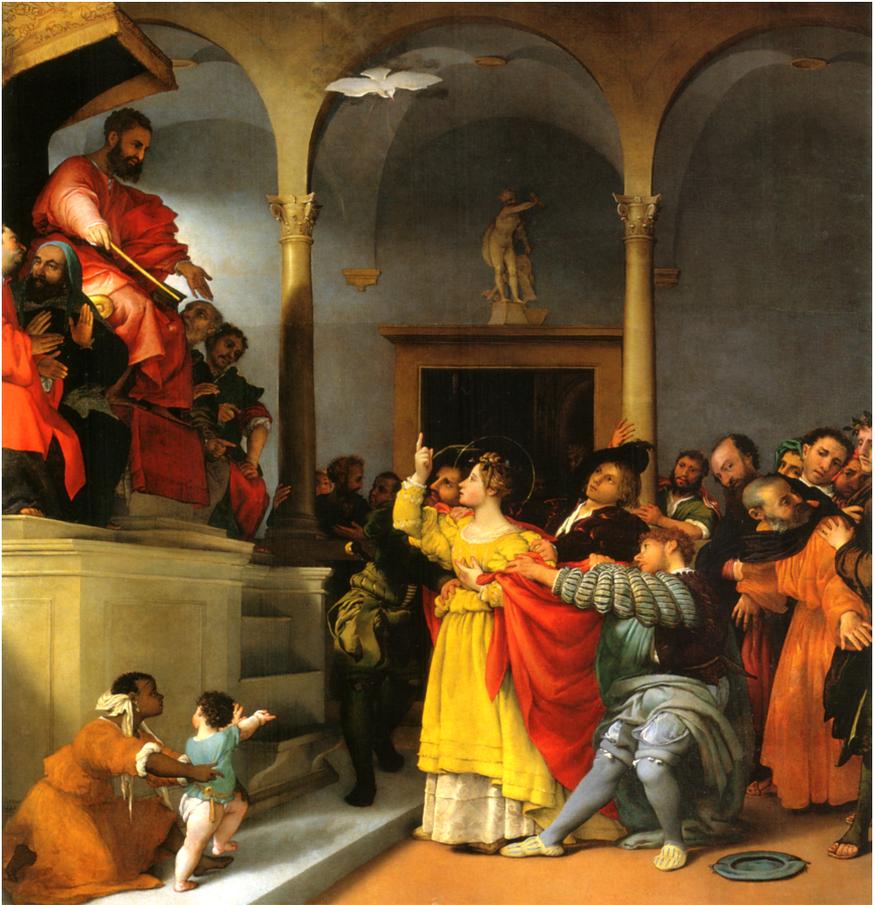


THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama

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December 2018

This Month's Cover

This month, in honor of the Feast of Saint Lucy of Syracuse (December 13), our cover picture is Lorenzo Lotto's *Saint Lucy Before the Judge*. Completed in 1532, it is oil on canvas and almost square, measuring 7'11"x7'9". It is displayed at the Jesi Municipal Art Gallery in Jesi, Italy. The focus of saints in December is usually heavily on Saint Nicholas of Myra (December 6, who eventually morphed into Santa Claus in the 19th century), but for over 1000 years Saint Lucy was among the most popular of the saints throughout Europe. She is particularly popular in Italy, Sicily, and rather surprisingly, Scandinavia. In Sweden her feast is the official opening of the Christmas season. She is often associated with Saint Nicholas because as he is the patron saint of young boys, her feast is exactly one week later and she is the patron of young girls. She was an early Christian martyr, dying in A.D. 304 during the Diocletian persecution. Although little else is known about her, her legends over the centuries have flourished. She was a very wealthy young woman of 19 who devoted her inheritance to helping the poor. She had taken a vow of chastity and refused to marry, and was thus accused by one of her suitors of being a Christian. When she refused to renounce her faith, the judge ordered her to be dragged off to a brothel. According to the legend, they could not move her from where she stood even when they tied her to a yoke of oxen. Finally in frustration they cut her throat and buried her where she stood. Another legend says that before she was killed the judge ordered her eyes gouged out, but when they buried her they discovered that her eyes had been restored. Images of her often show her holding a dish with her eyes on it. Today the Duomo di Siracusa, the

