

# InSpire

## Christmas Eve: Life is good

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Christmas Eve services were very joyful. The church was full and cozy. There was joy in the room and Rev'd Jo's smile was as big as ever. My mother used to say "life is good" when she observed people enjoying themselves. The Christmas Collect says, "O God, you make us glad by the yearly festival of the birth of your only son Jesus Christ." The service felt like the celebration it should be.

After I felt this, my mind slipped into an area of concern. I started doing math—age math—and I realized this could be one of the last Christmas Eve's that I will have. Anxiety set in.

Life's irony is that while we cherish it, we know we will eventually have to let life go. Letting go is the hard part. Giving up accomplishments, people, and things we love, things we want to keep forever. Life is made up of thoughts and feelings. I have good ones and bad ones. Thankfully, we have hope in our Savior and eternal life. Our faith.

Philippians 4:8 crossed my mind on Christmas Eve: "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right,



*We can't show you our Christmas joy, but our Christmas Eve altar was glorious, also*

whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. And the God of peace will be with you."

That's when I realized, "Tonight, there is hope. Hope in the eternal. Faith in the miracle of life. And yes, faith in Peace. The beginning of something wonderful."

This is my Christmas Eve story at Resurrection. I invite you to share your Resurrection story with your church community and others by submitting an article to Lea Fowlie at [leafowlie@comcast.net](mailto:leafowlie@comcast.net).

We would love to hear from you!

~ Dan Parker

## Epiphany: God's grace extends to all



*The Rev'd Jo Belser*

*“Epiphany shows that we can recognize God coming into our world in everyday ways.”*

Did you know that Christmas was not always celebrated on December 25? Originally, it was celebrated on January 6, but the Church moved Christmas celebrations in the fourth century to compete with a pagan festival honoring sun gods. This made room for Epiphany, a season which begins on January 6 and lasts until Ash Wednesday, which will be on February 18 this year.

So, what does Epiphany add to Christmas? In other words, what does Epiphany bring us?

The gospel lessons during Epiphany begin with the account of foreign scientists, magi, discerning that God had been born among us. Their actions of coming to find Jesus and worship him were similar to the Jewish shepherds who learned of his birth by less ordinary means—angels. By the magi's actions, we realize that God hadn't come to just one group of people; God had extended his grace to all people.

Epiphany also shows that we can recognize God coming into our world in everyday ways: in nature, by new thoughts that come to us when we seek God, recognizing the light of Christ that dispels darkness, and even in the order of the stars when they act in unexpected ways. This is a lesson I review each time someone says to me, “I worship God in [someplace other than church].” Yes,



*The cast of our pageant*



this also is a way to worship our creator, however we see him; however we discern him. The only appropriate response is to worship him.

Because you know how important worship is to me, it won't surprise you that I find deep meaning in the magi finding God and worshiping him. Because I know how important sharing your gifts with others is to you, it would not surprise me if you find deep meaning in the magi gifting the Christ Child. In this way, loving

God and loving others, the circle of love is complete.

This year I will add one more element to our contemplation of Epiphany. The magi avoided placing their trust in human kings. This wasn't a political act, but a recognition of the need to not get enmeshed in evil. They found Christ, gifted him, and returned home “another way.” Where will our “another way” lead us this year?

*~ The Rev'd Jo Belser*

## I feel like Moses...

... in a way



Gebhard Fugel, public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Becoming Senior Warden is a humbling task in the best of times. In a year when Resurrection will experience a clergy transition it is especially daunting. After all, without a Rector, the Senior Warden will call and preside over Vestry and congregational meetings, assure continuing congregational worship, oversee the operations of the church, and support the various ministries of the congregation.

Nearly a decade ago we called our time away from our campus while we were building a new church our time in the wilderness, and to me the time between Rev. Jo's well-earned retirement and calling a new priest feels like we will be entering another wilderness. All of this has me feeling like Moses.

You might be thinking, "Is this woman really comparing herself to Moses

and saying she will lead Resurrection to a promised land of a new priest and future success? No, no, no, no, no. The Moses I am feeling like is the one we meet in Chapters 3 and 4 of *Exodus*.

