



St. Paul's Journal

Advent - Christmas 2009

*From the
Rector*



Christmas Evangel? Christmas Evangelicals?

Can we actually still use the word for a serious purpose with a straight face? I mean the word 'evangelical'? It's been battered and bruised for several centuries, and no more than since television ushered in the age of the 'televangelists'. The word 'evangelical' is now used, as you know, to describe anything from rich, deceptive, and scandalous preachers, to faith healers in the hills of Tennessee, to militant supporters of a certain form of public or diocesan politics, to those who use the word to describe a 'religious sub-culture', fearful of other Christians, and use shared spiritual code words to separate the truly spiritual from 'dead' Christians and so only really trust other 'evangelicals'... to those who, well, understand the word in much deeper and faithful ways.

I am still baffled by the contradictory way the word is used by sober people, though I taught for a number of years a university course on the topic of evangelical Christianity. But many thoughtful people do still use the word, and the website of St. Paul's Church uses the word; it says we are 'an Anglican parish rooted in the evangelical tradition'. What does this mean?

We need to back up just a bit to notice the origins

of the word. The English word 'Evangel', or 'Gospel', is a translation of the New Testament word *εὐαγγέλιον*. It was the word used by the first Christians to describe both the message of Jesus and the whole story of God 'becoming flesh' in the person of Jesus Christ: his conception, birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension in order to liberate the human race from its enslavement. It's a story we repeat every Sunday when we celebrate the Eucharist. Needless to say, it should be a very good word for all Christians, especially at Christmas!

Over the centuries, however, the word has been used by groups of Christians to distinguish themselves from Christians with other perspectives, sometimes in noble ways. Those who followed the 'evangelical counsels' of Jesus in medieval Europe, especially Franciscans, were 'evangelicals' who owned nothing and lived from hand to mouth. After the religious wars of the 1500s and 1600s in Europe, 'evangelical' became the word to describe the majority protestant denominations who had been freed from the power of worldly Bishops allied with Rome. And finally, 'evangelical' eventually described a renewal movement with the Anglican (Church of England) religious world. 'Evangelicals', beginning with the 'evangelistic' work of John Wesley and others in the mid-1700s, were not simply 'conditional' or 'grudging' Anglicans but instead 'Anglicans-plus' or 'evangelical' Anglicans. They entered into the Sunday and weekday worship of Anglicanism with fervour; but they also revived certain key aspects of the old 'Evangel' within the church of their day.

Before the evangelical Anglican movement hardened into 'evangelicalism' in the mid-1800s and before it began attempts to control diocesan politics and condemn what it considered to be any 'suspicious' or 'dead' forms of faith, the evangelical movement emphasized certain positive aspects of

faith, well recognized by those who have studied the movement.

What were these 'evangelical' characteristics? *First, a devotion to scriptural study and meditation.* Evangelical Anglicans loved sermons, Bible studies, personal scriptural study, and Bible lectures, even more than 'religious discussion in general'. *Second, an emphasis on Christ's death and resurrection.* Wherever the evangelical movement thrived in its early years, services of Holy Communion became far more important, as did prayer and reflection on the sacrifice of Christ, and attention to this sacrifice as a source of personal strength and motivation for outreach in the daily life of the Christian. *Third, a commitment to a life of conversion.* While some early 'evangelicals' had instantaneous experiences, most could point to stages of conversion through experiences of God touching their heart and reviving their faith. What all shared was the conviction that true faith was lively, and challenging, however different personal stories of faith might be from each other. *Fourth, an expectation of an 'activist' life.* Evangelicals weren't good at sitting on their hands. They were very good at organizing events, in spreading the 'evangel', telling the 'good news' of the 'gospel' story with words and action, whether by both sending missionaries out and telling their own stories of faith, or by building new churches, or by helping feed, house, and educate the masses who lived in poverty in the England of their day, or by challenging disastrously weak factory legislation and the institution of slavery.

Whatever the future fate of the words 'evangel', and 'evangelical', wouldn't it be wonderful if the parish of St. Paul's was known for these fourth things above—but above all for its hearty commitment to the old Evangel itself; the whole story of God 'becoming flesh' in the person of Jesus Christ: his conception, birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension in order to liberate the human race from its enslavement. Isn't this what Christmas is all about?

