

# Saint Thomas Church



**The Rector's Chronicle**

**Advent 2015**

*No love that in a family dwells,  
No caroling in frosty air,  
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells  
Can with this single Truth compare –  
That God was Man in Palestine  
And lives today in Bread and Wine.'*

My dear friends,

Those words – the final stanza of the poem '*Christmas*' by John Betjemann – bring home to me the central truth that we celebrate here at Saint Thomas Church which is the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. As a Church whose worship is centered on the Eucharist we celebrate the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament every day of the year. It is easy to forget that being a Eucharistic Parish also means that the Bible is central to our daily living; in the mass we celebrate the Liturgy of the Word in a very full way.

I would like to pay tribute to the team of lectors that we have in the parish and the serious and careful way that they approach reading at the liturgy. Sometimes people ask how it is possible to become a lector at the Choral Services; at Saint Thomas the tradition is that lectors begin their ministry here serving at one of the daily masses which also means reading the scriptures.



The acolytes who serve at the said celebrations at 8am and 5.30pm also lead morning or evening prayer. This is very good training for a ministry at the choral services held at the High Altar.

May I also comment on Father Spurlock's new Bible Study which meets on most Fridays after the 12:10pm mass. There is no preparation required and the participants have begun working their way through Luke's Gospel. The Revised Common Lectionary (the method of reading the scriptures over a three year period at Sunday mass) has one of the synoptic Gospels assigned to each year. On Advent Sunday we begin Year C and that is the Year of Luke.

## Christmas Services

We have an extra Christmas Service this year and the pattern of the Christmas Services has changed slightly. At 11:00am on the Fourth Sunday of Advent we will not repeat the Nine Lessons and Carols celebrated in the afternoon. Instead, there will be a sequence of readings, carols and hymns in the context of the Eucharist rather than separate from it, as we do at Advent and Epiphany. There will be some beautiful music including a very special Magnificat by Praetorius, which intersperses Christmas carols between the verses.

There will be a new service especially designed for children and families on December 23; the choristers will sing and the Sunday School will participate with simple readings of the Christmas story and prayers.

This means that we can now have our second Nine Lessons and Carols in full on Christmas Eve at 4pm.

So we can be clear, here is the pattern from December 13:

## Sunday December 13

*Advent 3 – Gaudete Sunday*

usual services at 8am, 9am, 11am and 4pm plus

### 1pm Christmas Pageant

*A version of the York Mystery Plays*

### 6pm Santa Lucia Party

*See elsewhere in the Chronicle for details*

## Wednesday 16 December

12:10pm Shorter Lessons and Carols

## Thursday December 17

5.30pm Concert:

*Britten's A Ceremony of Carols and Rutter's Dancing Day*

## Saturday December 19

4pm Shorter Lessons and Carols

## Sunday December 20

*Advent 4*

Usual Services at 8am and 9am then

### 11am A Festival of Lessons and Carols with Festal Eucharist for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

4pm Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols

## Wednesday December 23

12:10pm Crèche Service (*New service*)  
*especially designed for children and families*

## Thursday December 24

*Christmas Eve*

*The Church will be open for prayer from 9am until 1pm.*

12:10pm Said Mass (*New service*)

*Doors reopen to the public at 3pm\* for*

4pm Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols (*repeat*)

*the doors reopen to the public at 10pm\* for*

11pm Midnight Mass

*\*Those with tickets may enter through the 53rd street gate at 2:30pm for the 4pm service, and at 9:30pm for the 11pm service.*