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Cathedral of Syracuse, Sicily now stands over the site.¹

Lorenzo Lotto (c.1480-1556) was one of the leading Venetian artists of the period that just preceded the Italian High Renaissance. Although he is famous for his portraits, his other works were exclusively of religious subjects. He was deeply religious, and his later paintings were intensely spiritual. Like his rival Titian, his paintings are noted for their vivid use of color. Despite his extraordinary talent he was unable to compete with Titian in Venice, so most of his work was done outside that city-state. He worked in Trevis, the Marches, and Rome, but for most of his adult life he lived and worked in Bergamo in Lombardy. He did, however, frequently return to Venice for short periods. From 1538 until his death in 1556 he kept a diary in which he recorded all his paintings. He is reputed to be the most individualistic of all the great Italian masters. In 1552 what he thought was one of his best paintings did very poorly at an auction. He became deeply depressed, and joined the Holy Sanctuary at Loreto, where he became a lay brother. While there he decorated the Basilica of Santa Maria and the Palazzo Apostolico. He died in 1556 and, at his request, was buried in the monastery in his Dominican habit.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

“Christmas time is here, by golly, / Disapproval would be folly, / Deck the halls with hunks of holly, / Fill the cup and don’t say when.” So starts Tom Lehrer’s comic carol, and there is in fact a sneaky pearl of wisdom in it. Every year people angrily decry the materialism and commercialism of Christmas, threatening to ignore the festival altogether. Some propose that we abandon it to the secularists and celebrate the birth of Christ at some other time of year. Lehrer says, “Disapproval would be folly,” and he is right. To abandon Christmas to the secularists would be to abandon the field of battle in the presence of the enemy. It means they have won, and signifies a

¹ One of Caravaggio’s most famous paintings is of Saint Lucy’s burial.

belief that the true faith can be overcome by the powers of this world. Angry invective, boycotts and arrogant claims of moral superiority are weapons of this world. To use them is also to abandon the field of battle, because sinking to the level of the other side means joining the other side.

Finally, changing the date of the observance of the Nativity would be a mistake on several levels, because it is an acknowledgement that the secularists have won. It might also be a mistake in accuracy. Although we do not know for sure when Jesus was born, there is strong evidence that despite the modern idea that it was in the spring or fall, December 25 may actually be the correct date.¹ Whether or not it is, to change the date of the observance would be to yield.

What, then, do we who honor the religious significance of the feast do? The answer is simple: do what you would do if you honored the religious significance of the feast! Being true to the faith does not require the elimination or even the silencing of those who are not. Granted, it would be a lot easier if everyone observed the faith as they should, but nobody, especially Jesus, ever promised us that it would be easy. If there were no distractions or temptations, where would be the virtue in fidelity to Christ? What comes easily is rarely valued.

As the Christmas season approaches, let me wish you all a very merry Christmas (remembering that it doesn't actually start until December 24). Go ahead and send your Christmas cards (but please don't call it just a "season" or a "holiday"), make your preparations, have your joyful gatherings, deck the halls with boughs of holly, and enjoy the celebration. After all, it is the celebration of the birth of our Savior, and that is reason to be very merry. Just remember the true reason for your merriment. Merry Christmas, and God bless us, every one!

Father Rick Losch

¹ See <https://taylormarshall.com/2012/12/yes-christ-was-really-born-on-december.html>. Dr. Taylor Marshall presents some excellent arguments for the birth of Christ actually being on December 25.

Thank You, Deep South Landscaping

We are grateful to Jason Gordy and his workers of Deep South Landscaping for their gift of giving and planting the winter flowers in the prayer garden, as well as for pruning and cleaning up the shrubbery in the church yard and rectory and cleaning out the gutters on the parish house and rectory. We appreciate their hard work and generosity!