Paul Friesen

Beyond the Chancel Steps in Advent and Christmas

As Advent comes once again, my thoughts for *Beyond the Chancel Steps* in this issue of the Journal turn to beside the Chancel steps. In this season leading up to our celebration of the birth of Jesus, Tinker McKay will once again co-ordinate the arranging of Poinsettias at the base of the pulpit at Saint Paul's. The special display around the pulpit in memory of loved ones is a tradition that we look forward to seeing each Christmas Eve and throughout the Christmas season.

Have you ever wondered why the poinsettia is a Christmas flower tradition? We have evergreen trees, thanks to Queen Victoria's Prince Albert, Advent wreaths to mark the progression of the season, candles, and other decorative lights that relieve the darkness of shorter days, but in recent years the poinsettia has been embraced as a seasonal decoration in church as well as in our homes. Placed as a memorial to loved ones it often is a catalyst for memories of Christmases at St. Paul's and farther afield.

This plant with its remarkable red leaves and star-shape is also known as the *Christmas Star*, the *Winter Rose*, the *Flower of the Holy Night*, the *Mexican Flame Leaf*, the *Pascua*, or the *Noche Buena*, depending the language you speak. The name *poinsettia* comes from its being introduced to North America from Mexico in the early 1800's by Joel Roberts Poinsett, when he was the United States Minister to Mexico. No matter what it is called it is an outstanding plant. It can become a small tree but the ones we buy at Christmas are pruned to be smaller and don't bear flowers. The way the fiery coloured leaves are grouped around the stem just makes it look that way. These days poinsettia can be found in over 100 different shades but in my mind my memories are associated with the flaming red ones.

There is a Mexican folk legend that explains how the poinsettia became a Christmas tradition. Like many folk legends, there are many versions but it

goes something like this: Two poor children, Maria and Pablo, like other children in their village, were looking forward to the Christmas Eve festival and the annual Nativity play in which a large manger scene was set up in their village church. The season was full of parades and parties, and all the people, especially the children, were bringing presents to the Christ child on Christmas Eve. Maria and Pablo loved Christ and the season of his birth very much but did not have money to buy something for the baby. They were sad and disheartened when they set out to attend the service on Christmas Eve. They took the long way in hopes of finding some blossoms to give as a gift but didn't find any. Finally they picked some weeds growing on the roadside, squared their shoulders and approached the church door. Other children teased them and laughed at their gift but they braved their way to the front and carefully arranged their greenery around the manger. To everyone's amazement, the greenery burst into bright red star-shapes and was the most outstanding of all the gifts the Christ child received that night. A miracle? It must have seemed like one to the people gathered that Christmas Eve, and so the *Poinsettia* became the traditional Christmas "flower".

In tracking the history of the *Flower of the Holy Night*, I also learned that although many people believe the Poinsettia is a poisonous plant that is not true. To quote, *a lot of plants in the Christmas Star's family are toxic, and you would be forgiven for misreading "poinsettia" and thinking you saw "poison" but the plant's bad reputation is simply not correct. Christmas Stars can cause allergic reactions in some people but they are not toxic. In fact, the old Aztecs used the sap of the plant to cure people who were suffering from a bad fever. So don't worry about putting one on your coffee table.* (1)

I am sure the tradition of poinsettias at Christmas, whether on your coffee table or around the pulpit, holds many memories for you as it does for me. Forty-five years ago, they weren't as common or as inexpensive in the Maritimes as they are today. I recall a classmate from Bermuda telling me she could pick poinsettia from her bedroom window and didn't associate snow with Christmas. I knew about snow but hadn't seen very many live

poinsettias. In the 1970's, for my first Christmas away from Canada and extended family, memories of poinsettia at the church we attended and several hundred plants piled forty feet high to make a very large tree at a local hotel in Knoxville, TN, are vivid even today. There was no snow that Christmas and we didn't have to wrap up or shovel to attend Christmas Eve service but we shared the Christmas traditions and the people at the Church of the Ascension embraced us. More recently, after having attended Saint Paul's for several years, we attended Christmas Eve service at St. Alban's in Acton, Ontario. There was snow and the church was full of people and poinsettia. As we shared a *BAS* service that night my memories were of St. Paul's and loved ones that were no longer with us.

I'm sure you, too, have memories associated with the *Flower of the Holy Night*. This Christmas, whether you attend Christmas Eve service at Saint Paul's or elsewhere, when you look at a Poinsettia, think about what the legend of Maria and Pablo symbolizes and remember loved ones and the significance of celebrating the birth of Christ.

