

# St Stephen's News

ST STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH · TIMONIUM, MARYLAND

VOL. XXXI, No. 5 A PARISH IN THE CLASSICAL ANGLICAN TRADITION FEBRUARY 18TH, 2020

FROM THE RECTOR

## Scripture sheds an amazing light on the commentaries

Many arguments have been advanced to support the contention that English should be the official language of the United States. My favorite is said to have been made by an unnamed Southern senator who argued it should be the official tongue because God chose English in which to write the Bible.

I strongly suspect the story is apocryphal, but, if it is true, I imagine the Bible he had in mind was the majestic King James Version of the "Good Book."

And before we smugly congratulate ourselves on our superior knowledge, we would do well to remember that the KJV – the translation St. Stephen's uses liturgically – was for centuries considered to be "gold standard" against which all English writing should be judged.

The King James Version of the Bible is not simply a scrupulous translation, it is one that was made at time when the English language was in the first flowering of its glory – the age of William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Andrew Marvell and the incomparable John Milton.

By contrast, the much earlier Latin translation of the Bible used by the Roman Church, known as the "Vulgate," was written in a language some 400 years passed its Caesarian prime.

Prior to the Vulgate, Christians had read the Bible in Greek or an earlier Latin translation derived from the Scriptures written in the Greek language.

Greek was the primary language of the Scriptures because both the Gospels and Epistles were originally written in a form of Greek, known as *Koine*, which by the First Century AD had become the *lingua franca* of the Roman Empire. (No evidence has ever been discovered to substantiate theories that the Gospels were originally written in Aramaic, the ancient Judean language.)

At the same time most non-Hebrew speaking Christians, Jews and gentiles, relied on the Greek version of the Old Testament called the Septuagint, from the Latin *Septuagint* (seventy).

The Septuagint was translated from the Hebrew to the Greek for the Great Library of Alexandria at the request of the Egyptian ruler **Ptolemy II Philadelphus** (285–247 BCE). Tradition has it that the Torah – the Five Books of Moses – was translated simultaneously by 72 Jewish scholars, six from each of the 12 tribes of Israel.

By the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, however, Jewish scholars and some their Christian counterparts were claiming that the Septuagint differed in important ways from the Hebrew version of the Scriptures, among them St. Jerome, a **Latin priest, confessor**, theologian, and historian, who is largely responsible for became known as the **Vulgate**.

The recent publication of the full text of the ancient manuscripts known as the Dead Sea Scrolls has called in to question St. Jerome's assumptions about the Old Testament and section of the Scripture known as the Apocrypha.

According to scholars who specialize in the Scrolls, the texts found in them echo more closely the Septuagint than the texts used by St. Jerome, the translators of the King James Bible or the "reconstructed" texts upon which many modern version of the Bible are based, including the Revised Standard versions.

This, of course, brings us to the frequently asked question: "Which of the many translations of the Bible on

the market is the best?" This, in turn, invites a further question: "Best for what?" For if you are looking for a Bible to read privately and to use for general study?

The answer – with certain notable exceptions – is most modern translations will do. Find one that you are comfortable with and have at it.

On the other hand, if you are looking for a Bible to use used academically or for use as a norm for establishing questions of doctrine, it is a different matter entirely.

Indeed, it is a question which has been a matter for debate for centuries. Indeed, since the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, scholars like St. Jerome have been engaged in continual – and often acrimonious – arguments over which ancient texts of the various books of the Bible are the most authoritative.

The King James Version is based upon a text known in Latin as *Textus Receptus* [The Received Text]. It is drawn from a family of ancient texts traditionally used by Western and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

## Parish Prayer List

Our Prayer Chain offers prayer daily for people on the Prayer List and guests of the Joseph Richey Hospice. To add a name to the prayer list, or visiting list, or to join the Prayer Chain, call the parish office (410) 560 6776.

**FOR RECOVERY:** Catherine, Richard✘, Janis, Parisa, Daniel, Judy, Leona, Charlotte, Rachel, Elizabeth, Kim, Dorothy, Donna, Skip, Dan, Sarah, Betsy, Edie, Heidi, Alan, Terry, Helen, Linda, John, Neal, Stephen, Nathan, Hobie, Betty, Helen, Jan, Bobby, Lee, Cary, Marie, Jim, Joanna, Kendall, Ian, Gloria, June, John Tom, Michell, Jack, Lewey, Stephen, Pamela, David, Wade, Sifa, Eileen, Ravi, Theresa, Lisa, Larry Ricard & Scott

**FOR LIGHT, STRENGTH & GUIDANCE:** Caroline, Karen, Ardis, Mavis, Michael, Melba, Sam, Vinnie, Doug, Chip, Elizabeth, Ian, Lisa, Carey, Jacob, Casey, Beth, Kath, Rebecca, Colin, Christian, Catherine & Elizabeth

**IN MEMORIAM:**

**THOSE WHO MOURN:**

**ON ACTIVE SERVICE:** Lt. Col. Charles Bursi, Lt Nicholas Clouse, USN; Lt Col. Harry Hughes; USAF; Cpt Fiodor Strikovski, US Army.