Annual Parish Meeting

Our Annual Parish Meeting will be held on Sunday, December 2nd immediately following the 11:00 a.m. service. Reports of various parish organizations will be made and two new Vestry members will be elected to replace Jim Rankin, Rosalie Dew, Joe Moore, and Mary Helen Jones, whose terms expire December 31st and who will not be eligible for re-election to the Vestry for one year. Note that Vestry members' terms were changed from three years to two years beginning January 1, 2018. Beginning in 2019 we will have a four-member vestry. Other members of the Vestry are Roy Underwood, and Ethel Scott, whose terms expire on December 31st, 2019.

To be eligible for nomination and service on the Vestry, one must be:

- an active confirmed communicant in good standing at St. James' (communicants' names are printed in bold type in the Parish Directory);
 - frequent and regular in worship attendance;
 - a supporter of the work of St. James' by an annual pledge to the operating budget; and
 - willing and able to attend Vestry meetings and perform the work expected of a Vestry Member. Vestry meetings are normally scheduled after Sunday services on an "as needed" basis.
-

Wilmer Hall Christmas Contribution

St. James' will be making a special gift to Wilmer Hall for its Christmas needs this year. Last year because of your generous contributions, we were able to contribute \$1,000.00 and we hope to be able to make that same gift this year or perhaps an even larger one. Envelopes are available on the table at the back of the Church and contributions should be made payable to St. James' and designated for "Wilmer Hall Christmas". Envelopes may be placed in the Alms Basins or given to Hiram Patrenos. So that we may forward our contribution to Wilmer Hall in time for use this Christmas, the last day for making a contribution is Sunday, December 2nd.

Christmas Flowers

Each year St. James' Church offers the opportunity to remember loved ones through donations to the Altar Guild, which provides poinsettias and other decorations in the church for Christmastide. If you wish to make a tax-deductible donation for this –in memory of, in honor of, or in thanksgiving for – envelopes with forms are available at the back of the church or you may print this information clearly and mail it along with your contribution to Carolyn Patrenos, P.O. Box 399, Livingston, AL 35470. Checks should be made payable to St. James' Altar Guild. Because of the increased costs for these flowers and decorations, we ask for a minimum donation of \$40.00 for memorials. The publication deadline for inclusion in the Christmas bulletin is Wednesday, December 19th.

Advent and Christmas

On Saturday, Dec. 22nd at 1:00 p.m. the Altar Guild and volunteers will prepare the Christmas decorations for the church. Volunteers should be sure to bring their hand clippers, gloves and wear casual clothes.

On Sunday, Dec. 23rd, the 4th Sunday of Advent at 11:00 a.m. we will celebrate the "Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols" from King's College, Cambridge. Immediately following this service, we will complete the decoration of the church.

Our celebration of Christmas will begin on Monday, Dec. 24th, Christmas Eve, with our traditional Christmas Eve Mass at 5:30 p.m. Father Losch will be the celebrant and our nursery will be open for this service. Immediately following the service, we will have our parish Christmas party in the parish house. You are asked to bring your favorite hors d'oeuvre and your favorite wine to share.

Every Member Canvass

We have begun our Every Member Canvass. Pledge cards are available on the table at the rear of the church. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to St. James'. The Vestry needs this information so that it can budget appropriately for the upcoming year. If you have any questions regarding our parish finances, please do not hesitate to speak with a member of the Vestry or our Treasurer, Hiram Patrenos. Pledge cards are available on the table at the rear of the church and may be placed in the alms basins or mailed to St.

James' Church, Post Office Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470. Please prayerfully consider your commitment to St. James', its mission and work and return your card no later than Sunday, December 9th.

Community Fifth Sunday Service

The 5th Sunday Community Service this month will be hosted by the Livingston First Presbyterian Church on December 30th at 11:00 a.m. Please make your plans to attend and help to continue this unique Livingston tradition.