*Thank you to everyone who has pledged support to Saint Thomas for 2016.*

## Thursday December 25

*Christmas Day*

11am Solemn Eucharist

*Doors open at 10am.*

## The first concert of the season

There have been some terrific reviews of the first concert performed by the Choir with the Orchestra of St Luke's. It was a delight to welcome Andrew Nethsingha, the Director of Music of St John's College, Cambridge (John Scott's *Alma Mater*), to direct the choir. Stephen Buzard and Benjamin Sheen deserve great credit for preparing the choir. Our new Concert's Team, Katie Salmon and Midge Woolsey, have endeared themselves to many of our *Friends of Music* and their expertise builds on the many years of hard work of Jacki Slater and Claudette Mayer who retired in the summer. May I also praise Richard Lippold, a gentlemen of the choir, who held the fort over the summer, through the period of John's tragic death and beyond, working with Katie and Midge up to the first concert. Thank you, Richard, for all that you have done. Thank you also to Avery, our absolute technical whiz-kid, who worked with our web-designers to create and implement a new on-line ticketing system over the summer. With a 'full house' at the concert some of us were worried about how it would all work but it worked brilliantly and all of us at the Church offices are grateful to our splendid volunteer ushers who managed to transition from one system to another (including re-numbering the pews) with grace and good humor.



*Photo Ira Lippke*

The names of the guest conductors for the rest of the series have now been released:

Dec 8 & 10 – **Gary Thor Wedow**

*New York City Opera, Seattle Opera, Wolf Trap and a member of faculty of the Julliard School of Music*

Mar 18 – **David Hill**

*Professor at the Yale School of Music, Director of the BBC Singers & the Bach Choir*

May 13– **Daniel Beckwith**

*Guest opera conductor, Michigan State University/Florida State University, Assistant Organist Temple Emanu-EL, Fifth Avenue, and a former gentleman of our choir.*

## Santa Lucia Celebration

On **Sunday, December 13**, we will have a Scandinavian themed evening at the **rectory** to celebrate the feast of **Santa Lucia**, so popular in the countries of Northern Europe in the depths of winter. There will be a **Smörgåsbord** of food and, I am pleased to say, the traditional Santa Lucia ceremony which involves a young woman or girl wearing a crown of lights. Tickets are now available and cost \$50. Festive dress is being encouraged – that means anything from black tie to something colorful or glamorous!



## Quiz Night

The second Quiz Night was a great success and I am very grateful to the Headmaster for allowing the use of the Choir School while the boys were on their half-term break. This year we had over 90 people at the event – tickets sold out quickly. Last year's champions 'Team Clever' (team captain, James Finklea II) did not quite live up to their Team name this year and were pipped at the post by *The Irish Twins* (team captain, Andrew Palmer). The evening was a great success with wonderful food provided by Heidi's kitchen team and marvelous waiting staff. As usual, there was a lot of spirited engagement by the various teams (who *all* had remarkable names!) and we only had one dispute over where the ball should be placed at an American Football Match!

## Every Member Canvass

The Development Office and I are absolutely thrilled with the response that we have received to the 2016 EMC appeal. As most of you know I have challenged as many of you as possible who do not tithe to consider increasing your existing pledge by 10%. The parish family has responded so warmly and generously and many of you have told me that you have or intend to increase your pledge by 10% or more. We have welcomed new leadership pledgers (\$5000 or above). Many of you will, no doubt, be pledging in the coming weeks as we approach the beginning of 2016. Thank you for your support; without it this church simply would not function and by increasing our giving we can be better stewards of our invested funds which, in turn, make our church finances more secure in the future.

The theme of our 2016 canvass is *The Open Door*. One of the wonderful things about Saint Thomas Church is the fact that it is not only placed on Fifth Avenue but that the doors are open 365 days a year. I am grateful to the custodial staff and, in particular, to David Daniel for his ministry of welcome on weekdays. As we move into 2016, David and Fr Daniels will be helping the Strategic Planning Group think about how we can develop our Nave ministry in the coming years. We will, of course, still have more disruption to the nave even after the windows are replaced next year, for then the organ project begins its most important phase – the dismantling of the old organ and the building of the new. 2018 will be a wonderful year for many reasons but most of all because we will finally have said goodbye to lots of scaffolding!