*Textus Receptus* went unchallenged from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup>. when a German scholar unearthed a Bible at St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai Desert which was claimed to predate the earliest versions of the *Textus Receptus* by a couple of centuries. It was a find that fueled scholarly debates that continue to this day.

The newly discovered book – dubbed *Codex Siniaticus* – was hailed as the repository of the earliest textual New Testament tradition. Its champions within the English Church, therefore, demanded a revision of the venerable King James Version and the result was a new translation published in 1881, as the Revised Standard Version (RSV).

The RSV did not meet with total approbation – in part because its leading scholarly critic, The Rev. John W. Burgon, Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, and Gresham Professor of Divinity, was excluded from the translation committee.

*Siniaticus* was seriously corrupted by errors, affecting not merely words and sentences, but entire passages, and Burgon objected to the revision committee's "reconstruction" of large portions of the text through

inference and extrapolation. He also questioned the committee's use of paraphrase.

Burton then deployed his vast erudition to cite sources more ancient than *Siniaticus* – including the writings of the Post Apostolic Fathers – to defend the integrity of *Textus Receptus* and argue for its superior authority as a text.

Other critics of the RSV – pointing to the presence of sectarian scholars on the committee, including a Unitarian – claimed that the translators had been chosen with an eye focused more on sales than scholarship.

In any event, Burton's critique – which has never been fully answered – was so damning it cast a pall over the RSV's popularity that lasted well into this century.

The RSV text, however, steadily gained adherents in educational institutions, and, in the 1930s, it began to catch on with churches. Soon publishers were vying with one another to produce newer, more up-to-date versions.

Today, the RSV and translations based on its underlying text is in far greater favor at universities and theological schools than the King James Version. And, doubtless, part of its appeal is that it is acceptable to a wider range of religious denominations and sects than the more demanding King James Version of the Received Text.

Probably as a consequence, an overwhelming majority of the new editions of The Bible are based on the RSV text. Currently, only one major modern language edition of The Bible is based on the Received Text: The New King James Version. But as it also employs paraphrase quite extensively, it is not truly a substitute for the “old” King James.

What does all this mean as far as people in the pews are concerned. The answer is not an awful lot. For the average reader, the differences between the various translation – with certain notable exceptions (the Readers' Digest Version springs to mind) – are relatively minor.

Such controversies as arise usually come with the commentaries that since the earliest days have accompanied the various translations. However an old Oxford professor of sacred theology used to advise his students: “Read the Scriptures, gentlemen. They shed an amazing light on the commentaries.”

The Israeli soldier/archaeologist General Yigael Yadin who deserves the last word. He said the Dead Sea Scrolls enable us to say for certain that the Biblical text has been transmitted from generation to generation with amazing accuracy for more than two thousand years. GPH✱

## St Stephen's Anglican Church

11856 Mays Chapel Road, Timonium, MD 21093

Office: 410 560 6776 · Rector: 443 425-2420

Vicar: 410 878-5275 · Pastoral Care: 410 252 8674

[www.ststeve.com](http://www.ststeve.com)

The Very Rev. Guy P Hawtin, Dean & Rector

The Rev. John Novicki, Vicar ·

Associate Rectors:

The Rev. Michael Belt, The Rev. C. Daniel Bursi,

The Rev. Dr. Norman Flowers,

The Rev. M. Wiley Hawks & The Rev. Mark Newsome,

Mrs Happy Riley, Director of Pastoral Care

& Wedding Coordinator

### SUNDAY SERVICES

8am: Said Eucharist

9.15am: Sung Eucharist (with Nursery & Church School)

11am: Sung Mattins (1st Sunday: Sung Eucharist)

Choral Services (as announced) – [evensong.ststeve.com](http://evensong.ststeve.com)

### WEEKDAY SERVICES

Wednesday, 6pm: Evening Prayer

Friday, 12 noon: Healing Eucharist

Saturday, 5pm: Family Eucharist

## Calendar of Events

### WEEKLY

Monday, 6.30pm: Bridge Club

Thursday, 10am: Knitting Circle

Noon: Bible Study

Friday, 10.30am: Bible Study

### MONTHLY & SPECIAL

## The Vestry Meeting

Wednesday, 7.00 PM, February 19th

## Ladies Who Lunch

Noon, Wednesday, February 19th

Venue: Viyo's Cafe, Cockeysville

Information: Call Sara Douglas at 410-560-9026

## The Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper

5.00 PM to 7.30 PM, Tuesday, February 25th

## Housey Housey (Anglican Bingo)

Friday February 28th, 6.30 PM, in the Parish Hall

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

St Stephen's Anglican Church  
11856 Mays Chapel Road  
Timonium, MD 21093

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
TIMONIUM MD  
PERMIT # 181