References consulted were:

- (1) Poinsettia: The Christmas Flower Tradition
<http://www.lovelychristmas.co.uk/TheChristmasFlowerPoinsettia.html>
- (2) Poinsettias
<http://www.worldofchristmas.net/christmas-flowers/poinsettias.html>
- (3) Poinsettia – The Christmas Plant
<http://www.newton.dep.anl.gov/natbltn/600-699/nb699.htm>

Dr. Margaret Bateman Ellison
Director of Chancel Guild



Looking out of the Rectory Window on Christmas Eve

When my husband was ordained 20 years ago I came to realize that much in my life would be altered, and one of those things would be how I spent Christmas Eve. Up to that point, our Christmas Eve churchgoing as a family usually involved a service geared to children around suppertime. But Anglican clergy work late into the night on Christmas Eve. One of the realities of life that I had to get used to as a clergy wife was spending Christmas Eve night alone with the children after the early family service. I hope that I'm not too prone to self-pity, but I must admit that sometimes I found this difficult. But on occasion, those lonely Christmas Eves would bring unexpected joys.

Anxiously going to the window and watching snow pile up, while worrying about road conditions, became a Christmas Eve ritual for me, especially during the four years we lived in the small town of Clinton, Ontario. Our daughter was born in Clinton and so the town has a special place in my heart. But Clinton lies in one of southern Ontario's great snowbelt areas, just west of Lake Huron. Each winter would bring about three feet of snow that began to pile up in late November and, with frequent refreshing, would last till March. Gordon's winter drives between his two parishes were always a worry to me. But never more so than the Christmas Eve of 1992 when snow was plentiful and I was weeks away from giving birth and feeling some solidarity with the Holy Family.

That Christmas Eve, as the snow piled higher and higher, I couldn't keep myself from anxiously checking the rectory front window to see if Gordon had made it home safely from the early evening service in time for the 11:00 pm service at our church across the street. In my "delicate condition" I hadn't risked the snowy drive to that earlier service 20 kilometres away. It was getting closer and closer to 11:00 and my anxiety level was rising as the snow fell ever more thickly and I still hadn't heard the car pull into the driveway.

Then, as I looked out at our church, I saw a little scene I'll never forget. A parishioner had come to shovel the sidewalk of the church in preparation for the service. And for some reason he had conscripted his eight year old son into helping him. Having taught this boy in Sunday School for two years, I was well aware that this was an unhappy boy in an unhappy family. The streetlight cast a gentle glow out into the dark night, illuminating the blowing snow and the team of harsh father and reluctant young son shovelling. Then around the corner came Santa Claus! It was in fact the town doctor, still in his Santa costume, walking home from the nearby United Church service where he had given treats to the children.

But to that unhappy eight year old boy, forced into shoveling duty too late on a cold Christmas Eve, this really was Santa. And from my window, I watched as the good doctor, staying in character, passed some treats to the wide-eyed boy, bellowed "Ho, ho, ho, Merry Christmas" and then continued his snowy walk home. And for some reason, my anxious worries lessened as I shared in that little boy's sense of joy and wonder. Just then, our car came around the corner; Gordon had made it home safe and sound from his drive along that blustery, country road notorious for white-out conditions. And I felt that sometimes we do get a glimpse of "Peace on Earth".

Mary Lu Redden

Christmas Thoughts

A few weeks ago our 9:00 a.m. music team offered this lovely song: "O dear Lord, three things I pray, to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day..." The song stays with me.

My thoughts at Christmas always include grateful thanks for Jesus' birth, for Mary's "yes" to God, and for Joseph, obedient to God's word, standing alongside her. I think of Mary, this young Jewish girl

chosen to bear God's Son. It was her responsibility and joy to love and care for God's baby Jesus, to guide him throughout his boyhood and early adult life, providing the foundation of a devout Jewish family, a loving home to help him grow into his full life as God's Son, as puzzling and painful as that was to become. It seems certain that Mary succeeded in her task when, at Jesus' baptism, God said: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

I am interested in Jesus' humanity as well as his divinity. Although we know so little about his childhood, there are a few clues in the Scriptures and, with the prayerful use of our imaginations as we read the Gospels, I believe we will find clues to his adult humanity as well, even to the very end. I'm hoping that we might find ourselves relating to Jesus more fully as we consider his humanity more carefully. We celebrate his birth with carols, praise and thanksgivings. After Christmas may we read the Gospels, and pray and sing, "to see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day..." of our Saviour.