One of my favorite Christmas Carols is by Herbert Howells, a setting of a poem by Frances Chesterton:

*Here is the little door,  
lift up the latch, oh lift!  
We need not wander more,  
but enter with our gift;  
Our gift of finest gold.  
Gold that was never bought or sold;  
Myrrh to be strewn about His bed;  
Incense in clouds about His head;  
All for the child that stirs not in His sleep,  
But holy slumber hold with ass and sheep.*

*Bend low about His bed,  
For each He has a gift;  
See how His eyes awake,  
Lift up your hands, O lift!  
For gold, He gives a keen-edged sword.  
(Defend with it thy little Lord!)  
For incense, smoke of battle red,  
Myrrh for the honored happy dead;  
Gifts for His children, terrible and sweet;  
Touched by such tiny hands,  
and Oh such tiny feet.*

## Adult Education

In January, Father Austin and I will be teaching, again, the *Rector's Doctrine Class*. The class is especially designed for those who want to be confirmed or received into the Episcopal Church. But it is also for anyone who is interested in learning more about Christ and about the doctrine and traditions of the church, as we've received them. The class will meet on Tuesday evenings from 6:30 to 7:30pm. Session One begins on January 12 and the class then meets every Tuesday until March 15. After a break for Holy week and Easter, the class resumes on April 12 and continues until May 10. Bishop Allen Shin, *Suffragan Bishop of New York*, will be with us Sunday, May 15 and will celebrate the Eucharist with Confirmation and receive members into the fellowship of the Episcopal Church.

I have heard some concerns expressed recently about the adult education program; I am committed to our adult education program and its future. This program has become an integral component of the ministry at Saint Thomas. Father Austin has brought a robust theological manner to our learning program and I want that kind of robust approach to continue. We may, of course, do some different things in the future also – for example, this year Father Daniels has been leading a 'Christian Doctrine Class II' to see if those who have recently attended the Rector's Doctrine Class and have been confirmed would like to go deeper into some of the subjects covered. I am pleased to say that there has been a positive response to this. I have also mentioned our new Friday Bible Study and, at some stage and possibly in Lent, I would like to think how we might form a group to use the traditional Benedictine discipline of *Lectio Divina* which uses four separate steps to study the scriptures – read; meditate (or reflect); pray; contemplate.

I also want to find ways in which we can reach more people with our theological program and I have had discussions with three seminaries – Nashotah House (where Father Mead and I are Trustees), The General Theological Seminary and Berkeley School of Divinity at Yale. I have been asked to consider having a seminarian intern in 2016-17, and Father Austin and I have had a discussion about lectures or seminars in conjunction with the seminaries and with seminarians visiting us.

We have several visiting preachers coming soon: On Sunday, December 13 at 11am we welcome the **Very Rev'd Kurt Dunkell**, *Dean of the General Theological Seminary* where Fr Daniels trained.

On January 24, during the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*, at 4pm Evensong our preacher will be **The Very Rev'd Prof. John McGuckin**, *Nielsen Professor of Early Christian History, Union Theological Seminary, Archbishop of the Romanian Orthodox Church and Professor of Byzantine Christian Studies, Columbia University*.

On January 31 we shall keep the feast of *Candlemas* and our preacher at 11am will be **The Very Rev'd Stephen Peay**, *Dean of Nashotah House Theological Seminary* where Fr Spurlock trained. Father Peay is Professor of Homiletics and Church History and was a former Roman Catholic Benedictine Monk. We hope that he will offer some teaching during his stay with us.

## Finally...

As we approach the celebration of the Lord's birth let us pray for peace and goodwill among all peoples. In the aftermath of yet more terrorist attacks, let us pray hard as a parish for a change of heart in those who plot violence and let us give the best example we can of a community grounded in selfless love. Let me leave you with some beautiful words of St Thérèse of Lisieux which mean a great deal to me:

*"Without love, deeds, even the most brilliant, count as nothing."*

Affectionately,

Father Carl Turner