



St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
Newsletter

A Church for People Who Wonder

Our mission:

to make Christ known and to spread the good news of the Gospel; to nourish the spiritual growth of the congregation, to serve the local community and the world in Christ's Name; and to be responsible stewards of our time, talent and treasure.



Newsletter ~ December 21, 2011

Dear People of St. Stephen's,

In 1994 the Rev. Richard H. Schmidt wrote a reflection in *Episcopal Life* magazine entitled, "Christmas: Let Me Hold You, Dear Little Jesus." Inspired by his image of holding the infant Christ, here are some words for our hearts' prayer on this Christmas Eve:

Little Jesus, let us hold you now. On this holy night, when you are a newborn baby, let us cradle you in our arms. Let us hold you and keep you warm. Now, while you are small and vulnerable, let us watch over you. We want to hold you now, because many times in time to come, you will hold us.

Rest well, sweet baby. Rest your tiny hands. For though you are the King of kings, you will touch no silk, you will carry no gold. You will grasp no earthly scepter, sign no imperial decrees. You will use your hands for far more precious works: touching a leper's wound, wiping away a widow's tear, blessing and breaking bread, and giving it to your friends. Your hands, now so perfect, so tender, so tiny, will someday be wounded for us.

Sleep well, sweet baby. Rest your tiny eyes. For someday you will look at the world and you will see the pain and loneliness and ache that humans bear. You will look at us and see us just as we are, with all our sins and loveliness both. You will look and see the Christ within each one of us, and you will try to teach us to see it too.

Hush now, sweet baby. Rest your tiny mouth. Your voice will summon the dead to life. Your words will define grace, pronounce blessings, teach, and paint pictures with words so we too might see our eternal God the way you know God to be. Your mouth will speak forgiveness to those who wrong you, will send us forth in your name to all the world. Your words will echo down through centuries, bringing meaning and hope to our lives.

Rest now, tiny child. Rest your infant feet. For someday you will walk many miles to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives. Someday you will stride out in power across billowing waves in a storm-tossed sea. Someday your feet will be anointed with oil by a woman who prepares you for death, and your feet will bear the same nail prints as your hands. Rest your feet now, for someday millions will follow in your footsteps.

And sweet little baby, with your little heart, how much love you will show. Rest now. And let us hold you on this holy night, for someday, you will hold us. Someday we will feel lost and lonely. Someday we will wonder — is this all there is? What does it mean? What am I here for? Then you will come to us. You will not be a helpless infant then. When you come to find us, you will come as our Wonderful Counselor, our deliverer. You will tell us that you searched for us. You will call us each by name. And when you find us, you will rejoice. You will invite us to your banqueting table and nourish us with your very self. You will remind us that we belong to you; we are yours.

Little baby, let us hold you on this holy night, for someday you will hold us. Someday we will feel deep sadness and sorrow. Something will happen in our lifetimes that grieves us so deeply

that we may wonder where you are. But you will come to us, then, not as a helpless baby, but as the Prince of Peace. You will remind us of the promises of God, of the strength of hope, of God's deep loving kindness, God's steadfast love. You will hold us close, and if we are quiet enough to hear, you will whisper to us that all will be well. You will tell us that you are here for us always, not just when we are empty enough to know we need you. You walk beside us, offering us your peace every day.

Sweet infant redeemer, let us hold you on this holy night, for someday you will hold us. Someday we will grow old or sick, our bodies will fail, and it will be time for us to rest from this world. Then you will come to us, not as a vulnerable baby, but as Mighty God, Everlasting Father. You will welcome us into eternal light and life. You will welcome us to a heavenly feast prepared since the beginning of time, a home and a place for us.

You will do all of these things for us at great cost to yourself. You will teach us the meaning of giving, all that we have and are, on behalf of goodness and love, no matter the cost.

But that will be someday. Tonight we adore you as a baby. We welcome you as a helpless, vulnerable babe, as the Almighty God who became a child so we could become fully mature human beings; who had no place in the inn, so you could prepare for us mansions in heaven; who became poor, so we could become rich; in whose weakness is our strength. This is the night, the wondrous night when the creatures hold our creator. This is the night of grace, when the Lord of heaven and earth stoops down, reverses roles, and allows us — the finite — to serve the infinite God.

And so, little Jesus, on this one night, let us hold you.

And let us whisper now the thanks that will be yours for all the years to come. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you for loving us. We love you too.

Fr. Don+

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER GROUP

The Contemplative Prayer Group will continue to meet on Mondays at 6 p.m. during the holiday season.

THURSDAY BOOK STUDY

Beginning Thursday, January 19, the Thursday book group will begin a study of Marcus Borg's *The God We Never Knew*. The study will last seven weeks. Books will be ordered on January 5, so if you are interested in participating, please put your name on the sign up list in the Information Center or contact Mel Caron at mcaron@windstream.net.

SUNDAY ADULT FORUM AND FR. DON'S BIBLE STUDY

There will not be any adult Christian education for the next three Sundays (Dec. 25, Jan. 1 and Jan. 8) The Annual Parish Meeting is on January 8, so Christian education has been cancelled. On January 15, Fr. Don's Bible study on the Gospel of Mark will continue. The Adult Forum will begin the second half of *Eclipsing the Empire*. Consider making participation in adult Christian education a part of your New Year's resolution — study and growing in your faith doesn't end with Confirmation. Join us at 9:15 in either the Garner Room or Classroom One.

