

THE EPISTLE

Saint James' Episcopal Church
Livingston, Alabama



Volume XXV, Number 5

May 2018



May 2018

This Month's Cover

This month's cover painting is Botticelli's *Pentecost*. It is oil on wood panels, and has suffered greatly during the five centuries since it was painted in about 1500. It is a very large painting, 6'10"x7'7", and was originally part of an even larger work measuring 15'x9'6". Over the centuries the panels which were originally glued together have started to separate, cracking the paint. There have been severe paint losses and it has been restored many times, sometimes very clumsily. It came into the hands of the Birmingham (England) Museum and Art Gallery in 1959 in very bad condition. Thanks to modern technology and the work of some of the finest painting conservators in the world, it is slowly being restored to its original beauty at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. When the restoration is complete it will be returned to Birmingham.

The painting shows the Blessed Virgin Mary and eleven of the Apostles as the Holy Spirit descends on them at Pentecost. Judas is missing, of course, and most of the picture of the one on the far right is missing due to paint loss. Matthias had already been elected to replace Judas, but we do not know whether he is not represented or a twelfth Apostle is missing because of paint loss. While Mary is usually depicted in youthful beauty, she is here accurately shown as an older woman (she would have been around 50 on the first Christian Pentecost, and in Botticelli's time that was thought to be relatively old). The traditional tongues of fire are not depicted; neither is the Holy Spirit, usually shown as a dove, although he may have been in the original larger painting.

Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipepi, commonly known as Sandro Botticelli, was born in Florence in about 1445. His oldest brother Antonio was very chunky and muscular, and as

The Epistle is published monthly except August by Saint James' Episcopal Church, P.O. Box 446, Livingston, AL 35470-0446, the Rev. R. R. Losch, Editor, email rlosch33@gmail.com, Phone 205-499-0968. Copyright © 2018 Richard R. Losch. Permission is granted to reproduce text items in parish newsletters or bulletins (but not on the Internet or digitized) as long as they are reproduced completely and in print, and credit is given.

a child got the nickname *Botticello*, “Little Barrel.” Eventually all four brothers came to be called by the plural, *Botticelli*. Their father was a tanner, but with four sons there would not be enough business to apprentice all four in his own trade, so he apprenticed Antonio to a goldsmith as a beater of gold leaf. Young Sandro’s artistic talent apparently caught the attention of Antonio’s master, who encouraged it. In time Sandro fell under the patronage of Lorenzo de’ Medici, the patron of the Golden Age of the early Florentine Renaissance. Any artist who gained Lorenzo’s support was destined for greatness.

Although his official residence all his life was never more than five minutes’ walk from where he was born in Florence, Botticelli soon caught the attention of the great art community in Rome and spent much time there. In 1481 Pope Sixtus IV commissioned him to assist in decorating the walls of the newly completed Sistine Chapel. Those works were even at the time considered among the greatest of Italian paintings. Although most of them survive, in the next century they would be eclipsed by the magnificent ceilings painted by Michelangelo.

For some unknown reason Botticelli’s reputation faded by the end of the 16th century, and he was not again recognized for his genius until the 19th century. His works were so numerous, varied and influential that even a brief survey of them is well beyond the scope of what we can cover here, but suffice it to say that he was one of the strongest pillars of the Early Renaissance, and ranks among the greatest of the Italian Masters. He died in Florence on May 17, 1510.

Richard R. Losch+

A Word from the Editor

Today it’s hard to have a day pass without hearing someone complain about how technology is taking over our lives. You can go into a restaurant and see a family having dinner, and instead of talking to each other each one, adult and child alike, is poking at his smart phone. There are dire predictions that intelligent robots will eventually rule us, and most college students have never seen the pages of a printed and bound

encyclopedia. Before we get too wrought up about this and start to research the problem on the Internet, however, perhaps we should stand back and try to look at it a little more objectively. I recently saw a meme (yes, on Facebook) that showed a photograph of commenters on a train. Every single one was staring at a smart phone or iPad. Beside it was a photograph from the 1950s of commuters on a train, and every single one had his face buried in a newspaper. Is it really all that different? When the telephone came out people were sure that it would be the end of privacy. When the railroads spanned the country, people worried that this would mark the end of sovereign states and local cultures. In the 12th century Pope Innocent II banned the use of the crossbow by Christians because this weapon of mass destruction threatened the annihilation of the human race.