Gretchen Gillis

Friends of St. Paul's

It has been a busy time at St. Paul's over the past few months around our church family. The Ladies Guild, ACW held their Annual Sale which has been a tradition for many years and always most successful.

We welcomed Dr. Walter Kemp, a former organist, for two Sunday services.

Our Choir Director and Organist, Andrew Killawee, and Mrs. Maggie Duinker, Pianist and Director, at the 9:00 a.m. service form such a large part of our Worship message. We look forward to the Advent and Christmas Services and their wonderful leadership.

We welcomed back to St. Paul's a former parishioner, Mrs. (Edward) Florence McVeigh who was visiting family including a very special great grandson.

We were saddened by the death in November of Miss Maude Clarke. Maude was a faithful member of St. Paul's for many years.

We look forward to the Advent and Christmas Services and their wonderful messages with the beautiful settings of red, white and green... 'Advent tells us Christ is near; Christmas tells us Christ is here'

May you know every blessing as we 'follow the Star' and visit once again, the Christ Child born in Bethlehem.

Amen.

Dot Kelly

Christmas Greetings

Greetings, *St. Paul's!* I have settled in nicely here in Oxford and have already found employment. I am working at the Ashmolean Museum, which is part of the University of Oxford and is the oldest public museum in Britain (1683). It houses many world-class collections of art and archeology, and needless to say, the job is perfect for the historian in me! I am part of the Front of House team, which means I am in the galleries answering visitors' questions and maintaining security of the building. My job as guide at St. Paul's gave me the experience needed to get this job, for which I am very thankful. I hope that if any of you are in Oxford over the next two years, you will come and visit me at the Ashmolean!
Update: I have just learned that as part of our official reopening after a ten-month renovation, the Queen herself is coming to visit the museum!

Ori Duinker

Excerpt from: THE ST. JOHN'S MYSTERY PLAYS: the Shepherds

BOY Father, Father, what is't there I see
Above the crooked black spruce tree
That shineth in the sky?

TOD What is't? Sooth, know not I!

Angel voices are heard

Hark! What is this sweet melodious sound
That doth affect my senses most profound.

Gabriel enters, shepherds start back and clutch each other, Tod holds his son.

Oh Saints! What shall this be!

GABRIEL Good shepherds, fearful be not ye
The Lord your God doth wondrous tidings tell
To you his shepherds, that your sheep guard well.
In Bethlehem, in stable poor, there shall ye find
God's baby Son, His gift to all mankind.
And for a sign God's presence there
Shalt shine a star, in firmament most fair,
Aloft that stable spare.

Hallelujah, Praise to God on high,
That for Thy Son doth luminate the sky.

Angel voices swell

Shepherds look at each other, then in a bemused fashion, pack their sacks

Singing fades and dies.

BOY Father! Father! Come to Bethlehem with me!
I long to go, this gentle babe to see.
Oh Father, Come!

TOD Yea indeed, my son, I come with thee.

SHEPHERD 1 So too shall I to Bethlehem make haste
To see God's Son, his mother pure and chaste,
And earthly father of God's little one.

SHEPHERDS 2 Lief would I with ye make haste and go,
But I must stay and seek my lamb below
That wandered hath, still hidden from my sight.

Baa-aa-ing is heard, Shepherd 2 goes quickly to the sound.

SHEPHERD 2 See here! The lamb I lost is found!
Now go I with ye haste to town.

All exit in haste, taking lamb and sacks.

*An Excerpt from the St. John's Mystery Plays
Written & submitted by Fiona Day*

Christmas Bread

Incarnation and Nativity

It is no accident the cradle was a feed bin,
not a child-safe, government-approved and downy nest.
Perfection did not choose to feed us with a silver spoon,
for where's the mystery in that?
A byre, then, and a manger filled with fodder
for the local beasts to eat, and there
was laid an infant human boy.
We can assume the lodging meagre,
yet the person it contained did not contain his joy at being born;
the skies blazed, shepherds shrieked and kings came calling.