Remember when Moses first saw the burning bush in which the angel of the Lord spoke to him, his first reaction was "I must turn aside..." When the Lord said, "I am your father," Moses' first reaction was to hide his face. When told he would bring the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses said, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

The Lord tells Moses all the ways he will help him in his assigned task, but still Moses resists. "But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me....?" And later, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you

have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." And, finally, he says, "O my Lord, please send someone else." Yes, that's the Moses I feel like!

But as one reads further into *Exodus*, you see that the Lord stays with Moses and the Israelites and does what he has promised. He sends Aaron as high priest and the prophetess Miriam. He changes Pharaoh's mind with plagues. The Red Sea parts. When the people are hungry, there is manna. When they thirst, Moses draws water from a rock. And they do make it to the end of their journey.

So, I look around and realize that I am not alone. This is a shared journey for all of us at Resurrection. We will make it together despite my deficiencies as a leader. Despite the trials and tribulations that we may face, the disappointments that we may experience before our ultimate success in calling a new Rector. We know that God is with us and he makes all things possible.

At this point in our parish life, we will all be like Moses. Traveling together, seeking together, praying together, and coming out of the wilderness to a new life together. Just like the Israelites, although I suggest we skip the Golden Calf episode!

~ Kat Turner



Kat Turner

*"We know  
that God  
is with us  
and he  
makes all  
things  
possible."*



## The Dignity Index

I don't think it is surprising that many think that civic discourse in our country is no longer civil. The polarization of political views on various topics has led to an us vs. them mentality that frequently ignores what we have in common. Politeness seems to have left politics, and we are constantly exposed to mean-spirited tirades, gotcha journalism, and juvenile name-calling. Widespread access to social media amplifies these behaviors. I find this coarsening of our political life demeaning and the toxicity of political discourse a possible prelude to violence. It is disturbing to me as a Christian.

Personally, the worst part of all this is what I see this environment doing to me. I find myself reveling in a nasty take down of someone I disagree with. I delight in seeing an unflattering meme. And in the privacy of my own home, I have been known to issue a loud expletive in response to something I have heard or read. This is not who I want to be.

Disagreement between segments of our common life is not new. In the 20th century, four years before attorney Joseph Welch asked Senator Joe McCarthy, "Have you no sense of decency," freshman Senator Margaret Chase Smith had delivered a declaration of conscience to her colleagues in which she noted "But recently that deliberative character has ... been debased ... to a forum of hate and character assassination." In the

## THE DIGNITY INDEX®

Ease Divisions. Prevent Violence. Solve Problems.

- 8 "Each one of us is born with inherent worth, so we treat everyone with dignity—no matter what."
- 7 "We fully engage with the other side, discussing even values and interests we don't share, open to admitting mistakes or changing our minds."
- 6 "We always talk to the other side, searching for the values and interests we share."
- 5 "The other side has a right to be here and a right to be heard. They belong here too."
- 4 "We're better than those people. They don't really belong. They're not one of us."
- 3 "We're the good people and they're the bad people. It's us vs. them."
- 2 "Those people are evil and they're going to ruin everything if we let them. It's us or them."
- 1 "They're not even human. It's our moral duty to destroy them before they destroy us."

Learn more at [dignity.us](http://dignity.us)



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## The Dignity Index

*(Continued from page 4)*

nineteenth century in his Second Inaugural Address Abraham Lincoln found it necessary to remind his countrymen that after the divisions of the Civil War that the nation should proceed “With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right....” In the eighteenth century, in our early days as a nation, we can see that Federalist Paper #10 addresses how to reconcile citizens with interests that are contrary to the rights of others or inimical to the interests of the community as a whole. Madison argued that a representative democracy can be an effective defense against partisanship and factionalism. Is this still true?

What happened to these arguments for civility and cooperation? Does no one believe in the Golden Rule anymore? And what can we do about it?

I recently had two experiences that suggest a way forward for us, as individuals. The first was a keynote address by the Rev’d Lisa Kimball at the Diocesan Annual Convention and the second was a moderated conversation between the conservative retired federal judge Tom Griffith and liberal Special Olympics head Tim Shriver. This latter event was part of the

McClendon Lecture series of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church. Both events referenced the Dignity Index, created because “Political discourse that demonizes the other side is crippling our democracy and dividing our families. The cause? Words. Studies have shown that language rooted in contempt creates division, while language rooted in dignity can overcome it.”

