

December 2012



The **S**hape

Newsletter of The Episcopal Church in Almaden

From the Rector

Though they may not realize it yet, on December 9, several members of ECA will be celebrating a feast of the Incarnation. ECA folks will be attending a play that tells the story of the Guadalupe put on at Mission San Juan Bautista – a musical play that is really something more like a worship service. The Guadalupe story, told in Spanish and central to the people of Mexico, is a story, really, of the Incarnation – another revelation of the truth of God among us. It is a different story than the Christmas one we know so well, but deep within, it tells the same truth.

[Continued on page 3]

Service Schedule

SUNDAY SERVICES

7:30 AM

11:00 AM

THURSDAY SERVICE

7:30 AM

Rector

The Reverend Katharine Flexer

(408) 364-6524

Staff

Susie Ferguson

Youth & Christian Education

Kristal Kim

Music Director & Organist

Bill LaVallee

Treasurer

Dennis Elliott

Administrative Assistant

Assisting in our Ministry

George Romer

Senior Warden

Steve Wing

Junior Warden

William Bond

Acolyte Master

Bobbi Finley

Altar Guild

Kathy Mastre

Coffee Hosts

Sharon Mills

Greeters

Jenny Hoyt

Lay Readers

Ann Avoux

Prayer Vine

Dave Byers

Ushers

Bonnie McPherson

Junior High Youth Group

Inge Bond

Senior High Youth Group

Andy Kerr

Folk Music Director

Alex L. Dykes

Shape Editor

Jill Hertzner

Shape Copy Editor

Mary McPherson

Bible Study

Sharon Hall

Children & Families

Worship Schedule

- Dec 2 - First Sunday of Advent**
7:30 & 11:00 AM Holy Eucharist
- Dec 6 - St Nicholas**
7:30 AM Thursday Morning Eucharist
- Dec 9 - Second Sunday of Advent**
7:30 & 11:00 AM Holy Eucharist - Folk Sunday
- Dec 13 - St Lucia**
7:30 AM Thursday Morning Eucharist
- Dec 16 - Third Sunday of Advent**
7:30 & 11:00 AM Holy Eucharist - Healing Sunday
- Dec 20 - St Thomas**
7:30 AM Thursday Morning Eucharist
- Dec 23 - Fourth Sunday of Advent**
7:30 AM Holy Eucharist
10:00 JV Christmas Pageant and Communion
- Dec 24 - Christmas Eve**
5:00 PM Family Service
10:30 PM "Midnight" Mass
- Dec 25 - Christmas Day**
10:00 AM "Come as you are" Eucharist
- Dec 27 - St John the Evangelist**
7:30 AM Thursday Morning Eucharist
- Dec 30 - First Sunday of Christmas**
7:30 & 11:00 AM Holy Eucharist

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From the Rector

[Continued from cover]

The story of La Virgen de Guadalupe tells how the Mexican Indian peasant Juan Diego received visions of Mary, the Mother of God, near Mexico City in December, 1531. Mary appeared to Juan as a young peasant girl, and spoke to him in his native language, the Indian language Nahuatl. She asked that a church be built to her honor on the hill of Tepeyac, a holy place connected with the Aztec worship of the goddess Tonantzin. Juan went to the Archbishop, the Spanish Franciscan colonial authority, and told him of the vision. The Archbishop, doubting that the Mother of God would appear to a peasant speaking his native language rather than Spanish, told Juan to return to Tepeyac and ask Mary for a sign that would prove the vision. Mary gave him roses in the dead of winter, which Juan took back to the Archbishop. When Juan opened his cloak to show the roses, they fell to the floor and revealed the beautiful icon of the Guadalupe in his cloak. And so the church authorities were convinced of the truth of this vision, and ever since, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been celebrated on December 12 in Mexico and everywhere Mexicans have settled.

