

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

Volume XXXI, Number 3

November 2025



November 2025

This Month's Cover

In recognition of All Saints' Day, November 1, our cover this month is Albrecht Dürer's *The Saints' Adoration of the Trinity*. Completed in 1511, it is oil on a linen panel. It is 4'5"x4'6" and is displayed in the Art History Museum in Vienna. In 1501 the wealthy merchant Matthäus Landauer, along with Erasmus Schildkrot, a prominent goldsmith, founded the *Zwölfbrüderhaus* ("House of Twelve Brothers") in Nürnberg. Both men were patrons of the arts. This was a charitable institution to house and feed up to twelve impoverished artists who could not support themselves with their work. Landauer himself lived there until his death in 1510. In the house there was a chapel dedicated to the Holy Trinity and All Saints. In 1508, Landauer commissioned Albrecht Dürer to paint an altarpiece for the chapel, and this painting was the result. Unfortunately, it was not finished until 1511, a year after Landauer's death.

The painting depicts the saints of heaven gathered around and worshipping the Holy Trinity. The man in red on the right is Dürer, and next to him is Maximilian I, the Holy Roman Emperor. On the left in red is Matthäus Landauer, and the elderly couple to his left are Dorothea and Wilhelm Haller, two of the charity's primary supporters. The Pope on Landauer's right is Julius II, who was the reigning Pope at the time. He was also a patron of the arts, being the Pope who commissioned Michelangelo to paint the Sistine Chapel ceiling. It was common during the Renaissance for artists to include their patrons and supporters in their paintings, as well as self-portraits, especially in religious commissions.

Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), usually associated with his woodcut prints, was the most famous German painter of his time, although his woodcuts originally launched him into fame in his twenties. He was born in Nürnberg, the son of a Hungarian goldsmith, Albrecht Dürer the Elder. He first trained young Albrecht and his brothers as painters and goldsmiths.¹ Dürer's Godfather, Anton Koberger, left the goldsmithing business to become a printer. He owned 24 printing presses, a prodigious number in those days, and was

¹ Life was hard in those days. Dürer's parents had eighteen children, of whom only three survived to adulthood. These were Albrecht, his brother Hans, also an accomplished painter, and his brother Endres, who took over his father's goldsmithing business.

renowned all over Europe for the fine quality of his work. His most famous work was the *Nürnberg Chronicle* which contained 1,809 woodcut illustrations, many of which Dürer may have worked on.

In 1494 Dürer married Agnes Frey. It was a prearranged marriage, and by all indications, not a very happy one. Neither really wanted the marriage, and Dürer described her in a letter as an “old crow.” A friend in a letter described Agnes as “a miserly shrew with a bitter tongue.” The couple had no children.

Because of Dürer’s autobiography and a plethora of surviving letters, we know a great many of the details of his life that we will not try to include here. Suffice it to say that he was famous throughout Europe by his late 20s, and by the time of his death in 1528 he was regarded even by his contemporaries as the greatest German artist of his time. He was not only a practicing artist but also a very insightful art theorist, publishing several books in this field. He died in Nürnberg on April 6, 1528 at the age of 56. He was buried in the Johannesfriedhof Cemetery, where his grave can still be seen.

Dürer was a faithful Roman Catholic throughout his life, although many analysts believe that in his later years, as the Reformation began to surge throughout Europe, his works showed distinct Protestant sympathies. He never officially became a Protestant, but the Lutheran Church commemorates him on April 6th.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

Yes, the End Times are coming. No, we have absolutely no idea when. Jesus told us that it was not given even to him to know when while he was still among us. He gave us the signs to watch for (wars and rumors of wars, famine, plague, etc.) not as clues to when it was going to happen, but as reminders that it will happen, and that we had better be prepared for it at any time. It may be this afternoon, or it may not be for thousands of years. It is not given to us to know. The signs are all around us, but if we study history, we realize that they have always been all around us. The signs are to warn us to be prepared, not to tell us what is going to happen or when.