Since then, I have learned of the effort of Utah Governor Spencer Cox, a Republican who has made depolarization a central theme of his governorship. As chair of the National Governors Association, his initiative “Disagree Better” focused on building cross-aisle collaborations with blue states. And he prompted headlines recently when, in response to a question from a reporter, he stated that Pennsylvania’s

Democrat Governor could be a good president. Cox acknowledges that his actions are guided by his faith as a member of the Church of the Latter-Day Saints. Perhaps it’s time for all people of faith to publicly tie their faith to their political activism.

I am encouraged that some political leaders are willing to show leadership on this issue. I hope more will follow. For me, I now have the Dignity Index against which I can measure my own actions and hope to do better. While I might find myself at level 5 to 8 on this scale, depending on the issue or the day or the situation, I hope to stop my level 3 and 4 reactions that I have found so dispiriting in myself.

How about you? Where do you fall on the Dignity Index?

~ Kat Turner

*“Where  
do you  
fall  
on the  
Dignity  
Index?”*



*Thank you for the cake mix and frosting, a Christmas gift to each of our food pantry clients*



*The Rev'd  
Theresa Lewallen*

## Plan to attend these events

During my time on medical leave, I've missed participating in racial justice and healing events. I am grateful that the Racial Justice and Healing leaders highlighted its work and focus through the Advent Calendar. I hope you marked some things down to do in the future if you weren't able to do them during December.



*Nobel Foundation,  
public domain*

Committee asks that you register (free) on its [Website](#).

The Diocese of Virginia's winter book study begins on **January 14** at 3:00 to 4:30 pm on Zoom. We'll read and discuss *Critical Race Theology*, which examines how theological ideas have been used historically and systematically to justify racial hierarchy and uphold white supremacy. This four-week study draws on Black Liberation Theology and Womanist thought to offer a pathway toward genuine systemic repair and a more just vision of the Beloved Community. If you are interested in joining this Zoom-based winter book study with Canon J. Lee Hill, Jr., please [contact Tammy Lewis](#) by e-mail or 804-622-3194.

The Diocese is training people to offer its new Racial Justice and Healing curriculum, "I Will With God's Help," which is liturgically rich and uses the lens of our Baptismal Covenant. More information will be available later in January.

Join us on **February 8** from 3:00 to 5:00 pm for *Singing the Journey: Still We Rise* at the Lyceum to celebrate Black History month. The Washington Revels Jubilee Voices and the Office of Historic Alexandria's Division of African American History will celebrate African American music, history, and culture in a concert exploring the

themes of freedom, resilience, and joy, from the Civil War through the present day. Enjoy traditional African American spirituals, poetry, dance, ring shouts, banjo tunes, stories, and audience participation.

One of the gifts of my time at home was being able to watch the PBS series *The American Revolution*. As I watched and listened, I recognized that this series included the involvement of people normally left out of the telling of our country's history. Indigenous voices and the roles the many tribes played were not only included but were highlighted. The roles that free and enslaved Black people as well as Europeans from across many countries played are woven throughout that part of our history as a country. I was particularly struck by the inclusion of Phyllis Wheatley's writings as a key factor in the dichotomy of people seeking freedom while holding other people enslaved. Phyllis Wheatley's ability to learn to read and write English at a young age also belied the lie being perpetrated that the enslaved were unable to be educated. The series highlights and adds to some of the information we learned in Sacred Ground.

*~ The Rev'd  
Theresa Lewallen*

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[The Rev'd Jo J. Belser](#)

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Please consider joining me and others at the City of Alexandria's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Program. This 53<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary event will be held on Thursday, **January 15**, at the George Washington Masonic National Memorial ("Masonic Temple"), 101 Callahan Drive, Alexandria. A reception at 5:30 pm precedes the program, which will be held from 6:30 to 8:00 pm. This year's theme is *Dawn of Justice and Hope*. The Memorial



## We fed 30 children at the shelter

Did you know that our church provides and serves dinner at Carpenter's Shelter on the first Sunday evening of the odd-numbered months? This means that we made and served dinner at the shelter on Sunday, January 43. Here's what happened. The dinner went well, thanks to all who provided the food and those who served it. Of the 43 children who were residing in the shelter that night, we fed 30, and we also fed 14 of the 18 adults. This was a higher percentage of the children than usual, probably because the food on the menu was very popular: chicken, macaroni and cheese, green beans,

corn bread, salad, and miniature cupcakes. The sauces for the chicken were very popular, as well: ranch dressing, hot sauce, and Chick-fil-e sauce. It was amazing how many little ones took the hot sauce.