Be Wordly Wise

Noel

Although most people recognize it as being of French origin, the word Noel (or Noël) today is an English synonym for Christmas. In French it means Christmas Season. It was first used in English in the 14th century and was spelled Nowel, although at that time French was also commonly spoken in England (the ruling family were still the Plantagenets) and the French spelled it Noel. In 1811 the word was also used as a synonym for Christmas carol ("to sing noels"), although this usage was probably taken directly from the modern French. In Old French it is *nael*, which is a corruption of the Late Latin *natalis* [*dies*], [day of] birth, referring specifically to the day of the birth of Christ. That in turn came from *natus*, the past participle of *nasci*, to be born. That in turn goes back to the Old Latin *gnasci*, which is rooted in the Proto-Indo-European *gene*, to give birth. It is from *gene* that we get such words as generate, genetics and beget. The use of Noel as a given name for boys born on or near Christmas seems to have begun in the late 19th century. Noel Coward was born on December 16, 1899, and Noel Langley was born on Christmas Day, 1911. By the mid-20th century Noel had become a popular boy's name regardless of the birth date.

Richard R. Losch+

The real test of character is whether when you get the chance to treat them the way they treated you, you choose just to walk away.

Ember Days

This month on the 19th, 21st and 22nd we observe an ancient tradition, the Ember Days. These are days of fasting and prayer for the Church, focusing especially on vocations to the priesthood. They are observed four times a year: on the Wednesday, Friday and Saturday in the first week of Lent; in the week between Pentecost and Trinity Sunday; in September in the week of the Autumnal Equinox; and in the third week of Advent. It is unclear when the observances originated, but we know they go back at least to the third century, and are probably rooted in ancient planting and harvest festivals. Since they have never been observed in the Eastern Church we know that they began in the west, almost certainly in Rome. They were a regular observance in the Roman calendar until the early 1960s, when the Second Vatican Council (“Vatican II”) dropped them.¹ The Anglican Church and some branches of Lutheranism still observe them. In the Episcopal Church seminarians are expected to report to their bishop on their spiritual development each Ember season. This was strictly required when I was in seminary in the 1950s, but sadly the practice is fading today.

The name of these observances has nothing to do with fire or burning embers. Since they are observed four times a year they were called in Latin *Quatuor Temporas*, the Four Times. When Christianity came to the ancient Germanic tribes the *T* disappeared and the word became *Emporas*. By the time it had worked its way into English it had become Ember.²

The Church is in trouble today, with rapidly declining membership, the collapse of moral and liturgical standards, and burgeoning scandals. It is in dire need of fasting and prayer!

Richard R. Losch+

¹ In our opinion it is more than coincidence that the rapid decline in religious vocations in the Roman Church began soon after this.

² When the Jesuits came to Japan in the 1540s they sought a meatless food that they could get the Christian Japanese to eat during the fasts of *Quatuor Temporas*. They developed a fried seafood dish that they called *Temporas*. The word survives today as *Tempura*.

Satan and the Serpent in the Garden

At the risk of offending those who take the Bible literally word for word (and in only the King James Version), we must start out by saying that there is absolutely nothing anywhere in the Old or New Testaments to indicate that the serpent in the Garden of Eden was Satan or any other demon or evil spirit. As a matter of fact, there is nothing in the Old Testament stating that there even is a devil, named Satan or anything else. This would be a concept as senseless to the ancient Israelites as it would be to tell Ezekiel that what he saw was a UFO.¹ It is easy to read new meanings into old texts, and it is the same when we read back into the Eden story that the serpent was Satan or Lucifer. To have suggested that to a 7th century BC Israelite would only have engendered a puzzled look, because he would not have had any idea what you were talking about.

In Hebrew the word *satan* (שָׂטָן) is not a proper name.² It means “adversary” or “accuser,” and refers to an office that was equivalent to a prosecutor in a court of law. It occurs in only nine incidents in the Old Testament, and five of those refer to a human legal, military or political opponent; the other four refer to a heavenly being. In all but one incident it occurs as *ha-satan* (שָׂטָן הַ), the *satan*. The one exception is in 1 Chr. 21:1, where we read that “Satan stood up against Israel.” Here the Hebrew reads a *satan* instead of the *satan*. Since Hebrew has no capitals and no indefinite article (“a”), it could be argued that this should be translated as the proper name Satan, but if so it would not only be inconsistent with the whole rest of the Old Testament, but it would imply a concept that was totally foreign to Jewish thinking of the time. It would be better translated “An adversary [or accuser] stood up against Israel.”

