

# THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church  
Livingston, Alabama

Volume XXIII, Number 4

April 2016



April 2016

## ***This Month's Cover***

Our cover picture this month is Titian's *The Annunciation*. It is oil on canvas, painted in 1564. It is a large painting, roughly 13½'x8', and is displayed in the Chiesa de San Salvador (the Church of the Holy Savior) in Venice.

The Feast of the Annunciation is normally celebrated on March 25 (nine months preceding Christmas), but this year it has been translated to April 4 because March 25 is Good Friday. It celebrates the visitation of the Angel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary to announce to her that she had been chosen to bear the Incarnate Son of God. It is a feast that focuses on humility and submission to God's will. Mary knew that as an unmarried woman her pregnancy would bring scandal and possibly even death, yet her unhesitating answer was "Be it unto me according to thy will." In the painting we see Gabriel approaching the frightened Mary. Above, surrounded by a host of *putti*, is the Holy Spirit descending upon Mary in the form of a dove.

Titian was the most important member of the Late Renaissance artistic movement known as the Venetian School. He was most noted, and still is to this day, for his extraordinary use of color. Unfortunately, the only copy of this painting that we could find fails to show the brilliant color balance for which Titian was so well known. His contemporaries often described him as "the Sun amidst small stars" (a line from Dante's *Paradiso*, which was extremely popular at the time).

In English he is usually called Titian, although his real name was Tiziano Vicelli. He was born around 1488 in Pieve di Cadore in the Republic of Venice. During his lifetime he was known as Tiziano da Cadore. At the age of 12 he and his

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older brother Francesco were sent to an uncle in Venice to arrange an apprenticeship with a painter. They were placed under the Bellini brothers. There he became associated with a number of students who were to go on to become Renaissance masters. He and his friend Giorgione de Castelfranco came to be recognized as artistic geniuses. They remained good friends, but also became rivals. Rivalry among artists was fierce in Venice at that time, so much so that many with great talent moved away and sought commissions elsewhere as did Lorenzo Lotto, our artist of last December. Titian himself left Venice frequently, but only because he was called elsewhere to paint the magnificent frescoes that had gained him fame all over Italy. Michelangelo criticized his paintings as perfect in color but deficient in drawing, but he was the only major artist who had anything negative to say about Titian.

During the last 26 years of his life (1550-1576) Titian worked almost exclusively for King Philip II of Spain, mainly as a portraitist. During that period he painted a number of mythological works based on the poems of Ovid, and these are generally considered the greatest of his works.

Titian died of the plague in Venice in 1576, approaching the age of 90. His son Orazio died almost immediately thereafter, and his lavish palace was looted by the mobs that roamed freely in the chaos of the plague. He was buried in the Basilica di Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari. There was no grave marker, but later the Austrian rulers of Venice commissioned a large monument to his memory.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***A Word From the Editor***

Easter has come and gone, Spring is rapidly giving way to Summer (at least in the South), and before long many people will be thinking less and less about religion until Christmas begins to loom on the horizon. I find it interesting that as our society becomes increasingly antithetical to religion, and particularly to Christianity, there is an increasing number of religious movies coming out of Hollywood. Many of these are

extravagant sandal-operas like *Risen* and *The Young Messiah* that are built on fantasy and ancient (though often heretical) legends that have no foundation in history, tradition or Scripture. There are also many popular and often low-budget films that tout the power of prayer, such as *Woodlawn*<sup>1</sup>, *Fireproof*, *Courageous* and *War Room*. However well- or badly-done these films may be, they are nonetheless religious, and that is something we have not seen in a long, long time. Many of us remember when Hollywood churned out dozens of films like *Song of Bernadette*, *Going My Way* and *The Bells of St. Mary's*, and at Easter and Christmas you could not turn on the TV without being bombarded by re-runs of classic religious films from *Quo Vadis*, *The Solver Chalice* and *The Robe* to *The Ten Commandments* and *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.