It is a feast day of identity and healing, which is why it remains important to the Mexican people, most of whom are descended from the indigenous Aztecs as well as the Spanish colonialists. The Roman Catholic Church was an import to Mexico, one that came at the hands of a sometimes brutally oppressive invasion. As in the missions in California, Indians were often forcibly 'converted' to the new faith, separated from the culture and religion of their ancestors. That the mother of Jesus, central to the new religion of Christianity, could show herself in the guise of the indigenous people of Mexico, speaking one of their languages and appearing at the site of one of their goddesses, brought together the two hostile parts of what be-

came Mexican culture, that of the native peoples and that of the foreign oppressors. Our Lady of Guadalupe represents the heritage and history of Mexico, and the identity of its people. It is notable that El Teatro Campesino – a farmworkers' theater – puts on this play every year in a mission church, rich with that same history and tension.

But the feast is about more than the identity of the Mexican people. That meaning is, I think, part of the larger meaning of the story. For as I said, this is a story of Incarnation. It is a story of God among us, coming to be one of us in our earthly life. In the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, our matter is made holy, the divine coming to dwell among us in our flesh. Mary is for many the feminine face of God; her appearance in the form of a peasant just like Juan Diego, speaking to him with love in his own native language, showed him that God was God of the poor just as much as the rich; of the Indians just as much as the Spanish; of the Aztecs just as much as the Christians. In this Incarnation, the divisions between people are healed; heaven and earth are brought together. The peasant's identity, the identity of the Spanish church authorities, the identity of all of us who hear and see this story, is blessed and made holy, sanctified as children of God – created by and for God in love. The same message we hear in the story of Christmas – but perhaps one we can hear afresh in a different way.

In this holy time of year, throughout this month of feasts, may the truth of the Incarnation come home to you: that you are a beloved child of God, caught up and made holy in Jesus' incarnation among us, the Word made flesh. Happy Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe – and Happy Feast of the Nativity.

Kate Flexer

Senior Warden

In early November, the Diocese of El Camino Real convened its Convention. Among the results was an articulation of the Diocese's Strategic Plan, including its Vision, Mission, Values, & Objectives. It is striking how aligned our ECA Vision is with respect to the Diocesan one. Further, relevant Objectives were adopted:

- Foster leadership and church growth & retention strategies that capitalize on local opportunities.
- Refine and redouble our efforts to increase cross-cultural understanding and integration.
- Increase inter-generational church participation.
- Motivate congregations to expand their horizons of mission and ministry; nudge them out of their comfort zones.
- Intensify stewardship to expand the core of our giving.
- Better equip laity and clergy for ministry by developing more effective tools for education, spiritual formation, and active Christian leadership.

Considering these objectives, I find we are working locally to achieve “global” objectives. I agree with Alex Dykes' editorial in last month's Shape which said that when we share our gifts with others and invite others in our community to become part of our family, we are doing what Christ commanded. We are practicing good stewardship of our talents toward our neighbors. Growth is a by-product, not an objective. Alex tells us that if we focus on mission within our vision, we will be relevant to our neighbors. One way to be relevant is to be ourselves and act accordingly. We should think of ourselves as a small group in a mega-church called the Episcopal Church in the USA (ECUSA). Mega-churches know they can't function unless they break themselves down into manageable units. ECUSA has been at this for hundreds of years; it's not new! As a

parish, we are poised to be functionally relevant to our community. So, acting locally and relevantly is to belong to, be connected to, and aligned with the next organization up – the Diocese of El Camino Real. We are aligned with our parent Diocese as never before in memory. To be most effective is to be able to use all parts of the Body of Christ. Humans yearn to belong, to be validated, and to be useful. That is why ECA works so well.

On a personal note, I am “nudging” my right arm “out of its comfort zone” with physical therapy now. My right arm yearns to be relevant to the body (of George) again, instead of a source of pain. Change is painful, but fruitful. Progress is slow, but measurable. I am hopeful and faithful to the rehab plan. ECA change is also painfully slow, but measurable. The fruits of our combined labor are clearly worth the effort and supported by our Diocese. Have faith.