It is true that there are concerns introduced by modern technology that need to be addressed, but it is counterproductive to panic about it or long for the simpler past. I recommend Dan Brown's latest novel, *Origins*, in which he deals with just this question. Typical of Brown, he deals with it in a totally unexpected way, but he leaves the reader with much to think about in the matter of technology. The only difference between our learning to deal with modern electronic artificial intelligence and the cave men's learning to deal with the then modern technology of agriculture and improved weapons is the speed with which change is taking place. Things move much faster today.

I have faith that with the help of God we will adjust and adapt to this rapid change, and that ultimately we will be better off for it. The process may be painful, but then pain is often the most common indicator of progress. The only way that we are in real danger is if we begin to think we can handle it by ourselves and leave God out of the mix. In today's society that is a real and present danger, and it is up to us as people of faith to see that this does not happen. Pray fervently that it does not, work fervently to keep God in our lives and in that of our culture, and then leave the rest up to him.

Father Rick Losch

Be Wordly Wise

The Comforter

Jesus said that he would not always be with us in his physical presence, but that he would send us the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who would lead us into all truth. That promise was fulfilled on the first Pentecost following his Resurrection and Ascension. Today we most often use the word comfort to imply ease with an overtone of physical pleasure, as in the comfort of a warm bed on a cold winter morning. We even call the quilt that covers us a comforter. This is not at all what that word meant during most of its history. It comes to us from the Latin verb *confortare*, to strengthen or support. That in turn comes from *con-* (or *com-*) a prefix that intensifies the meaning of the word to which it is attached,¹ and *fortis*, strong. The Holy Spirit is not given to us to make us comfortable in the modern sense, but to support us and give us the strength that we need to function as Christ's disciples. He is not the Holy Spirit the Easer, but the Holy Spirit the Strengthener. When we are strengthened, however, it does make the difficult path much easier.

Richard R. Losch+

Episcopal Relief and Development

St. James' recently received a letter from Episcopal Relief and Development thanking us for our donations in 2017. They said, "The 2017 End of Year Report shows your parishioners contributed \$625, for hurricane relief, to combat malaria, and for undesignated funds." This is in addition to the \$125 that the Vestry contributed. These are generous donations for a tiny parish like St. James'. Thanks to all who gave.

ERD, unlike the majority of relief charities, does not extract any salaries or operational expenses from its donations. The Episcopal Church underwrites these expenses, so 100% of all donations to ERD goes to their relief operations.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ As in communion, com-union, an intensely binding union with God.

Prayer Garden Gate

Maggie Noland has generously given St. James' a beautiful wrought iron gate for the Prayer Garden, and a handsomely embroidered Fair Linen for the Altar. Both are in memory of Thomas Raiford Noland, who served St. James' as Treasurer for many years. We are grateful for her generosity. The gate and the Fair Linen were both blessed on Easter Day.



Richard R. Losch+

The Epistle is Online

The last five 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+

ECW Nursing Home Party

The Episcopal Church Women's meeting in May will be at 2:00 p.m. on Wednesday, May 9 at the Sumter Health and Rehab Nursing Home Facility in York. Every month SH&R has a party for all their residents who have a birthday that month, and all residents are invited. For several years the St. James' ECW has sponsored the May party, which is usually the largest one of the year. They provide refreshments, entertainment, and gifts for the birthday celebrants. This will be the last ECW meeting until they resume their activities in September.

Richard R. Losch+

Sunday School Summer Recess

Our last day of Sunday School this school year will be Sunday, May 13th. Thank you to Fr. Losch for teaching the adult classes.

Hiram Patrenos

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 spring and summer flowers in the prayer garden, as well as pruning and cleaning up the shrubbery. We appreciate their hard work and generosity!

Hiram Patrenos

Forward Day by Day

The new *Forward Day by Day* daily devotional booklets for May, June and July are available on the table in the vestibule and in the tract rack in the parish house. In addition to the small booklets we have large print editions available. Please feel free to take either size.