I'm not sure what this portends, if anything. I do recall noticing many years ago that when there is a sudden unexpected spate of war movies, it is likely that we will soon be at war. When Hollywood opened the floodgates of filth, violence and immorality, the decay of our societal morals was not far behind. I don't believe that Hollywood was the cause of it, but rather it was the harbinger. Perhaps this wave of religious films is a harbinger of the stirring of a religious revival in America. If so, we have a great responsibility to make it a revival of prayer and Christian living, not one of slogans and sentimentality.

Pray fervently that we bring God back into our lives and our culture. It is our only hope to heal our broken society.

*Father Rick Losch*

*I went to a bookstore and asked the saleswoman, "Where's the self-help section?" She said if she told me, it would defeat the purpose.*

<sup>1</sup> *Woodlawn* is based on the true story of black NFL running back Tony Nathan and his white coach Tandy Gerelds when they were at Birmingham Alabama's Woodlawn High School during the desegregation era.

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## ***Be Wordly Wise***

### ***Utopia***

Utopia is recognized in almost every language as an ideal place where there is no dissention in politics, religion, social values or economics, resulting in a land of pure happiness. The word Utopia is sometimes used synonymously with Eden or Paradise. Saint Thomas More coined it in 1516 in his book *Utopia*. More was King Henry VIII's Lord Chancellor.<sup>1</sup> He lost his station and eventually his life for his refusal to support Henry's attempt to secure an annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon in order to marry Anne Boleyn. Although the book was written in Latin, More created the word from two Greek words, the prefix *ou-* (ὄυ), non-, and *topos* (τοπος), place. Utopia was, then, the Non-Place, or the place that does not exist. Although that was More's own explanation of how he came up with the name, some later users have put a more positive slant on it by spelling it Eutopia, thus using the Greek prefix *eu-* (ἔυ-), good. By that usage Eutopia would be the Good Place.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***Sucarnochee Folk Life Festival***

Livingston's annual Sucarnochee Folk Life Festival will be celebrated this month on Saturday, April 16. The ECW will again be selling their famous homemade candy and baked goods on the Courthouse Square. They will be there until they are sold out. Plan to stop by early. They usually have a great supply, but their reputation precedes them and they sell out fairly quickly.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Thomas More came to be well known in modern times through Robert Bolt's play *A Man For All Seasons* and the subsequent movie of the same name. He is also a main character in the recent TV series *Wolf Hall*, which is about More's rival and prosecutor, Sir Thomas Cromwell.

## ***The Reason for Circumcision of the Jews***

In the Book of Genesis God commands Abraham, “This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised . . . Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (Genesis 17:10, 14). In ancient times the Jews were the only people in the world known to have practiced circumcision. Its use as a hygienic measure is a very modern (and often medically challenged) practice, and was not a matter of concern to ancient peoples. It therefore clearly distinguished them from all other people, and marked them as having been set apart as the People of God. While there is no similar distinguishing mark on Jewish women, we must remember that the practice was instituted in a time when virtually all societies were patriarchal.

The question is often raised, why circumcision? It would seem that some more obvious mark such as a tattoo on the forehead or a more visible physical mutilation such as clipping an earlobe would be better, as it would then serve as a public declaration of one’s attachment to the Covenant. In fact, the lack of visibility is the very reason for circumcision. A Jew’s attachment to the Covenant was a very private and personal thing between a man and God. The physical sign of it was always covered by clothing, emphasizing that one’s religious commitment was not something to be displayed in the public square. Jesus affirmed this in his teaching to fast and give alms privately, making no public display such as the Pharisees and hypocrites did (Matt. 6:16ff).

From ancient times the Jews considered public nudity to be an abomination. Often even a husband and wife never saw each other nude, as they would finish undressing after they extinguished the lamp. When we read in the Bible that someone was naked, this is actually a mistranslation. The word that is often translated “naked” is *‘ayrom* (עירום), which means “unclothed.” In almost all cases this meant wearing only a

loincloth, not being completely nude. The modern equivalent would be being in one's underwear.