George Romer
Senior Warden

Christmas Worship Schedule

December 23

10:00 AM JV Christmas Pageant & Communion
Come support our actors and worship together
with our sister church!

December 24

5:00 PM Family Eucharist
Children and families especially welcome at this
first communion of Christmas.

10:30 PM Choral Festival Eucharist
Come for this solemn and beautiful festival of
music and worship.

December 25

10:00 AM Christmas Day Eucharist
Come as you are, and celebrate Christmas with
warmth and carol-singing.

Youth Updates

The youth have been very active over the last month: In October the youth met up with the folks at SMUM, had a tour, and then painted walls as a service activity. Then in the beginning of November they once again served dinner at Montgomery Meals, with great participation and enthusiasm at both activities. They have also had some regular meetings sprinkled in here and there—with topics such as “Planet Earth” and “If I were God...” We have been having good attendance at meetings, with at least 10-12 kids showing up, and frequently bringing friends. We are moving into our time of chaos—with Pie Making time upon us—with the money we raise going to the SMUM holiday food drives and gift giving. Then we move into December, and our service activities with SMUM. If you see a youth, give them a high five and kudos, as they have been a busy bunch.

Women’s Retreat

If you are looking for time to rest, to pray, to learn more about God and each other, then the 2013 ECA Women’s Retreat is the perfect place for you. The theme is ‘Leaving a Legacy,’ led by our own Rev. Kate Flexer. The retreat will focus on our place in the communion of saints, our connection with those who came before us and our concern for those who come after us. We will explore some material about the status of young women today, and consider how we can care and attend to their future as well as our own. The retreat will have content for your brain and inspiration for your soul!

The retreat will be the weekend of March 1-3, 2013 at the beautiful St. Francis Retreat Center in San Juan Bautista. The cost is \$202.00 per person/double (\$252.00 per person/single) including all meals. There is a \$75 non-refundable deposit. Space is limited to 28 women; scholarships are available. If you are interested in attending this wonderful retreat, please contact Melinda Jennings by phone (408-225-0528) or email (melinda1948@gmail.com). We look forward to sharing this special weekend with you.



Thank You

Margaret Halliwell for repairing our nursery's Afghan.

Susanne Moore and Gayle Byers, Suzanne and Peter Mayo, Maryke and Robin Williams, and Nancy Romer for helping us get ready for youth center renovations.

Anne Tysanner, Gwen Hacker, Sandie Mueller, Wendy Martin, Phyllis Chai, Ann Mayers, Kelly Yamanishi, Alex Alvarado, Ron Howie, Arnold Moore, Mary McPherson, Todd Lukanc, Nancy Romer, Marianne Schmidt, Mike Schmidt, and Jerry Ferguson for helping with our Sunday school program in November.

Joan Okumura for the new refrigerator. It was donated in memory of Dick.

Nancy Romer, Todd Axtell, Kimberly Axtell, Mary McPherson, Ann Mayers, Ellen Lukanc, Ed Mueller, and Sandie Mueller for participating in the Diocesan Convention.

David Byers for spearheading the work for the remediation and remodeling downstairs.

Betty Consorte for spearheading the Christmas crèche setup.

Hank & Sheri Winkenwerder for washing dishes after our Oktoberfest event.

Amy Griffith and the whole crew for a wonderful 45th birthday luncheon on October 28.

Roger Hoyt for playing the piano for the November 6 Election Day Eucharist.

Birthdays

Jonathon Beacher	1
Marion Grungé	2
Martha Lou Reynolds	2
Kate Flexer	4
Patricia Kabeja	4
Betty Consorte	5
Shelley Moore	5
Lola Fahlen	6
Donna Miller	7
Susie Ferguson	13
Susanne Moore	16
Kathleen Eagan	19
Gary Keck	19
Francie Kerr	19
Jason Skowronski	19
Toni Hird	24
Evan Hertzner	25
Celeste Cihon	28
Ed Criner	30
Belinda Byerly-Robins	31



Occupied vs. Unoccupied Cup

Someone asked this question, presenting a cup with water poured to the mid-point: "Do you see the cup half-full or half-empty?" The question's purpose perhaps was to define the optimists and the pessimists.