The oldest book in the Old Testament is Job, in which we find the *satan* challenging Job’s righteousness. He is clearly not a demon, however, but a member of God’s heavenly court.

¹ If you Google “Ezekiel’s Vision,” though, you will find a number of web sites saying exactly that.

² It is pronounced sah-**tahn**.

He is in effect God's prosecuting attorney. He argues that Job is good because he has been rewarded, while God says that Job is rewarded because he is good. The *satan* challenges God: take away Job's rewards, and he will cease being good. God accepts the challenge, and permits the *satan* to do anything to Job but kill him. Job, of course, proves his fidelity to God.¹ The *satan* is not an independent force of evil, but is obeying God's orders.

The Book of Numbers comes before Job in the Old Testament, but it is chronologically a much later book. There again we find the adversary, the *satan*, coming as a messenger from God to Balaam forbidding him to curse the Israelites (Num. 22:22). Most translations of this render *ha-satan* as an angel.

In Zechariah's time the appointment of Joshua² as High Priest was highly controversial, because he would be the cleanser of the very corrupt temple priesthood. In his vision (Zech. 3) Zechariah sees the tribunal of the *satan* and God's messenger, in which God judges Joshua worthy and rejects the accusations of the *satan*. Here again, this is essentially a court trial in which the *satan* is the heavenly prosecutor, not an evil spirit. God's messenger is the defender, and God is the judge. Most translations unfortunately render *ha-satan* here as Satan, implying that he is the evil fallen angel, which he is not.

The concept of an evil demon in opposition to God does not appear in any Hebrew writings until well into the Second Temple Era (the period after the return from the Exile). The first hints of it that we see in the Bible are in the Book of Daniel, which was written sometime in the late 2nd century BC. This was clearly a result of the influences of the religions of Persia, one of the strongest of which was Zoroastrianism. That religion believes in two warring spirits, the monotheistic good god Ahura Mazda (Wise Lord) and Ahriman, the evil spirit who tries to destroy him and will be eventually overcome in a final

¹ The purpose of this very ancient story was to demonstrate the patience and loyalty of a truly righteous man in the face of adversity. The happy ending (Job 42:7-16) is clearly a much later addition to the original book.

² Not the Joshua who conquered Canaan.

battle in which Ahriman is eternally bound by Ahura Mazda. This dualistic concept had a strong influence on Judaism and later on Christianity.

The fact that an Eastern religion had influence on Judaism does not mean that this influence is false. The development of both Judaism and Christianity was slow, with revelation being given to mankind as he was able to deal with it. For example, if the Trinity had been revealed at the beginning, the Israelites would still have rejected the ancient polytheism that worshiped hundreds of gods; but instead of worshiping only one God, they would have worshiped only three. The concept of there being only one God had to be driven home before humans could grasp the concept of one God in three Persons. Likewise, the concept of the authority of good over evil had to be driven home before we were ready to understand the concept of corrupted good (as in the fall of Lucifer) battling against pure good (God and the righteous angels). This is evident in that Zoroastrian theology teeters perilously on the knife-edge between a good god and an evil lesser spirit, and the dualism between two equal gods, one good and one evil.¹ By the middle of the Second Temple Era Judaism was on a firm enough footing that it was ready for the revelation of the power of evil in the allegory of the fall of Lucifer and his rebellious angels.

Going back to the story of the temptation of Eve, we can read into it an understanding that the serpent was Satan, the fallen evil angel. However, from the time the story was first told, and even at the time that it was written down centuries later, the idea of Satan as an evil spiritual being would have made no sense to the Israelites, even though it does to us.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ This actually appears in Manichaeism, the 3rd century Christian heresy. This taught that all matter is evil and was created by the evil God of the Old Testament, and all spirit is good, having been created by the good God of the New Testament. Manichaeism resurged periodically for almost 1000 years until it was finally quashed completely in the 13th century by the teachings of the Scholastics (primarily St. Thomas Aquinas).