After the time of Alexander the Great (4th century BC), the Hellenic culture pervaded most of the known world. While this was anathema to most faithful Jews, many younger Jews were attracted to it. This led to a division between traditional Jews and those who are known as Hellenized Jews. A basic tenet of Hellenic culture was adoration of the human body and the obligation to perfect it through regular exercise and athletic endeavors. The Pan-Hellenic Games were religious rites honoring various gods.<sup>1</sup> Because they extolled the perfect body, any mutilation or disfigurement disqualified a man or boy from participating. Circumcised Jews, therefore, could not take part in them. These athletic competitions were performed completely naked,<sup>2</sup> which was highly offensive to the traditional Jews, thus exacerbating the divide between traditional and Hellenized Jews. At the order of the Seleucid emperor Antiochus I, Greek physicians developed a method of skin grafting whereby they could undo circumcision without leaving a scar.<sup>3</sup> This enabled the Hellenized Jewish youths to participate in the games, but in the eyes of the traditionalists it was deemed a declaration of their renunciation of God.

Circumcision, then, because of its personal and private nature, was an ideal physical sign of a Jew's spiritual commitment to the Covenant of God.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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<sup>1</sup> These games and the gods they honored were the Olympiads (Zeus), the Pythiads (Zeus), the Nemeads (Zeus and Heracles) and the Isthmiads (Poseidon).

<sup>2</sup> The word gymnasium derives from the Greek *gymnos* (γυμνος), naked, and means "place of nakedness." To the Greeks, unlike the Jews, *gymnos* did mean complete nudity.

<sup>3</sup> We tend to underestimate ancient medicine, particularly that of the Greeks. Some of their surgical techniques were extremely advanced for their time. They developed a scalpel so sharp that it was still used in modern times for ophthalmic surgery until the discovery of the laser.

## ***Christian Amulets and Charms***

In ancient times many Christians, just like their pagan neighbors, often wore amulets or charms to ward off evil, bring good luck, or heal diseases. The difference between Christians and pagans was that the Christian amulets usually bore passages from Scripture, while the pagans more often wore images of their gods. Before we judge too quickly, however, we must remember that all ancient people, Christian and pagan alike, were very superstitious. They believed not only in divine power, but also in the powers of magic, demons and witchcraft. Early Judaism and Christianity both condemned sorcery not because they did not believe in it, but because they believed that it is evil. They believed that it exists, but that we should have no part in it.

Literary scholars, including Biblical scholars, refer to the beginning line of a passage as an *incipit* (Latin for “it begins”). For example, the incipit of the Gospel according to Saint John is “In the beginning was the Word.” The typical Christian amulet consisted of a piece of vellum, parchment or papyrus on which was written one or more incipits, usually from New Testament writings or the Psalms. This was rolled up and placed in a cloth or leather pouch or (for the rich) in a capsule made of precious metal and worn usually around the neck. A great many of these have been found in archaeological digs, particularly in Egypt.

This practice may have been rooted in the Jewish custom of the *mezuzah*. This is a small capsule (in ancient times made of metal or clay) in which is a scroll containing several passages from the Torah. It is placed on the doorpost of the main entrance to a residence. It is a fulfillment of the commandment, “Write them on the doorframes of your houses, and on your gates” (Deut. 11:20). The *mezuzah* is not considered an amulet or charm, but simply a constant reminder of the Law to anyone who enters or leaves the house. It is rooted, however, in the pre-Judaic pagan custom of placing a charm at the entrance to keep evil spirits from entering the house. I have a

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*mezuzah* on the doorpost of my house as a reminder that as a Christian, my faith is rooted in Judaism.

In a similar way, many modern Christians wear a cross or crucifix, or a medal of a saint. Only the most ignorant believe that this will ward off evil or bring good luck. Instead, like the *mezuzah*, it serves as a constant reminder of one's Christian faith and of the duties and responsibilities that go with it. Superstition and belief in magic are incompatible with Christianity. Faith in the love of God, the protection of tutelary angels and the intercession of the saints, however, is not only compatible with Christianity, it is basic to it. Signs and symbols of that faith help us to remain focused on it.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***The Causes of Anti-Semitism***

Someone once quipped, "How odd of God to choose the Jews." In fact, it was not odd at all if we consider that the phrase The Chosen People does not mean that they were chosen as favorites, but that they were chosen to bring the knowledge of God to the rest of the world. For that purpose they were the ideal people. Their culture and the Hebrew language are neither Eastern nor Western, but they contain elements of both, and are thus not mysterious to either. They lived in an inhospitable terrain that to this day requires discipline and stamina to survive. Their history is rooted in suffering and oppression, thus making them able to relate to most of the rest of the world that has known the same.