Then it occurred to me: how would Jesus answer that question? I think he would have retorted with another question; this of course, is just my opinion, formed after reading of such tendency of his in the gospels.

M: Do you see the cup half-full or half-empty?

J: Can you ask the question again without the word "half"?

M: That would be an inappropriate question, since it is neither full nor empty.

J: Exactly. Now, then, can you ask the question without the word "half" and with substituting the words "occupied" and "unoccupied" in places of "full" and "empty"?

M: Yes, that would be a more workable question, without the word "half," as the question simply becomes "Do you see the cup occupied or unoccupied?"

J: A workable question indeed. And more accurate. For the intention to measure the water quantity in the question itself is fallible for the essence of the question; despite the effort to define the pessimists and the optimists, it is already pessimistic with the word "half" which is not a "whole." For saying half-full is just as the same as half-empty. The most accurate question, with such purpose, is to ask is "Is the cup occupied or unoccupied?" If one

answers "occupied," good for him. If he answers "unoccupied," because he is crippled with the eyes that see the lack all too well, may God be with him that he may see the unseen.

Of course, this conversation never occurred in reality; it did only in my mind. But it seemed to answer the question for me: that I should see and live my life in this way. As an occupied cup I am called to be thankful for its content, regardless of the quantity (of success, recognition, satisfaction, and all the etc. of worldly concerns and desires, as such things are insatiable for the limitless human greed).

Now I ask about the quality of the occupation. then again, with the word "thankful" the inquiry has already been answered; goodness comes with thankfulness.

Kristal Kim



Lenten Meditation

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others...” 1 Peter 4:10

I am seeking volunteers to contribute writings to ECA’s book of Lenten Meditations. This ministry, like others, involves giving something of yourself to be used by God in service to others. It involves stepping out in faith and being confident that the Holy Spirit will give you the words to say to share with fellow believers here at ECA.

Instructions for writing your meditation:

Settle into a comfortable chair. Invite God to speak to you through the words you are about to read. Read the day’s lessons you’ve been assigned, noticing words or phrases that stand out to you.

Cogitate (meditate) on them for a period of time. Write down your thoughts about what God is saying in your own words. You can write them in the form of a summary, an explanation, a conversation, a poem, a prayer (praise, confession, petition, etc.), or you can even speak to us from God’s perspective as many of the prophets did in the first person. Select a phrase from the scripture to title your meditation with. Try to keep your meditation to 250 words.

Please see me to get assigned readings for a particular day in Lent.

Mary McPherson
marymcp@aol.com



Diocesan Convention Report

Most of you have had an experience that was extraordinary that you wished you could have shared with a loved one who was not in the same space at the same time. These were our feelings when we were at this year's diocesan convention. We wished that all of ECA could have experienced the spirit, the love, and the learning that we did.

The theme was "Cubits: Found in Translation." Bishop Mary's pre-convention letter to the people attending explained:

"a cubit is a measurement that was the length of the king's forearm, and is referenced in the Hebrew Bible in various settings, such as in the building of the temple or in Noah's construction of the ark. Depending on the king, of course, the definition of the measurement would vary: hence the need for translating. How we measure something may depend on our perspective or how we experience it. Measuring in the church tends to make us nervous, in part, because it makes us worry about decline. If you measure something, you may be disappointed! However, we cannot know where we are going if we do not assess where we have been. We cannot change if we are not able to measure our impact with some honesty. We deal in spiritual and intangible realities that are difficult to measure love, grace, peace, joy, we need strategies to support the immeasurable gifts of God we are called to offer to the world."

