

# Calvary Protestant Evangelical Free Church

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## CALVARY CHRONICLE

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### EPIPHANY by David E. Manuel

Throughout the year, in schools, shops, offices, or even our homes, especially at the very beginning of certain months, people put up decorations in anticipation of some significant holiday: hearts for February, four-leaf clovers for March, jack-o-lanterns for October, turkeys for November, and on it goes. Old decorations are eagerly replaced by the next in the sequence. For many people, Christmas, the theme of December, is forgotten as they move on to the theme of January, especially, perhaps, because New Year's Day encourages us to put away the old and begin the new.

Others want the Christmas season to last as long as possible. My wife, for example, would have the whole house decorated near the beginning of Advent to help us anticipate the climactic day. With our busy schedules, though, we often decorate up to the last minute. In her view, decorating on Christmas Eve, or especially *after*, is pointless. I, on the other hand, see no reason not to continue decorating even past the 25<sup>th</sup>. Now, I don't want to be that person whose Christmas tree is up all year, but, like my wife, I do want the season to last.

Especially among groups that follow the liturgical calendar (like Catholics, Lutherans, and Episcopalians), opinions about the duration of Christmastide vary: until the end of December 25; until "**the octave of Christmas**" on January 1; until **Epiphany** (the arrival of the wise men) on January 6; until the **Feast of the Baptism of the Lord** on January 13; or until **Candlemas**, the **Feast of the Presentation of the Lord** on February 2. Personally, I'm partial to the idea of the twelve days of Christmas (plus one): December 25 through Twelfth Night on January 5 followed by Epiphany, on January 6. Those thirteen days offer me a logical period from the Nativity itself through the appearance of the wise men, after which the Gospels proceed to Jesus' ministry, passion, resurrection, and ascension.

Our modern practice of marking the actual date of an event encourages the assumption that the church also would be precise. Yes, the church did try to determine the historical date of Easter, for example. But in observing biblical events for which we have no verifiable date, the church has tried to agree on a shared time for celebration as it formulated the liturgical year. In doing so, the church often groups events together thematically in its calendar, rather than strictly chronologically. This is especially true of **Christmastide**.

The changes to Epiphany over time demonstrate that thematic organization of the liturgical year. The first recorded reference to the observance of Epiphany is by Clement of Alexandria, who died toward the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. So, we know that Epiphany began in the Eastern Church later than Pentecost (2<sup>nd</sup> century) but far earlier than Christmas (4<sup>th</sup> century). The word "epiphany" (ἐπιφάνεια, *epiphaneia*) means "*appearance*" or, especially in religious usage, "a visible manifestation of a hidden divinity" (Bauer 304). Originally, it was "a feast of the appearance of Christ in the flesh, and particularly of the manifestation of his Messiahship by his baptism"—in other words, "a festival at once of his birth and his baptism." When the Eastern Church adopted the Western holiday of Christmas, they separated the celebration of the Nativity from Epiphany. But Epiphany was still the combined celebration of several Messianic manifestations in the early life and ministry of Christ: the adoration of the Magi, Jesus' baptism, the first miracle at the wedding at Cana, and the feeding of the five thousand. After the fourth century, the Western Church ("more Gentile-Christian in its origin") made Epiphany exclusively the feast of the Three Kings (Schaff, II, 221-2; III, 399). Thus, in the Western Church, Epiphany became a celebration of Christ's manifestation to the Gentile nations, the first members of which are "*wise men from the east*" who recognize the one "*who has been born king of the Jews*" (**Matthew 2:1**). Such an application comes not from some later symbolic misreading but may actually be at work in the structure of Matthew's Gospel (Nolland 118).

(Continued on next page)

Perhaps because the church has placed the Nativity and Epiphany so close together liturgically, many people think that the wise men arrived with the shepherds at the manger. Isn't the proof right there in our Nativity scenes? **Matthew (2:1-18)** does provide some information. Who were the wise men? In the original Greek, Matthew calls them "magi" (μάγοι), a word of uncertain etymology with both positive and negative connotations. But in the context of the Gospel, "magi" are clearly viewed positively, and their astrological expertise is presented without judgment. Calling them "kings" relies upon a possible reading of passages that Matthew may be echoing (**Psalms 72:10-11; Is. 60:3, 5b-6**). Some speculate that they might have been Gentile converts to Judaism. How many were they? Matthew does not specify. The traditional number is based only on their three gifts. Where "from the East" did they travel? Babylon was perhaps the most famous center of astrology, but any number of other places in the East are also possible (Roberts 15-16; Brown 167-70, 187, 197-200). When did they find Jesus? **Matthew 2:1** can be translated "Jesus having been born . . . magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem," that is, after the birth of Jesus. More time elapsed before Herod summoned the wise men to ask "what time the star had appeared." After Herod sent them to Bethlehem, the wise men came not into a stable but "into the house" (εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν, *eis ten oikian*) to see Jesus. Later, Herod killed all male children "in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men" (**Matthew 2:1-18**). From the last passage, we often assume that Jesus must have been two years old by the time the wise men arrived. But the ancients believed that such astronomical portends could mark some significant event (such as the birth of a royal child) either at the time or in advance, as a herald (Brown 170-1). So the star could have appeared on the day of the birth itself but also two years before. And Herod, by choosing to kill boys of so wide an age span, seems also to have been uncertain of the precise date. But most see enough time as having elapsed that the magi would have found Jesus in Bethlehem but relocated from the stable—the shepherds long gone. Matthew omits—as irrelevant—details that the modern reader might like to know, focusing instead on the theological import of events: Gentile magi came to prostrate themselves (προσκυνέω, *proskuneo*) before a new-born king, whose dominion, being not of this world (**John 18:36**), would not be defeated by the powers of this world.