Why is it then that the Jews have been so hated for so long? It would seem that they should be the most understood. Anti-Semitism goes back to the earliest days of Judaism. Christianity did not invent it, although Christians admittedly honed it to a fine art. The answer is really quite simple. From their earliest days the Jewish religion and culture have been rooted in strict moral and ethical standards that require constant attention to live up to, and which are a stumbling block to those whose standards are significantly lower. Jews will be the first to admit that their history is one of backsliding and

failure to live up to that standard, but it is also one of repeated attempts to get back up, repent, and do God's will. In fact, the Old Testament itself is a record of their failures, the calls of the many prophets to repent, and of their many astounding successes. Jesus, a Jew, succinctly summed up the goal: "Be perfect therefore, even as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). All realized that in this life no one could achieve that goal, but in striving for it one could only improve in his obedience to God and in his relationship with him.

Among all the cultures of the ancient world, the only one whose goal was moral perfection was Judaism. Judaism was the only ancient culture that worshiped a God who is holy, righteous and loving, and who expects his followers to be the same. All the other ancient religions had gods who were capricious, demanding, above morality, and often outright cruel. Their gods imposed moral laws, but they themselves were not obligated to live by them. Zeus, the king of the Greek gods, forbade incest and cannibalism, yet he married his sister Hera and ate his own children. He forbade adultery, yet was constantly romping through the fields in disguise seducing shepherd girls. Venus forbade sexual relations between goddesses and human men, yet she had an affair with the human Anchises and bore Aeneas, the ancestor of the Romans. The gods had no compassion for humans, and generally held them in contempt. The Titan Prometheus did have compassion on mankind and gave him the gift of fire, and as punishment Zeus condemned him to eternal suffering. Stories like these abounded in all ancient religions except Judaism. No one other than the Jews condemned these pagan gods, because as gods they were above the law and free to do whatever they pleased—the only obedience that was demanded of them was to superior gods. Most of the ancient pagan religions believed that the gods did not care what humans thought of them as long as they made the proper sacrifices and went through the proper rituals. A man could go into the temple of Osiris and in his heart care nothing for the god or even hold him in contempt, but as long as he said the proper prayers and offered

the proper sacrifices the god would not punish him, and might even help him prosper.

This was not at all the case with the Jews, even in the earliest days of their religion. They believed that God knows what is in our hearts and minds, and judges us on this rather than on our outward deeds. They also believed that God is the only God and all other so-called gods do not exist, but are merely creations of human imagination. They never hesitated to proclaim that truth to the pagans, although the message was not generally well received. It is true that in the earliest days of their faith they believed that God rules over all the other gods, who are to be completely shunned and ignored, with God alone being worshipped. Very early, however, they came to understand that there is only one God, the great I AM, He Who Exists (Ex. 3:14). The polytheistic Gentiles did not understand this, and it made them very uncomfortable to contemplate the idea of only one omnipotent God.<sup>1</sup>

The Jews recognized the nuclear family (parents and their children) as the basic unit of society and civilization. To the Gentiles the most important thing was the line of descent and the extended family, not the nuclear family. When the Romans thought of *familia* they thought in terms of ancestry, and one's ancestral line established his position in society.<sup>2</sup> The nuclear family was secondary to that, serving primarily

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<sup>1</sup> One of the very early names for God was Elohim, which is a Hebrew plural form. This does not mean that they believed in many gods, however. In Hebrew, as in almost every other language (including English until a couple hundred years ago), the singular is used for familiars (children, family, inferiors and intimate friends), while the plural is used as a sign of respect. In English we now use the plural "you" universally, but not very long ago the singulars "thou" and "thee" were common as the familiar forms. We address God with the familiar "thou" as a sign of affection for him (just as Jesus called him *Abba*, Papa, instead of *Ab*, Father). In the Hebrew idiom the plural Elohim was simply a term of respect.