The world we live in is a troubled one, to say the least. The future of the economy, once reasonably predictable, is a mystery even to the best economists. International relations are so tense that one stupid act on the part of any of a dozen world leaders could trigger a

world war. Hatred, bigotry, division and ignorance are at the highest peaks that we have seen in decades. Traditional moral and social values are crumbling at an astonishing rate. Church attendance and membership are plummeting. That's the bad news. Amid all this talk of doom and gloom, however, there is good news. The good news is that regardless of the mess that we have made, God is still in charge.

I have told this story before, but it is worth retelling. A little boy was trying to move a large rock. He tried everything he could think of, including levers, but he wasn't strong enough to do it. His father stood there and watched as the child became increasingly frustrated and angry. Finally, his father said to him, "Stop and think about what resources you have, and use them." The child, almost in tears, snapped back angrily, "I have!" His father replied, "No, you haven't. You haven't asked me for help yet." This is a perfect metaphor for our relationship with God. We say that he is in charge, but unless we truly believe it, we fail to turn to him for the help that we need. We cannot fix this world's mess by ourselves. We also cannot expect God to jump in and fix it for us. We need God's help, but we need to ask him for it. This is easily said, but not so easily done. It grates against human nature to have to admit our weakness and ask others for help, even God. It involves a good deal more than just saying "Lord, help us" in our prayers. It requires action.

God did not give us the Church to be an organization for social reform, soup kitchens, and nice parish get-togethers. These have their place, and they may be results of what the Church is for, but they are not the purpose of the Church. The church is the fellowship of the faithful among whom God has promised to dwell when it has finally attained a state of perfection. That is what the term "Kingdom of Heaven" or "Kingdom of God" means. Heaven is not some place "way off there" where individuals eventually go to dwell with God. Heaven is the fellowship of all the baptized faithful among whom God will come to dwell. Satan's most powerful weapons to keep that from happening are hatred and division, and this world is helping him to do his job well. I said that action is required. The action that is needed is a concerted effort to overcome the divisions that are tearing us apart. That does not mean we all must agree. It means that we all must agree not to reject or hate each other when we disagree. That takes constant effort. But with prayer, the help of God, and the decision to act as Christians, it can be accomplished.

Richard R. Losch+

Be Wordly Wise

From Tiny Eggcorns Mighty Jokes Do Grow

An eggcorn is a word or phrase resulting from misinterpreting something one hears. It comes from mishearing “acorn.” The error is reasonable, since an acorn is somewhat egg-shaped. An eggcorn is produced by the substitution of a similar word or syllable, yet still conveying something close to what the original phrase meant. Some common eggcorns are “nip it in the butt” (nip it in the bud), “for all intensive purposes” (for all intents and purposes), “could of” (could have), and “spitting image” (spirit and image).

An eggcorn is not the same as a mondegreen. A mondegreen is the substitution of similar syllables or words that completely change the meaning. An example of this is Jimi Hendrix’s song “Excuse Me While I Kiss the Sky,” which is frequently misquoted as “Excuse Me While I Kiss This Guy.” The name mondegreen comes from a Scottish ballad with the line “They slew the Earl of Marray and they laid him on the green,” which is often misquoted as “They slew the Earl of Marray and the Lady Mondegreen.”

Neither an eggcorn nor a mondegreen should be confused with a malapropism, which is the use of a completely incorrect word, making a phrase that is total nonsense. An example of this would be, “Illiterate it from your memory” instead of “obliterate.” This word comes from the name of Mrs. Malaprop, a character in an 18th century Sheridan play, who often used words incorrectly. These also should not be confused with a Spoonerism, which is the switching of sounds within a sentence, such as “Let me sew you to another sheet” instead of “Let me show you to another seat.” This word is named for the Oxford professor Rev. William Archibald Spooner, who was famous for making such mistakes in his speech.