The history of the celebration of Epiphany, as laid out above, shows how the church linked other biblical events to the visit of the wise men. As the church made alterations to Epiphany over time, it also introduced biblical events to be commemorated on new festal days during the period between Christmas Day and January 6. Of course, these dates and observances are not necessary to our faith. The flexibility of their inclusion and removal makes that patently clear. And we may certainly attend to them, or not, as we wish. Their long absence from anti-liturgical evangelical tradition may even make them too strange for us to contemplate at all. But when I first encountered them through my studies of English literature, which is replete with poetry about these very subjects, I saw those ancient commemorations, paradoxically, as a refreshingly *new* and edifying addition to my devotional life.

For me, at least, the liturgical alignment of the days from Christmas through Epiphany enriches my contemplation of the Nativity. Four examples will suffice. The Feast of St. Stephen (December 26) recalls the first martyr (**Acts 6:1-8:2**) and the price so many paid for faith in this Savior. The Feast of St. John the Evangelist (December 27) directs me again to **John 1:1-2:17** and faith in Christ, the light of the world. The Feast of the Holy Innocents (December 28) calls to mind Jesus' escape from the slaughter Herod meted out upon countless innocent children in a failed attempt to thwart God's purposes (**Matt. 2:16-19**). The Feast of the Circumcision (January 1) suggests doctrinal implications of the incarnation: first, as another confirmation of God's plan (**Luke 1:31; 2:21**); second, as an expression of tenets of Christology, that Jesus was born in the flesh under the law of Moses (**Galatians 4:4; Hebrew 2:14-17**); third, through later tradition, as the beginning of Christ's redemptive mission poignantly expressed by the first shedding of his blood ("For here is foreshadowed his perfect self-offering upon the cross, the shedding of his blood to set us free from sin and death") ("The Naming").

For me, active contemplation of God's love as expressed in the Nativity of Jesus continues beyond Christmas to Epiphany. Imagine my bewilderment when on December 28 (the fourth day of Christmas), I received an email from EFCA East declaring that "Christmas has been celebrated and now we wait in limbo for the next holiday to arrive": New Year's Day. I have not been in limbo.

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# **SENIORS LUNCHEON!**

The holiday season started early in December with the seniors celebrating Christmas at a luncheon on **December 6<sup>th</sup>**. A number of women dressed festively for the occasion, the seniors enjoyed some fellowship while listening to Christmas music, and Brother Ralph prepared a delicious roast beef dinner.

Elder Charlie attended and gave a holiday homily. He read scripture from the book of **Luke** which gives the account of the nativity story - the foretelling of the Savior's coming, and the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. God loves us so that He sent His Son to be born on earth, be the light of the world, give us peace with God, and fulfill His eternal plan of salvation. Charlie reminded us to keep Jesus in our hearts this season. Give rather than receive - God will bless you!



We thank Ralph and Charlie for making the luncheon such a joyous, memorable time to begin the holiday season



Looking ahead, the next Seniors Luncheon will be held **Tuesday, February 7<sup>th</sup>**. As always, the luncheon will start at 12:00 noon. It will be Italian style! There will be chicken cutlets, meatballs, pasta with sauce, a salad, and a sweet dessert. Please let us know you are coming by either signing the sign-up sheet at the church or call the church office at 516-223-4070.



# Special Events in December

## JONES BEACH LIGHT SHOW

On **December 2<sup>nd</sup>** the church planned an outing to Jones Beach State Park to see the annual holiday light show. There were 17 in the church family who went, ranging from toddler to seniors, who enjoyed the many different light displays around the parkway loop at the west end, and then stopped by to see all the activities going on at the West End 2 bathhouse.

Afterwards, everyone drove back to the church for fellowship and refreshments. It was a nice evening out and time spent together.



## CHRISTMAS PAGAENT



On Sunday, **December 18<sup>th</sup>**, nearly 100 church family and friends celebrated Christmas together.

The evening started off with a pot-luck dinner.

As always, there was such a variety of delicious foods that was prepared by the many good cooks at Calvary.

