. They all knew what that meant but I am sure they did not fully understand when they hastened to that stable and found a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. And then the stars were blotted out with light and the sky was filled with angels who sang: *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will towards men.*

But if the Gospel describes the when, the Epistle (Titus 2.11ff) states the why. It too was appointed in the ancient Sarum and Roman Missals as appropriate essay that connects Christ's first Advent or coming (*as he hath appeared to all men*) with his second coming *when he shall come to be our judge*. And the heart of that message is found in the words: *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, that we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world*. Saint John Chrysostom observed that *worldly things are things which do not pass over with us into heaven but are dissolved together with this present world*.

The point is that the Christ Child was born that we might turn our hearts away from the coldness and self-centeredness of sin and bring forth the light of Christ in our lives. The prophet Isaiah prophesied this aspect of Christmas and this warming of the human heart when he said: *Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil* (Isaiah 1.16). And all this came to pass in Bethlehem that we might listen to that Child who would redeem us from all iniquity and make us a special people known for our good works.

I have never liked the cold, but I have never felt the cold on Christmas Eve; I have never felt darkness on Christmas Eve; I have only felt an inner warmth and joy on Christmas Eve. Leo Tolstoy best summed up the Joy of Christmas best when he quipped that *joy can only be real if people look upon their life as a service and have a definite object in life outside themselves and their personal happiness*. Only then, my friends, can we forget the cold, see the stars and join in the angels' song: *Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will towards men.*