Hiram Patrenos

A Personal Thank You

Many thanks to all who expressed their condolences on my loss of Morris, but special thanks to Linda Muñoz, who made a beautiful mosaic stone for his grave. Linda executes her art in many media, but her specialties are mosaics and stained glass, and she has earned considerable renown for her work. I am honored to have one of her pieces, and I greatly appreciate her kindness and generosity.



Richard R. Losch+

The Stone at Jesus' Tomb

For many centuries tradition has pictured the stone that sealed Jesus' tomb as having been a large disk that was rolled in front of the opening. That is what is generally depicted in almost all paintings and drawings of the tomb. This undoubtedly comes from the accounts in the gospels that speak of rolling the stone to or from the opening (Matt. 27:60, Mk. 16:3). In fact, the use of such a disk-shaped stone for Jesus' tomb is

highly unlikely. Of over nine hundred Second Temple Period tombs excavated around Jerusalem, only four had disk-shaped closures, and these were the tombs of royalty. Apparently this method of closing a tomb was used only for the very rich and powerful. One reason for that is that producing such a round stone (they were about 4 feet in diameter and over 18 inches thick) would have been very expensive. While Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man, it is very unlikely that he would have had a royal tomb. Although smaller disks (about 3 feet) became the norm by the late 4th century, they were quite rare in Jesus' time. The normal way of sealing a tomb was to use a roughly square tapered stone that was brought to the entrance and then pushed in like a cork stopper. While tomb entrances were very small—usually just large enough for a man to crawl through and then drag the body inside—it would still take at least a couple of strong men to move the stone and seal the tomb.

Why, then, does the Bible refer to rolling the stone? The Greek words used in every passage are derivatives of *kulindein* (κυλίνδειν), which clearly means to roll. Despite some apologists' claims that it can also mean to move or dislodge, Greek scholars say that it means only to roll. There is a logical answer. Once the square stone is pulled back from the entrance (thus “unplugging” it), it still must be moved aside to make room for someone to enter the tomb. By far the easiest way is to roll it sideways. Even though rolling it would not be as easy as it would with a round stone, one or two flips sideways would get it out of the way. The hardest part of using a stopper stone like that would not be getting it in front of the opening, but pushing it in or pulling it out. Nonetheless, a couple of strong men could do it relatively easily. Average women could not, however, and thus we have the women's question, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” (Mk. 16:3).

There is little doubt, then, that the stone that sealed Jesus' tomb was a tapered stopper-like stone with a roughly square cross-section of about 2 feet on a side.

Richard R. Losch+

Pentecost

Pentecost, although it is frequently all but ignored these days, is one of the most important feasts in the Christian calendar. It is equal in importance to Easter, and far more important than Christmas.¹ We hear a lot about Pentecost, but it seems that few people have any idea what it is all about. The name of the feast itself tells a great deal about it. The word comes from the Greek *pentekoste* (πεντηκοστή), “fiftieth.” It is a Jewish feast that falls fifty days Passover. Passover celebrates the escape of the Israelites from Egypt. The first day commemorates the preparation for the escape (modern Judaism recounts this in the Seder), and the second day commemorates the actual departure from Egypt. The Israelites spent seven weeks (forty-nine days) journeying in the wilderness, when they finally arrived at Mount Sinai where Moses would soon receive the Law from God. The Hebrew name of the feast is *Chag Ha-Shavuoth* (חג השבועות), “Feast of the Seven,” referring to the seven weeks of their journey to Mount Sinai. In Jesus’ time most Jews read the Scriptures in Greek (the Septuagint) rather than in Hebrew, and in most of the Jewish world the feast was called by its Greek name, Pentecost.² When Christians adopted the feast as one of their holiest celebrations they retained that name.

In Jesus time tens of thousands of Jewish pilgrims from all over the known world descended on Jerusalem every year for Passover.³ The city was chaos, and the crowds were so thick that there was barely room to stand in the streets. Most pilgrims camped outside the city, many on the Mount of Olives just across the Kidron Valley from the city walls. There were hundreds of people camping near the olive grove called Geth-

¹ Easter and Pentecost have been celebrated as major feasts from the very beginning Christianity, while Christmas was given little attention until the third century A.D. and did not become a major feast until the Middle ages.