Following dinner a service was held upstairs. The sanctuary was fully

decorated, everyone participated in singing Christmas carols, and then

Sarabeth read from scripture as the children acted out the nativity story.

There was Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and sheep, the angel, and three Wise Men with their gifts and camels. To end the evening everyone was invited back downstairs for

dessert. A great evening to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior!



We thank all those who were involved in putting the evening events together – and there were many. A special thanks to Sarabeth, Magalie, Melissa, and all the kids in the pageant for all their hard work and dedication. Thank you!

## DONATION GIFT BAGS



About 7 ladies from the Ladies Bible Study got together on Thursday, **December 22<sup>nd</sup>**, to pack up the items that were donated for the men at Recovery House.

One of the workers mentioned how much the men appreciated the clothes so much, that they tried them on immediately and showed off the 'new' clothes to one another. Thank you all for helping and making an impact in those men's lives!

# **NEW INTERIM PASTOR**

During the morning service on Sunday, January 1, we welcomed our new interim pastor Dr. Brian Leander, pictured here with his wife Vanessa. He will begin his ministry on Sunday, January 8. Dr. Leander will preach several times a month, will work with the elders and other ministry leaders, and will help us to prepare for a permanent pastor. We look forward to the ministry of Dr. Leander as we begin this new and exciting chapter in Calvary's history.



Also, please note we will be having a Meet and Greet on Sunday, January 8th directly after the service with a meal. Please send an email ([bjcorc@verizon.net](mailto:bjcorc@verizon.net)) or text (516-223-4210) to Barbara Corcoran about what you can bring, and we can have a general head count as well.

We really appreciate and feel blessed to welcome Pastor Leander and his wife Vanessa!

## **BIRTHDAYS**

### **JANUARY**

1st Martha Mietenkorte  
3rd David Brewster  
4th Gregory Dapice  
5th Magalie Alcindor  
6th Fitz Alcindor Sr.  
8th Matthew Lucchesi  
9th Lorna Bigby  
9th Steven Elcock  
16th Bob Benedetto  
18th Raynell Falden (Bigby)  
21st Louise Fazzino  
21st Eugene Lloyd  
22nd Wally Capasso  
22nd Erin Waldvogel  
24th Magaline Alcindor  
24th Vincent Rotolo  
24th Tim Waldvogel  
25th Finch Waldvogel  
27th Dave Senita  
29th Roy Knoernschild  
29th Allison Linhart  
30th Ralph Rose  
31st Chris Watts

### **FEBRUARY**

1st Nadia Elcock  
2nd Barbara Lucchesi  
3rd Amelia Rose Mandato  
4th Peg Corcoran  
12th Ruth Mason  
16th Aaron Nehring  
17th Kirsten Watts  
19th Mary Lou Ekstrom  
23rd Athena Fazzino  
26th Carol Chalavoutis  
26th Joshua Lucchesi



## **ANNIVERSARY**

### **January**

4th Charles & Barbara Lucchesi  
21st Joe & Louise Fazzino  
24th Matt & Karen Linhart

### **February**

3rd Pete & MaryLou Ekstrom  
20th Brett & Melissa Rose



### **OPTIMISM**

Count your blessings instead of your crosses,

Count your gains instead of your losses.

Count your joy instead of your woes,

Count your friends instead of your foes.

Count your smiles instead of your tears,

Count your courage instead of your fears.

Count your full years instead of your lean,

Count your kind deeds instead of your mean.

Count your health instead of your wealth,

# Calvary Chronicle

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## CHURCH UPDATES

**Adult Sunday School Class** meets Sunday @ 9:45 a.m. The group is watching “The Chosen” - followed by discussion. For parents with children who would like to attend the class, there will be a story time and activities available for your children.

**The Sunday worship service is at 11:00 a.m.** The message will be recorded and posted on the church’s website [www.cpcbaldwin.com](http://www.cpcbaldwin.com) (click on YouTube), and also on “YouTube” at [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) (search for Calvary Church, Baldwin).

**Children’s Church** is held on Sundays during the service. The children are dismissed before the sermon and meet in the fellowship room. On the first Sunday of each month (when Holy Communion is scheduled), Children’s Church will not be in session.

**Choir Practice** every Monday @ 8 p.m. unless it falls on a holiday.

**Bible Study/Prayer Meeting** is held Wednesdays @ 7:00 p.m. at the church. There is prayer time followed by Bible Study. The men and women are studying the Book of Luke.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Meet and Greet** – On Sunday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, directly after the service we will be meeting with Dr. Brian Leander, the Interim Pastor. (see page 5 for more details)

**Seniors Luncheon** – On Tuesday, February 7<sup>th</sup>, starting at 12:00 noon. Please let us know if you are attending by calling the church office and speaking to Paty or leave a message (516-223-4070).

## PUBLICATIONS

The December/January/February issue of *Our Daily Bread*, January issues of *Daily Walk* and *Today’s Christian Living* are available at the church. Additional literature and devotional books are located in the hymnal rack at the back of the sanctuary.