Besides the kitchen crew (Margaret Riccardelli, LaShaun Wye, and me), the people that made the dinner successful by contributing food were Helen McIlvaine, Coral Childs, and Betsy Faga.

Our next night to feed people at the shelter is on Sunday, March 1. Can you help?

~ Maureen Bryant



*LeShaun Wye, Margaret Riccardelli, and Maureen Bryant at Carpenter's Shelter on Sunday, January 4*

## Serving on the Vestry

I'm Helen McIlvaine and I am the City of Alexandria's Housing Director. I joined Church of the Resurrection in 2021 after being inspired by the faith-filled example of the group working on The Spire project (Rev'd Jo, Kat Turner, Betsy Faga, and Robert Reeves). As I began thinking about joining a church community, I realized that I felt closest to Christ when I was with these four. I love our church community and especially enjoy the 8:00 am worship service. The sermon is always very thought-provoking. Since I am still working and have grown children with families that are local, I have mostly volunteered for "one-off"

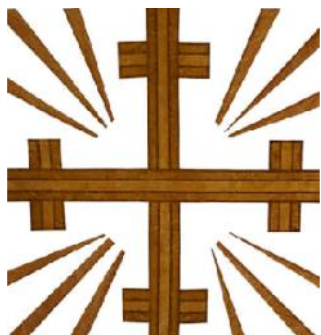


*Helen McIlvaine is second from the right in this photo of our 8:00 am in-person congregation on April 6 last year*

kinds of activities (e.g., lecturing, "telling," preparing food for Carpenter's Shelter), but I look forward to serving

Resurrection in a more committed way as a member of the Vestry.

~ Helen McIlvaine



## Church of the Resurrection

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### About *InSpire*

*InSpire* is the monthly newsletter of the Church of the Resurrection, describing the people of our congregation and our faith journey together. The following individuals contributed to this issue of *InSpire*:

- The Rev'd Jo Belser
- Maureen Bryant
- Lea Fowlie, editor
- Lenore Funkhouser, photos
- Judy Isaacs
- The Rev'd Theresa Lewallen
- Helen McIlvaine
- Dan Parker
- Kat Turner

Church of the Resurrection serves the people in the Beauregard Corridor of the City of Alexandria, home to many recent immigrants. In April 2021, Resurrection completed an eight-year mission to provide 113 units of affordable housing to its community.

## Pope Leo

These are some highlights from an article on November 28, 2025, in *The Washington Post* that are comments made by Pope Leo XIV:

He called his first trip abroad as pope a mission of unity and peace, inviting “all people to come together to search for greater unity, greater harmony, and to look for ways where all men and women can truly be brothers and sisters in spite of different religions, in spite of different beliefs.”

He said, “Following Jesus is not a wide and comfortable path. Am I willing to share the goods of the Earth, which belong to everyone, in a just and equitable manner? How do I treat creation, the work of his hands. Do I exploit and destroy it, or do I use it with reverence and gratitude, caring for and cultivating it as the common home of humanity?”

This last statement he made very much reflects the philosophy of Robin Wall Kimmerer in her book “*Braiding Sweetgrass*.” This new Pope is starting on a very positive note, which gives me hope for his and our future.

~ *Judy Isaacs*

## We celebrated on Christmas Day, also

Given how special Christmas Eve was, I wondered how our noon-day lunch Eucharist on Christmas Day would compare. There were 12 attendees last year for our first of this kind of Christmas Day service. However, this year there were 20 people and a veritable feast of food, fellowship, and worship. Carlton Willis, our new Bible study participant (and chair of the ALIVE! Board) joined us, as did David “Maxi” Maxwell and his whole family. Joshua Warren and Talisha Walker and four of their girls (Summer, India, and Armani, joined by Joshua’s oldest daughter, Haley), Lou Zarfes and Gay Colyer, and as many of you who weren’t still celebrating elsewhere with your families.

Sharon Roberts was not able to attend in person on Christmas Day, as we had hoped. However, we were able to greet her and Amanda Vann via Zoom and Lenore Funkhouser and I took Communion to them after the service. On the way, Lenore shared that “the love in the room” at our Christmas services really moved her.

~ *The Rev'd Jo Belser*