² Actually *Pentekoste Hemera* (Πεντηκοστή Ἡμέρα), Fiftieth Day.

³ To this day observant Jews dream of one day celebrating Passover in Jerusalem. At the end of the Passover Seder is said, “*L’Shana Haba’ah B’Yerushalayim* (לשנה הבאה בירושלים), “Next year in Jerusalem.”

semene, where Jesus and his disciples were staying. The Temple Guard did not dare arrest Jesus in the city for fear of rioting by his followers, so they had to be led by Judas to where he was staying at night. Even finding him there without a guide would be like trying to find someone in the Alabama stadium at the Auburn game. The Romans feared and hated that time, because with the rebellious nature of the Jews there was always danger of rioting or uprising. The Jewish leaders, including the Temple priests, were also afraid. They had managed to work out an agreeable relationship with the Romans, but if there were trouble they knew that the Romans would hold them responsible. They were leading opulent lives, and the last thing they wanted was some prophet like Jesus stirring up trouble. To make matters worse most of the pilgrims, having traveled vast distances to get to Jerusalem,¹ remained there until Pentecost, fifty days after Passover. For almost two months every year Jerusalem was a madhouse that the order-loving Romans hated, and the corrupt Jewish leaders feared.

After the Resurrection of Christ the Apostles were frightened and confused, not knowing what to do. It is not clear whether they stayed in Jerusalem the whole time. They may have gone back to Galilee for a while (that was only about a three days' walk), but the Book of Acts indicates that at least on Pentecost they were all in Jerusalem. "On the day of Pentecost they were all together in one place" (Acts 2:1). This would have included the twelve Apostles (Matthias had already been chosen to replace Judas), and undoubtedly some other disciples as well as the women who had been with them, including the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene and possibly Joanna and Susanna. "Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues

¹ For those from the more distant provinces, it could be a journey of more than a month each way.

as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken” (Acts :2-6, NIV).

That Pentecost was the undoing of Babel. In the legend of Babel, everyone spoke the same language. When they gathered together to defy God they were struck with speaking multiple languages, so they could not communicate and work together (Gen. 11:1ff). That first Christian Pentecost undid that by uniting all mankind in the ability to understand the language of salvation. At that time in Jerusalem there were a myriad of languages represented among the pilgrims, yet each heard the Gospel preached in his own tongue. That was the birth of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church that is given to unify all mankind with God. It was also the day that Peter, who a few weeks earlier did not have the courage to admit that he even knew Jesus, now had the courage to face a crowd that he knew might well kill him, and preach to them about Christ. That day about three thousand were converted and baptized (Acts 2:41).

When the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles he deposited in the Church, through them and their spiritual descendants (the Bishops), the immutable Faith of the Church. Through his guidance they would be responsible for revealing and defending the Faith, which he would give them to understand more and more as the need arose. This Faith was not given to be changed over the generations to fit the current culture. Rather, it was given to change the current culture of each generation to fit the will of God. This is the Faith that has been revealed and interpreted over the ages not by individuals or sects, but in the great councils of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised would lead us into all truth.

The Old Covenant between the Israelites and God was sealed at Mount Sinai with the giving of the Law. The beginning of that event, however, was the arrival of the Israelites at Sinai on the fiftieth day, the first Pentecost. It is significant that

the New Covenant between all mankind and God was confirmed on Pentecost, the celebration of the beginning of the Old Covenant. Christ's shedding of his blood on the cross redeemed us from our slavery to sin, his Resurrection opened for us the way to everlasting life, and his gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost gave us the Church, through which we are given all we need to receive those gifts of redemption and everlasting-life. For this reason we consider Pentecost inseparable from Easter, and equal to it in importance.