<sup>2</sup> It was far more important to Julius Caesar that he was of the Julian line (descended from Venus and Anchises, no less!) than that he was in particular the son of Gaius Julius and the Lady Aurelia.

as a means of maintaining that line of descent. To the Jews it was just the opposite. While tribal ancestry was important, the focus was on the basic family of parents and children.<sup>1</sup> Genealogies in the Bible are to preserve the memory of the people in the lists, not to demonstrate their ancestry.<sup>2</sup> This is why birthdays were important to the Gentiles, but not to the Jews. To the Jews what was important was *that* a child was born into the family, not *when*. To the Gentiles, on the other hand, the birthday was important because it established the person's exact position in the ancestral line. We know the birthdays of a great many of the famous people of antiquity, but we can only estimate those of most of the ancient Jews. The gospels do not record the date of Jesus birth because it was not important to them. Luke, who was a Greek,<sup>3</sup> is the only one who gives us any historical clues, but unfortunately he was a physician and not a historian, and his history is inaccurate.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A Jew's ancestry is inherited through his father, but his identity as a Jew comes through the mother. The son of a Jewish mother and Gentile father was considered a Jew, but the son of a Jewish father and Gentile mother was considered a Gentile. In the early days of the modern state of Israel this was a matter of concern in granting Israeli citizenship. That restriction has since been dropped.

<sup>2</sup> One of the few exceptions to this is in Matt. 1:1ff, which is to show Jesus' descent from King David. The ancient Jews believed that a man continued to live after death only as long as he was remembered.

<sup>3</sup> Luke was the only one of the writers of the four gospels who was not a Jew. He was a Greek, and was probably a God-Fearer before he became a Christian. God-Fearers were Gentiles (mainly Romans and Greeks) who believed in God and accepted the Jewish moral law, but were not bound to the ceremonial law.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 2:2 says that Jesus was born when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Publius Sulpicius Quirinius was appointed governor of Syria in 6 AD, which was 10 years after Herod's death, and thus 10 to 12 years after Jesus was born. There is some evidence that Quirinius might have been a minor official in Syria around 6 BC, which would have been about the right time for Jesus' birth. This may account for Luke's error. Most scholars believe that Jesus was born some time between 6 and 4 BC.

One of the greatest contrasts between the Jewish and Gentile cultures was in their attitudes toward sex, and this was the source of one of a major barrier between the two. The Jews' moral standard regarding sexual behavior was rigid, because they believed that there was a twofold purpose for sex, with nothing beyond it: (1) it was for the procreation of the race in obedience to Genesis 1:28 ("Be fruitful and increase in number"); and (2) it was the reunification of the masculine and feminine attributes of mankind in obedience to Genesis 2:24 ("a man . . . is united to his wife, and they become one flesh"). To the Jews, as to most Christians, any sexual act outside of heterosexual marriage was sinful. The Gentiles simply could not understand this. All the ancient Gentile cultures were extremely sexually liberal, to the point of licentiousness. About the only sexual restrictions taken seriously were incest and the adultery of a wife, because with the ancestral lineage being so critical it was necessary to know exactly who the father of one's son was.<sup>1</sup> The adultery of husbands was taken for granted, as were homosexuality, pedophilia, prostitution and even bestiality.<sup>2</sup> A significant part of the worship of Asherah, the Middle Eastern goddess of fertility, was sacred prostitution in her temple with her priestesses.

These libertine practices were severely condemned by the Jews, and there were harsh punishments for anyone, Jew or Gentile, who indulged in them within the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. They were tempting, however, for obvious rea-

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<sup>1</sup> Abraham and Jacob conceived sons by their wives' slaves, but this was acceptable at the time in the case of a barren wife. The child of such a union was considered the blood offspring of the man and his lawful wife.