The Green and Red of Christmas

Green and red have been associated with Christmas from the very earliest times of the celebration. There are many diverse traditions that led to this, although they all converge on the universal use of these colors for Christmas. Almost every culture has a festival at the time of the winter solstice. That is the time that in primitive thinking the sun ceases to die and begins to come back to life, which is a cause for rejoicing. As far back as 3000 BC the Egyptians would decorate their homes with palm fronds during the cooler rainy season at the time of the solstice. In that climate palms grew year-round along the shores of the Nile, which the Egyptians saw as the source of all life. Thus green palms were a symbol of everlasting life. In ancient Rome the symbol of everlasting life was the evergreen. The Romans would festoon their homes with evergreen boughs and garlands during the solstice festival. Throughout the Roman Empire at the time of the early rise of Christianity the Vedic Indian religion of Mithraism was very popular, with the cultic center of the Roman version of it being in the city of Rome. The sun god Sol was their primary deity, and his servant was the god Mithra. One of their symbols of everlasting life was the circle, which not only represented the sun, but also is a figure that has no beginning or end. At the solstice festival Roman Mithraists would combine the two symbols of everlasting life, the circle and the evergreens, and hang wreaths made out of evergreen sprigs. This was later adopted by Christians as the Christmas wreath, which also to them denotes everlasting life because of the evergreens and the never-ending circle.

Red as a Christmas color comes from two sources. The oldest goes back also to Mithraism. They believed that when Sol (the sun) was dying, Mithra had sacrificed a bull and put on a great feast. The bull's blood, which was its life, revived Sol. Each year at the time of the winter solstice the Mithraists would sacrifice a bull and pour its blood on the initiates as part of the initiation ceremony. Some of the blood, which symbolized life, would then be poured on the wreaths. The Christians adopted this practice symbolically by draping red cloths on their

wreaths to symbolize the Blood of Christ. In time this morphed into the placing of red ribbon bows on the wreaths.

In Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages, the vast majority of the population could not read. The churches would frequently stage what are called Chancel Plays¹ as teaching devices. Some of these are known as Morality Plays that taught basic moral and theological principles, but the majority were simply re-enactments of Bible stories. One of the most popular at Christmastime was the story of the fall of Adam and Eve, which taught the necessity of the coming of Christ. A major prop for it was a pine tree that represented a conflation of both the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Red apples and holly berries were tied to it to represent the forbidden fruit and fruit of the Tree of Life that was denied them after their disobedience. Obviously, this was the origin of the Christmas tree.² The colored baubles derived from the fruit, and since the first Christmas trees were usually outdoors, the garlands and tinsel represent the winter snow and frost.

The red of Santa Claus's suit derives from a different source. He morphed from Saint Nicholas, the Bishop of Myra (in Turkey). In early Christianity bishops wore red robes, and long before Thomas Nast's 19th century cartoon of "Saint Nick," Bishop Saint Nicholas was depicted in a red gown.

As we look at the green and red of Christmas, it would behoove us to remember that the green represents the eternal life that Christ has made available to us, and the red represents his sacrificial blood through which we can attain it.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ A particularly popular one today is *The Play of Daniel (Ludus Danielis)*, which is often staged in concert halls and large churches around the world at Christmastime. We have not only the whole script from its inception in about A.D. 1230, but also the score for beautiful monophonic music that accompanied it. In the early 1950s Noah Greenburg of the New York *Pro Musica Antiqua* revived it, and it was an instant smash success.

² Christmas trees were not brought into people's homes until after the Reformation (first in Germany), but from the early Middle Ages people often decorated pine trees outside by hanging apples or other fruit on them.

Cogito, Ergo Sum

The French philosopher René Descartes wrote, “*Cogito, ergo sum*”—“I think, therefore I am.” He argued that thought is the very essence of existence. Theologians have identified thought and reason as what distinguish humans from the lower animals and make them capable of having an immortal soul.¹

Linguists maintain that the value people place on something is reflected in the number of words they have for it. The words “think” and “thought” occur countless times in English translations of the Bible. In Hebrew and Aramaic there are twenty-two different words that we generally translate as the verb think or the noun thought. Unfortunately, because of the lack of English words to translate these subtly different Hebrew words, we are limited in our choices, finding that most often the only adequate words we have are think or thought. This greatly reduces the richness of the original texts.