Richard R. Losch+

Christianity and the Cross

Roman crucifixion was a punishment reserved only for foreigners and slaves, and was looked upon even by Romans with such abhorrence that for centuries crucifixions were rarely carried out where the public could see them. When Spartacus' slave rebellion¹ was finally put down in 71 B.C., General Marcus Licinius Crassus, with the approval of the Consul Lentulus, ordered that 6,000 rebel slaves be crucified. The crosses were lined up along the Appian Way so that everyone entering Rome could see them. He did this as a deterrent to any other slaves who might be considering rebellion, but he was soundly criticized by the Roman elite for exposing them to this horror. The following year Cicero made a series of speeches in the Senate prosecuting the corrupt magistrate Gaius Verres for having a Roman citizen crucified. Citizens, except for the worst offenders among the very low-born, were exempt from crucifixion.² The very word cross, *crux*, was considered a "dirty word" that was never used by "nice" people.³ It is, however, found in

¹ This rebellion is properly known as the Third Servile War (73-71 BC).

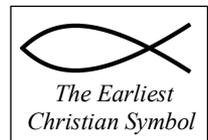
² This is why Paul, who was a Roman citizen, was beheaded instead of being crucified. Peter, Andrew, Philip, Jude, and Simon the Zealot were crucified. All the others were martyred in a variety of brutal ways except John, who, despite several attempts to murder him, died of old age.

³ The word "cancer" was like that in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries. If people mentioned it all they said "c" or whispered the word.

curses and vulgar graffiti that can be seen in Roman ruins.

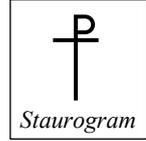
Crucifixion was not an invention of the Romans, but originated in pre-Roman times in the ancient Middle East. The Romans, however, honed it into a fine art of torture and agonizing, prolonged death. It was euphemized as being “hung on a tree,” and anyone subjected to it was believed to be cursed by the gods. By Jesus’ time crucifixion in its most brutal forms had been brought to Judea by the Romans, and was always done there very publicly. The Jews believed the Deuteronomic statement that “anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse” (Deut. 21:23). Jesus’ death, therefore, was a serious stumbling-block to the conversion of Jews to Christianity. They questioned how Jesus could be the Messiah promised by the prophets if he were accursed by God. When Jesus first taught about the Eucharist (John 6:27ff) many were offended and ceased following him (John 6:66); there is little doubt that many who continued following him at that time abandoned him when he was crucified. Peter justified it by laying the blame for it on the corrupt Jewish leaders (Acts 5:30, 10:39). Paul, on the other hand, said that Jesus took upon himself the curse that lay on all mankind for their sins, thus freeing us from that curse (Gal. 3:13). Because Jesus was sinless that curse had no damning effect on him.

Scholars have long held that because the cross was so abhorrent to all ancient peoples, it did not become a significant Christian symbol until well into the fourth century. The earliest symbol, they say, was a fish drawn by the intersection of two arcs. Many of the Apostles were fishermen, and Jesus told Peter that he would make him a fisher of men, so the fish was a very appropriate symbol.¹ Archaeological evidence, however, indicates that the cross actually was a very early symbol, despite the negative associations with it. One of the first uses of it was in what is called the *staurogram*, from the Greek for “cross-writing.” It is made up of what looks like the Greek



¹ The Greek for fish is *Ichthus* (Ιχθύς). The Greek initials for “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Savior” (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός Θεοῦ Ὑιός Σωτήρα) spell *Ichthus*.

letter *rho* (P) with a cross-bar on it. Is thought to represent Christ on the cross, with the top part representing his bowed head. It has been found on very early second century documents and inscriptions. By the late third century it had been modified to what is called the *Chi Rho* (XP, the Greek letters Ch and R), which are the first two letters of *Christos* [Χριστός], Christ).¹ This has been a major Christian symbol ever since, although many people are unaware that it was originally derived from a symbol of the crucifixion.



In 2000 the British Museum had a special display of two millennia of Christian art. The preponderance of it was images of the crucifixion. The press was given a preview of the display and they panned it. They said that no one wants to look at hundreds of images of ancient torture, and that it was time for the Church to start looking to the present. When the display was opened to the public, however, it turned out to be one of the most popular shows the museum had presented in decades. Many visitors were brought to tears, and many lapsed Christians came back to the Church as a result of the experience. The nay-sayers discovered that a serious contemplation of Christ's suffering can be moving even to the hard-hearted.