This child is ours – no foundling, not a waif served up
from half a world away to prick our charity,
(though that child, too, belongs to us –
inhabiting the suburbs of our care,
no portrait on the mantel shelf
or carried close for fond display to strangers.
with the proud boast “this is mine”.)

This is our boy, our deepest love,
our cord, our lifeline to that mind untouchable
who made us.
All humanity shares motherhood of him,
our sacrifice, our lamb,
not someone else's baby,
but the flesh and sinew of our hearts.

And by Love's hand it happened – that's our history.
The will that once exploded into matter,
hurled time in and burst stars,
poured out molten rock and gave air life,
exuberant air,
and breathed it into his dear naked clump of earth;
that same will then

distilled
all
down

to one atomic, microscopic, central moment
when a worthy peasant girl risked all she was
to let the Spirit in
to grow and bear a perilous Son.

Born of a woman, cradled in a bale of hay,
 and destined to sustain forever
 all who would consume and be consumed by him.
 Our bread, our life,
 Emmanuel.

*A poem by H. Mel Malton
 Submitted by Maggie Duinker
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A Caregiver's Reflection

Lest we forget.
 We are all moving
 together
 on the greatest of journeys.
 Lest we forget.
 We have all been called
 even as the One who calls us
 knows each of us by name
 for we have all been formed
 in His image.
 Lest we forget.
 We have been called to serve
 not to be served.
 We have been called.
 To reflect love and mercy
 and compassion.
 Lest we forget.
 And so
 we are all caught up
 in that great wave of motion
 much like the waves
 that brought the liberators
 to these Normandy shores
 and skies
 sixty-five short years ago -
 Lest we forget.
 We are all moving
 body and soul
 toward that great eternity
 where peace is all.

Lest we forget.
 As we care for those around us
 so too
 we are cared for.
 We were made for each other
 on this Great Journey.
 Lest we forget.
 The torch was theirs
 it is ours
 it belongs also to our youngest
 and to those still to come.
 Lest we forget.
 It is not ours to keep
 but to share
 to give love freely
 and so to live freely
 Lest we forget.
 We give thanks for that
 great torch
 that light
 that shows us the way
 through all darkness.
 We give thanks
 We give praise.
 Lest we forget.

God be with you.

*Eileen Fedor, Edmonton
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Christmas 2009

<i>Thursday, 24 December</i>	4 pm	Family Nativity Service
	11 pm	Christmas Eve Eucharist
<i>Friday, 25 December</i>	10 am	Christmas Day Eucharist
<i>Sunday, 27 December</i>	10 am	Eucharist

Some Important Parish Dates: Winter 2010*

<i>Wednesday, 17 February</i>	11 am	Ash Wednesday Eucharist
	6 pm	Ash Wednesday Eucharist
<i>Saturday, 20 February</i>	10 am	SDC Parish Lenten Mission
<i>Sunday, 28 February</i>	10 am	Combined Lenten Eucharist & Confirmation
<i>Sunday, 7 March</i>	10 am	Eucharist & AGM
<i>Sunday, 28 March</i>	10 am	Palm Sunday Eucharist
<i>Thursday, 1 April</i>	6 pm	Maundy Thursday Eucharist
<i>Friday, 2 April</i>	12 pm	Good Friday Liturgy
<i>Saturday, 3 April</i>	7 pm	Holy Saturday Liturgy
<i>Sunday, 4 April</i>	10 am	Easter Eucharist

**Please note that this is a schedule of significant dates, to help the households of our parish do some planning--not an exhaustive parish calendar or liturgical schedule. It will be revised and expanded periodically.*



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1749 Argyle Street*

Halifax, Nova Scotia B3J 3K4

Tel. (902) 429-2240 Fax (902) 429-8230

office@stpaulshalifax.org

www.stpaulshalifax.org

Rector: Paul Friesen

Senior Warden: Nora-gene Goodwin

Junior Warden: Tom Sellers

Deputy Warden: Ashley Stephenson

Directors of Music

Andrew Killawee

Maggie Duinker

Children's Programme Director:

Martine Osler

Honorary Assistants:

Neale Bennet

Gordon Redden

Parish Administrator:

Jan Skinner

Sexton:

Mitchell Nimeck

Submissions to *St. Paul's Journal* are always welcome. **Why not submit a spiritual reflection, a poem, or a book review?** The deadline for the **Lent & Easter** issue is **February 22, 2009**.