The opening Eucharist and various activities had significant youth involvement, mostly by video and other means (we were meeting on a school day). After the opening Eucharist, the business of the convention on Friday afternoon included presenting resolutions, nominations for various diocesan committees and the budget. One resolution of celebration was that St. Philip the Apostle Episco-

pal Church in Scotts Valley was admitted to parish status. Another concerned adopting as an Act of Convention "Alleviating Poverty and Injustice as a Mission Priority." ECA's Kimberly Axtell has been serving on this committee.

Other developments included a status update on the strategic plan, passed at the 2011 convention. Recommendations in the plan include moving the diocesan offices from Seaside to Salinas, likely to happen late in 2013. Two diocesan staff positions were recommended, for Communications and Christian Formation, though funding for these positions is in question. The diocese is also considering engaging the Rev. Eric Law and his Kaleidoscope Institute for some intentional work and training in multicultural ministry. We also voted to change our Fair Share calculation, the assessment of each parish paid to the diocese; the change will hold that rate steady for the next few years rather than raising it by 3% as an automatic cost of living calculation. We also heard from St Joseph's and Holy Child, Milpitas, two congregations who have recently completed their merger – no small event, as St Joseph's is mostly Anglo and Holy Child is a Filipino parish. And we celebrated Bishop Mary's 5th anniversary of ordination to the episcopate.

Woven throughout the time together were opportunities to help individuals focus on how we measure our presence in our community. Our table was able to discuss how we need to think outside of our church walls in a more global community manner. Bishop Mary encouraged us to think of ourselves as part of the "Episcopal Mega Church" with goals and visions larger than "just a church in the Almaden Valley."

Nancy Romer and Kate Flexer

Christian Education

December is always a busy month in most families and that is no different with our church family and Sunday School. We begin our winter curriculum with lessons that lead very nicely up to our Christmas Pageant scheduled for December 23rd and a joint service at 10 AM. If you are in town, you will want to come see what special things our children and youth have in store for you this year. Pageant Sunday is also a great Sunday to invite other families with children. All visiting children can be in our pageant, too. We have plenty of costumes and youth very capable of leading younger children to be part of our program. Encourage your visiting families to come just a little early to get costumes that the children might like.

This year we are also providing some special Advent materials for our children, youth and their families. For Sunday School aged children and their families, we have a daily devotions booklet entitled “Make Room for Joy.” The stable became very crowded when Jesus was born with people and animals. This booklet introduces the children to a variety of characters that may have gathered in the stable around the manger. Through these characters, the children can find ways to “make room in their hearts for the joy” of Jesus’ birth. To count the days, each child also received a special Advent Calendar from their Sunday School teachers.

For our youth this season, we offered an opportunity to do a little “texting.” “Message in the Manger” provides daily advent texts and devotions for teens and young adults. Extra copies of all these resources are on hand in the Christian Education office if you know of a family or youth that might enjoy participating in this Advent activity.

May we all remember the “reason for this season” and not crowd out the most important message. Let God’s love abound every day and in every way as we all celebrate the miraculous birth of our Savior.

Susie Ferguson



Website news

The website committee met early in November, as we continue striving to make the ECA website current, attractive, and useful. I'd like to share a couple of developments from that meeting:

Jason Kazarian is taking over as webmaster of the website, with the assistance of Mary McPherson. We are all much indebted to Hans Spanjaart, for all he has done in revamping the website and maintaining it over the past several years. Hans has elevated the website to a completely different level than before. Hans will continue to be involved in an advisory/consultant capacity, but his work now limits the amount of time he can devote to the website, and fortunately, we have a very knowledgeable and willing replacement in Jason.

Alexanna Alvarado is overseeing the photography aspect of the website, changing the photographic content periodically and helping set the right visual tone. If you take photographs related to ECA life and events, they can be submitted to Alex for possible use on the website. She is interested in quality over quantity, and would ask that you limit your submissions to your "best photos." Photographs can be submitted via Alex's mailbox at church, or they can be submitted digitally via email: photos@eca-sj.org.

The website committee will be meeting again early in December. We hope that you will make frequent use of the website, and we welcome your input regarding how the website can be more useful in the future.

Mike Schmidt

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The Shape