Richard R. Losch+

No Mention of Moses

One of the frequent claims of scoffers is that except for the Bible there is no historical evidence of the Exodus, or that Moses ever even existed. It is widely accepted that if Moses lived, it was during the reign of the Pharaoh Rameses II (r. 1279-1217 BC). In all the writings and inscriptions during Rameses’ reign,, there is no mention of the Israelite slaves or of Moses. One reason for this may be

a cultural custom of ancient Egypt. They were a proud people who honored strength and victory, and held humility and defeat to be contemptible weaknesses. If you read Egyptian inscriptions, you would believe that for centuries they never lost a battle, and that in every conflict hundreds of enemy soldiers died for every Egyptian soldier.¹ Assuming that the story of Moses is based on real events, it is very unlikely that the Egyptians would have kept any record of him or of the Israelites leaving Egypt. It was no secret to them that Moses was a Hebrew, and therefore in the eyes of the Egyptians, even though he was raised in the palace by the Pharaoh's daughter, he would have been thought of more like a pet, an inferior being. To the Egyptians, the idea of slaves rising up and leaving Egypt would have been unthinkable. They would have had kept little record of the slaves anyway, since in those days slaves were not considered human beings, but mere chattel property. After the Exodus, the Egyptians would want no record whatsoever of that humiliation, so they would have destroyed every mention of the slaves. The Egyptians were quite good at "cancel culture." If someone fell into disgrace, every inscription, record, and mention of him anywhere in the empire would be destroyed. They tried to make it look as if he had never existed.² In some cases, it was a capital offense even to mention his name. With many people, the only way we even know they existed was by the very few records that escaped destruction or were inadequately scratched off the walls. It is therefore no surprise that there is no historical record of Moses outside the Bible.

In fact, although there is no direct evidence of the Exodus, there are hints in the archaeological record that indicate that at least some of the tribes of the Israelites were in Egypt, and that Moses, although never mentioned my name, was a real person. Recently this may have changed. An American-Israeli epigraphist³, Michael Bar-Ron, claims to have discovered two Egyptian inscriptions that mention Moses. If confirmed, this is an exciting discovery, but we must note that it is still subject to peer review, much more examination, and

¹ This was true of almost all ancient peoples. Roman inscriptions are full of boasts and self-aggrandizement. A man who did not "blow his own horn" was thought to be weak. Humility was not respected as a virtue.

² They believed that this would even deny him an afterlife with the gods.

³ Epigraphy is the study and interpretation of ancient inscriptions.

final confirmation. There are several problems with it. The dating of the inscriptions appears to be in the 19th century BC, which is six centuries earlier than the reign of Rameses II. Even though they have only been translated very recently, the inscriptions were found almost a hundred years ago, when archaeological dating techniques were much more primitive than they are today, so their dating is not certain. A good deal of work will have to be done to determine their accurate dates. The etchings, along with several others, were found in a turquoise mine in Egypt where Semitic slaves worked in ancient times. They were written in a very difficult, early Semitic language and script, and translating them has been a major challenge. No one has undertaken it until Michael Bar-Ron started working on them several years ago. It was only recently that he discovered that two of the inscriptions referred to Moses. If confirmed, they will be the earliest known non-biblical references to him.

They read *Zot M'Moshe* and *Ne'um Moshe*, meaning “This is from Moses” and “Declaration of Moses.” Moses (Moshe) was not an ancient name. It is the Greek form of an Egyptian word, not a Semitic one, and it means “Drawn from the Water,” an appropriate name for Moses since he was found in the Nile River. There is no record of Moshe ever having been used as a name until the Moses of the Bible, even though after that many people named their sons for him. This means that the reference in the inscriptions, if they are authentic, almost surely refers to the biblical Moses.

This is an exciting discovery, but we must be careful not to jump the gun with it. It is still in its earliest stages. It must be proven to be authentic and not a counterfeit or a hoax. Its dates must be reconciled with the traditional dates of Moses, and it must be widely accepted by the scientific community. All this is yet to come.