The death of Christ changed the world forever, and that change was validated by his resurrection three days later. In his book of the same title, the great biblical scholar N. T. Wright² calls it "The Day the Revolution Began." When we contem-

¹ It was the *Chi-Rho* that Constantine saw in his vision in A.D. 312 on the night before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, when he became the sole emperor of Rome. He saw the symbol and heard the words, "*In hoc signo vinces*" ("In this sign you conquer"). He ordered his troops to inscribe the *Chi-Rho* on their shields, and the next day they destroyed Maxentius' superior army. That is generally considered to be the point of Constantine's conversion to Christianity. Soon after he became emperor he banned crucifixion and all persecution of Christians, and legalized Christianity.

² N. T. (Tom) Wright is the retired Bishop of Durham (England). He is a world famous New Testament scholar, Pauline theologian and writer, and is hailed by many as the successor of C. S. Lewis.

plate seriously the love of the Incarnate God as evidenced by his willing acceptance for us of one of the most agonizing deaths conceivable, it would take a hard heart indeed not to be moved. This has been the Church's experience from the very beginning, and this is why the Cross has always been and always will be the primary symbol of our faith.

Richard R. Losch+

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon

We have all heard about the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. They were supposedly built by Nebuchadnezzar II to appease his wife's homesickness for the lush mountain gardens of her homeland. Unfortunately, there is no evidence whatsoever to indicate that Nebuchadnezzar ever built any kind of gardens, let alone the legendary hanging ones. His building activities are at least as well documented as any in the ancient world, and there is no mention of a garden anywhere. The first mention of his hanging gardens is three hundred years after his time when the notably inaccurate historian Berossus wrote of them, and historians since, including Josephus, simply copied the story. There is evidence, however, that such gardens may actually have existed not in Babylon, but in the Assyrian capital of Nineveh¹ two hundred years earlier. Sennacherib built Nineveh as a magnificent new capital city, and in it built what he called "a palace without a rival." It is hard to associate the violent and belligerent Sennacherib with anything as tranquil as a garden, but there is compelling evidence that he built it along with a vast canal system to bring to it the huge amounts of water necessary to maintain it. A full video of the research can be seen at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/secrets/the-lost-gardens-of-babylon-watch-the-full-episode/1203/>.

Richard R. Losch+

¹ Today the city of Mosul in Iraq stands very near to where Nineveh once stood. Nineveh is the city to which the prophet Jonah was sent to warn them of their sins.

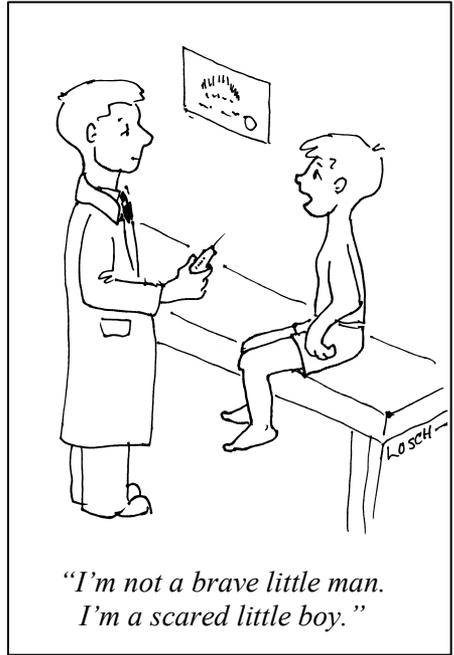
A Touch of Trivia

Eleanor Roosevelt was a “Pistol Packin’ Mama” who hated being accompanied by Secret Service agents. She traveled extensively, and she preferred to drive her own car. The Secret Service begged her to take an armed escort with her, but she refused. When they discovered that she was an expert shot they grudgingly complied and convinced her to carry a pistol. She packed a .22 Smith & Wesson Outdoorsman revolver—hardly a lethal weapon, but sufficient to slow down an attacker.

Richard R. Losch+

JAMIE

by Richard R. Losch



Saint James' Episcopal Church
P. O. Box 446
Livingston, AL 35470

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Livingston, AL
Permit No. 18