Propers for the Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Isaiah 9:2-7

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-20

Psalms 96

SPIRITUAL FORMATION TEAM

The Spiritual Formation Team will meet on Wednesday, January 11 at 6:30 p.m. in the Garner Room. This meeting is open to anyone who has an interest or ideas of offerings to further develop our spirituality and formation of faith.

WOMEN'S RETREAT TEAM

We are looking for women to serve on a planning team to organize this year's Women's Retreat. The date for the retreat is Saturday, March 3.) The focus of this year's retreat will be *Celtic Women*. If you are willing to help with this endeavor, please contact Mel at mcaron@windstream.net or 478-234-3698.



Christmas Worship Schedule

December 24th - Christmas Eve
5:30 p.m. - Children's Service
10:30 p.m. - Holy Eucharist Rite II

December 25th - Christmas Day
10:30 a.m. - Holy Eucharist Rite I



Children's Lessons & Carols

Children's Ministries would like to invite you to the Children's Christmas Eve program. The Children and

Youth will be hosting their version of Lessons and Carols at the 5:30 p.m. service. We hope to see you on the 24th.



Calling all singers! On Christmas Eve, you are invited to join the 'pick-up choir' to help lead the 10:30 service.

Please meet with Jenny Moore in the sanctuary at 10:00 Christmas Eve to prepare for the service. Welcome Christmas with a song!!

NEW YEAR'S DAY & ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday, December 31 - 5:30 Celtic Eucharist
Sunday, January 1 - 10:30 a.m. Rite I

Saturday, January 7 NO 5:30 Celtic Eucharist
Sunday, January 8 - 10:00 a.m. Rite II
Annual Meeting and Luncheon immediately following service.

Coming to the Luncheon? Here's what to bring:

A - C beverages
D - K salads/sides
L - S sandwiches
T - Z desserts

PLEASE NOTE: There will not be an 8:00 a.m. service on December 25, January 1, or January 8.

Nets for Life

There are still some envelopes on the Giving Tree in the Narthex for Nets for Life, which are long-lasting insecticide-treated bed nets. These nets are saving many lives by preventing the spread of malaria. They are the most cost-effective way to prevent malaria. Help save lives.

FOYERS

New groups will be formed for Foyers late in January for the months of February, March and April. If you are able to participate during these months and would like the opportunity to get to know your church members, please sign up on the new Foyers list in the Information Center. You can contact Mary Thomas, 706-485-7126 or Mel Caron, 478-234-3698 for more information.

Birthdays: Teresa Chambers, Beth Gamble, Carol Grant, Jeanne Sewell, Eloise Tichenor



Anniversaries: Frank and Beverly Ann Evans, Bill and Sandy Mills, Karin and Nat Smith

Special Prayers: Alling Jones, Phil Taylor, Stella Moore, Ruth Hart, Joe Davall, Hannah Layfield, Joy Crowe, Maredith Griffith, Griff Griffith, Doris Rule, Betty Manning, Jackie Russell, Emily Garner, Jeanette Roupe, George Thompson, Ruth Rule, Alan McGee

Annual Parish Meeting & Elections

The annual Parish Meeting of St. Stephen's Church will be held on January 8, 2012. There will be reports given from the various ministries of the church, and we will elect one Director for the Heritage Fund, and one for the St. Stephen's Foundation and three members of the Vestry.

The Directors for our foundations will have as their primary duty to decide on how money in the funds may be spent. The Parish Treasurer will offer advice on this.

As you know, our Vestry are servant-leaders. There are a number of tasks that members of your Vestry take on out of loving service to this community. Each week three members perform what we have called "security" at each of the three weekend services, opening or closing the church and seeing that the environment is comfortable. They start the coffee on Sunday morning and they see that it is all cleaned up after. In recent years the St. Stephen's Vestry have emerged as innovative decision-makers helping to steer the course of this church through some perilous financial times. They have been originators of many innovative ideas that have moved us forward, and through their efforts we have enjoyed some very happy occasions.

The years ahead seem to look brighter. The spirit of the church seems to be growing stronger, and the willingness of people to share responsibility seems to be getting stronger. There are still challenges in leading a church in the 21st century. This will be the exciting work that the Vestry will face in the coming year. We will be talking about growing this church and we will be talking about exciting new ideas for ministry.

If you are called upon by the Nominating Committee to serve your church, consider that to be a call from your fellow parishioners and from God, and please say yes. We want people who have a love for this church and especially a love for Jesus and the people of We want people who are willing to use the gifts that God has given them for the sake of the Kingdom of God here in Milledgeville.

Calendar For December 25 - 31

Sunday - December 25

10:30 a.m. Holy Eucharist Rite I

Monday 26 OFFICE CLOSED

10:15 a.m. Service at VA

6:00 p.m. Contemplative Prayer Group

Saturday 31 5:30 p.m. Celtic Eucharist

Those Who Serve December 24 - 5:30 p.m.

LEM & Lay Reader: Mel Caron

Usher: Kurt & Kathy Zweizig

Security: Ramon Lantz

Those Who Serve December 24 - 10:30 p.m.

LEM & Lay Reader: Eustace Palmer

Ushers: Rod & Robbie Westrom

Security: Tom Blenk

Those Who Serve December 25 - 10:30 a.m.

LEM & Lay Reader: Claire Shepard

Usher: Bill Eason

Security: Bernie Collins

**Altar Guild: Jill Hinton, Polly Echols, Adele George,
Jeannette Holsey, Edith Hunter, Jo Williamson, Sue
Wright**