The word that we most frequently translate as to think is *amar* (אמר), which actually means to say. It is often found in such expressions as *amar be-libo* (אמר בלבו), to say in one’s heart (“The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” [Ps. 14:1]). A related Hebrew expression is *amar amarti* (אמר אמרתי), to say a saying. This kind of construction is a common Hebrew idiom used for emphasis, and the closest English translation would be to *really* think, or to take very seriously.

In English, a thought might be something that just pops into our head and can be quite meaningless—a passing fancy. In Hebrew, however, a “saying,” which we have little choice but to translate as a “thought,” is an intentional thought that can be developed as one meditates on it, and which is often associated with an intentional act. This becomes particularly important

¹ Scientific research indicates that this distinction is not at all clear. Experiments prove not only that many animals can think, but that they can even reason at a primitive level. Any dog or cat owner will affirm that. Saint Thomas Aquinas said that animals have souls similar to those of humans, but the primary difference is that their souls are not immortal—they perish with their bodies, while the souls of humans live on after the death of the body. The Latin for soul is *anima*, from which we get the word animal.

when we consider many of Jesus' teachings. For example, he tells us that whether or not we have committed adultery physically, if we have thought about it then we have committed it (Matt. 5:27). Jesus spoke Aramaic, which has all the same constructions as Hebrew, so this casts a whole new light on the teaching. The passing lustful thought that may pop into a man's head when he sees a beautiful woman is not what Jesus was talking about. He was speaking of the intentional lustful thought that comes from dwelling on that passing thought, and which has its ultimate expression in the use of pornography, and may lead to actual physical adultery. The passing thought falls more into the realm of temptation, which, if we resist and reject it, leads more to virtue than to sin.

The intellectuals of the 18th century "Age of Reason," commonly called the Enlightenment, argued that the existence of God could be proven by pure reason. Ironically, a majority of them were Deists, believing that although God exists, after he created the universe he then had nothing more to do with it, leaving it to run by itself. The 12th century Scholastics, on the other hand, argued that we can know God through reason, but only because our ability to reason is given to us by God.

Thought and reason are extremely important elements of the whole fabric of the Jewish culture, and this is reflected in the fact that there are twenty-two Hebrew words for them. What we have here is yet another example that if we cannot read the Bible in its original language, we must be very careful to study as many different translations and commentaries as possible before trying to interpret its meaning.

Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is Online

The last six years of *The Epistle* are now online. Go to <http://rlosch.com> and click on the "Epistle" tab at the top. You can read it online or download it as a *.pdf* file. This is an easy way to share articles with others.

Richard R. Losch+

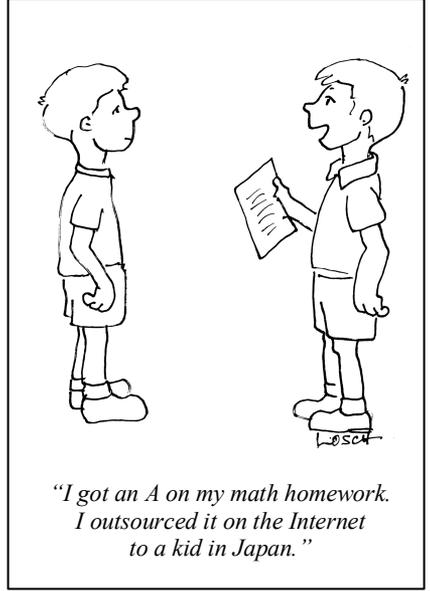
A Touch of Trivia

“Jingle Bells” was not originally written for Christmas, but rather for Thanksgiving. In 1850 James Lord Pierpont, the uncle of the banker John Pierpont (“J. P.”) Morgan, was sitting in a tavern in Medford, MA when a local annual sleigh race inspired him to write the song that he called “One Horse Open Sleigh.” He wrote it for an upcoming children’s Thanksgiving play. It was an instant hit, but very soon it became more commonly associated with Christmas than with Thanksgiving.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



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