Richard R. Losch+

Rome in Living Color

The image that most people have of ancient Rome, and the one promoted by Hollywood, is that of a beautiful city of white marble, replete with gleaming white statues and monuments. In fact, Rome was nothing like that. Most of it was a filthy, stinking and densely overcrowded slum of wood and brick. In the center of it were beautiful marble buildings and statues, all richly polychromed and gilded, and blazing with color. The Romans loved bright colors and

painted almost everything. The statues in the Forum were painted so realistically that one would have to take a second look to be sure that they were not live human beings standing on the pedestals. Modern archaeological technology has advanced to the point that even though most of the paint has disappeared over the centuries, we can now detect what was originally there and reproduce how they would have looked in Caesar's time. Historians have debated for decades over whether we should paint the ancient statues as they were originally or leave them in the bare stone form with which we are now familiar. There are strong arguments on both sides of this debate.

Among the best-known monuments in Rome is the Arch of Titus. Titus Flavius Vespasianus, the son of the Emperor Vespasian, was the general who put down the Jewish revolt and destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in AD 70. He brought back a fortune to Rome, including the gold vessels and Great Menorah from the Temple. Vespasian used this treasure to help pay for the building of the Flavian Amphitheater, the arena that today is known as the Colosseum.¹ When Vespasian died in AD 79, Titus became the emperor.² He was beloved by the Roman people (although justifiably hated by the Jews). He died suddenly of a fever in 81. His brother Domitian succeeded him and built the Arch of Titus in his honor. One of the main features of the arch is a panel portraying Titus' Triumph when he returned to Rome.³ It depicts slaves carrying the treasures from

¹ After the Great Fire in Rome, Nero built a huge palace, the "Golden House." Standing in the center of the palace gardens was a 110-foot gilded statue of himself that was known as the Colossus of Nero. Vespasian tore down the palace and built the Flavian Amphitheater there. He left the statue standing outside the arena as a reminder of what a monster Nero had been. It disappeared some time in Late Antiquity, but by that time, because of the Colossus, the arena had come to be known as the Colosseum.

² Vesuvius destroyed Pompeii and Herculaneum two months later. Many Jews and Christians thought that this and Titus' untimely death of a fever were God's retribution for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.

³ A Triumph was a celebration often lasting for days, to honor a victorious general. It was the highest honor that could be bestowed on a general. It included a lavish parade through Rome, with slaves carrying the treasures that the general had brought back. He rode in a gold chariot with his face painted red to represent the god Jupiter. For the rest of his life, he was allowed to have a laurel wreath over the entrance to his home.

Jerusalem. Prominent among them is the Great Menorah.

That panel has been the subject of intense study for many years. Part of the study involves analyzing the paints and gilding that were originally used. Under the direction of archaeologists and art historians, a firm in Milan has scanned the panel and produced a digital image of what it would have looked like in ancient times.



We are so used to the Hollywood image of a white marble Rome that it is hard to imagine the whole central portion of the city looking like this. It would have been nothing new to the Romans, though. Most of the ancient world cultures did the same thing. The Parthenon in Athens centuries earlier was polychromed in the same way. The statues around the top were painted to look like live human beings, and the columns were colored and gilded. The same was true of the statues and monuments in people's homes. This restoration gives us a glimpse of what the ancient world really looked like.

Richard R. Losch+

Dogs in the Bible

Many passages in the Bible seem to paint dogs in an unfavorable light. If we read carefully, though, we find that that is no more true than it is in any literature today. Even in our culture that loves and treasures dogs, we still hear such expressions as “you dirty dog,” and dogs are not allowed in places like restaurants and hospitals. It was much the same in biblical times and in the Greco-Roman world. Dogs served as companions, hunters, guards, soldiers and shepherds, just as they do today. In Rome, there is a gravestone from the 2nd century AD for a Maltese named Helena. It is inscribed, “To Helena, foster child, soul without comparison and deserving of praise.” The Romans loved their dogs as much as we do.