<sup>2</sup> Except in Judaism, in most ancient cultures a part of the ritual of a boy's becoming a man was for his father to take him to a brothel. In many cultures, part of a boy's growing up was to be sexually used by an athlete or famous soldier. This was to teach him endurance and to establish the man as a role model. This was expected to stop when the boy's manhood was officially recognized, and those who did not stop were scorned by society. Needless to say, this practice horrified the Jews.

sons, so the Jews enacted many laws that were specifically designed to isolate themselves from their neighbors. For example, a Jew could not eat with a Gentile or even eat food that had been touched by one. Even food that was cooked in a vessel that had been touched by a Gentile was forbidden unless the vessel had been properly ritually cleansed. Marriage with a Gentile was banned, and although it did happen occasionally, it was very rare.<sup>1</sup> Because of this the neighboring peoples considered the Jews to be self-righteous and standoffish, and they despised them for that. It is human nature to feel convicted and inadequate when we are in the presence of someone whom we recognize to be dedicated to a higher moral principle than ours, whether or not we agree with or respect that principle. This is also one of the reasons that so many faithful Christians are scorned today, and are cast aside as the Jews were, as fanatics or extremists.

Another factor exacerbated Christian anti-Semitism in the Middle Ages. Jews were socially suppressed. They not allowed to hold public office and had extremely limited property rights. They could lend money for interest, however, and that was forbidden to Christians. As a result, there was little that a Jew could do to prosper other than to be a merchant or a money-lender. The profligate Christian nobility often became deeply indebted to the Jews. The easiest way to get free of that debt was to calumniate them, then persecute them and seize their property. This was common for centuries.

When we consider these things, it becomes clear why the Jews have been hated for so long. They worship a God whom many do not understand, they espouse moral principles that make those with more libertine views uncomfortable, and they tend to pull away from those who might drag them down to a lower level. Another factor, strangely enough, is that they

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<sup>1</sup> Ruth, David's great-grandmother, was a Moabite who converted to Judaism. The father of Hiram Abi, the foundry man and probably the master builder of Solomon's Temple, was a Phoenician. He was considered a Jew, however, because his mother was a Jew of the tribe of Naphtali.

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are not a proselytizing religion. They do not seek converts, and in many branches of Judaism it is very difficult even to be accepted as a convert. We are generally uncomfortable with those who do not welcome us with open arms. Interestingly, Christianity faces the opposite problem. It is a proselytizing religion, and seeks to convert others. In the days that most of Western society was Christian this was not a problem. Today, however, when the majority is no longer made up of practicing Christians, many see Christianity as trying to foist its beliefs on others. Because of this, for the first time in centuries the Church is being suppressed and in some places openly persecuted. Christians, historically among the persecutors of the Jews, are for the first time in centuries coming onto the receiving end of persecution, and are thus rapidly moving toward support of Judaism and Israel. It's about time.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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## ***Save For the Yard Sale***

The annual Antiques Alley Yard Sale will be held on May 12-14, and the ECW will participate again this year. We will give more details in next month's *Epistle*, but it is none too early to start setting aside all those expendables that you dig out in your spring cleaning. The ECW will appreciate all kinds of items except clothing (unless it is a very unusual clothing item that you think would be in demand). Clothing takes up a lot of space and usually does not sell well. This is a great time to rummage around your closets and kitchen cabinets and clear out all those gewgaws that you haven't used in years. Remember, one person's junk is another's treasure. If you have large items that you need help with such as furniture, please contact Hiram Patrenos and he may be able to help make some arrangement for it. If you need more information, contact the Yard Sale Chair, Candace Strickland.

*Richard R. Losch+*

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# *A Touch of Trivia*

The first movie performer to receive credit on the screen was Florence Lawrence (c. 1886-1938). Before that no one, be it actor, producer or director, was ever acknowledged on-screen. Lawrence made over 200 films before finally being recognized by Vitagraph Studios, and then only after having made 40 films for them. She immediately became a household name, and is generally acknowledged to be the first true movie star.

*Richard R. Losch+*

**JAMIE**

by **Richard R. Losch**



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