Except in the very earliest stages of their culture, the Jews loved

dogs just as much. In the 2nd millennium BC, the Near East had wild dogs roaming everywhere. They were feral and dangerous, and were a threat to the villages and to the flocks of sheep. Most people were afraid of them and hated them. We see this when Jezebel was thrown from a window and the wild dogs ate her (2 Kg. 9:30ff). With the growth and development of the Israelite civilization, though, dogs became useful and, in many cases desirable. By the 2nd century BC they were popular both as work animals and as companions. One exception in the Near East was in many Arabic countries, most of which to this day dislike dogs. Muslim legend has it that Muhammad had a puppy in his tent, and the angel Gabriel refused to speak with him while there was a dog there. Because of this, Muslim tradition despises dogs. This is not true of all Muslims, of course. Many have beloved pet dogs, but among extremist Muslims dogs are considered ritually unclean and as detestable as pigs.

In Judaism, even though Jews may not eat dogs because they do not meet the dietary requirements, they are not considered ritually unclean the way pigs are. They are unclean for food purposes, but one does not become ritually unclean by touching a dog as one would by touching a pig. By the 2nd century BC dogs had become popular as household pets, as well as for their many other uses. We see a reference to dogs in one of the earliest books of the Old Testament, the book of Job: "But now they mock me, men younger than I, whose fathers I would have disdained to put with my sheep dogs" (Job 30:1). The prophet Isaiah also refers to them: "Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep. They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding" (Is. 56:10-11). In the Apocryphal Book of Tobit, Tobias sets off on a long journey with the angel Raphael as his guardian. His pet dog leaves their home and joins him on the journey as both companion and a guardian (Tobit 6:2; 11:4).

Among the Jews, as was also the custom in the entire Greco-Roman world, dogs were usually allowed to roam around dining areas while people ate. They not only picked up anything that fell on the floor, but people would frequently throw them scraps. The Romans, for example, did not use napkins. Every table was furnished with large round loaves of bread. Most eating was done with the fingers, and people would break off a piece of bread and roll it around on their fingers to clean them, then throw it to the dogs.

When Jesus told the Gentile woman as a test of her faith that it was not fit to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs (Matthew 15:26), she replied, "Yes, Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table."

Many ancient people, including the Jews, believed that dogs served a role in medicine. They believed, for example, that a dog's saliva had healing properties (many people today still hold that belief). The ancient physician Hippocrates advised that if you have an injured leg, you should keep it elevated and not walk on it. People observed that a dog does the same thing. That, along with the observation that a dog knows what herbs to eat to induce vomiting when its stomach he is upset led them to concluded that dogs understand medicine. This strikes us as funny today, but they took that concept very seriously in ancient times. The Greco-Roman god of healing, Asclepius, had a dog as his companion and assistant.

Dogs play a double role in the story of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man let the dogs eat the scraps from his table but could not be bothered sharing even the scraps with the beggar outside his door. The dogs came to lick the beggar's sores. Since they believed that a dog's saliva heals, this was seen as an act of compassion on the part of the dogs, whereas the rich man had no compassion whatever.

It is a common impression that dogs did not become pets until relatively recent times, but it is likely that they served not only as workers, but as beloved companions from the time that they were first domesticated about 15,000 years ago. They were clearly an important part of human life from the earliest of biblical times.

Richard R. Losch+

A Touch of Trivia

The Soviet Union, a master at Cancel Culture, tried to delete all memory of the existence of Genghis Khan. He is a hero of Mongolia, where he is celebrated as its founder. In the 20th century USSR, however, it was illegal even to say his name. It was a prison offense to mention him in print, video, or any other medium, and all history books and school textbooks had any reference to him deleted. It was also illegal to make a pilgrimage to Khentii, his birthplace.

Richard R. Losch+
