

Deadline to submit articles for "The Epistle" is the 15th of each month.

Jan. 6 • 6 p.m. • Burning of The Greens. Memorial Garden

Jan. 18 • Parish Office closed in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Jan. 19 • 5:15 p.m. • Vestry Meeting

Jan. 29 • 94th Diocesan Annual Council

Chalking the Door: An Epiphany Tradition

"Bless this house and all who inhabit it. Fill us with the light of Christ, that our concern for others may reflect your love."

*Be on the lookout for Epiphany materials
in your January Formation packet!*

Vestry Nominations Open

We will elect three new members of the Vestry to serve three-year terms at our Annual Meeting in March. Forms for nominations are available for pick up in the Parish Office or call for one to be emailed to you. Nominations must be received by March 1 for bios to be printed in the Annual Meeting booklet.

A potential vestry member must be a confirmed communicant; at least 21 years of age; must be canonically resident and actually residing the parish (letter of membership on file); must be entitled to suffrage at annual meeting at which elected; cannot have served on the Vestry in previous three years (though such person is immediately eligible to stand for nomination as Warden); and shall not serve more than six consecutive years in that or a combination of Vestry member/Warden offices unless said individual has served a portion of a former term (i.e. filled an unexpired term).

Prior to the Annual Parish Meeting, potential Vestry members will meet with the Rector; consent to the parish's Vestry Covenant; and commit to attend the annual Vestry retreat.

Annual Burning of the Greens

We trust that you are enjoying a blessed Christmastide. As we turn our focus towards Epiphany, we look to the star and follow the magi to our savior. We hope you will join us Wednesday, January 6, at six in the evening for our annual outdoor Epiphany service. We will offer hot chocolate, coffee and something sweet. Bring a branch from your Christmas tree for burning. We hope you can join us on this most special and sacred night.

*The One Hundred Ninety-fourth
Annual Council of the Diocese of Mississippi*

is appointed to convene on

January 29-30, 2021

Virtually

hosted by

St. Andrew's Cathedral - Jackson

&

Chapel of the Cross - Madison

The following delegates will be representing St. Paul's Parish:

Clay Holladay, Patrick Lewis and Lee Loeb

Alternates are Jamie Smith, Chad Tibbets and Wayne Wuestefeld

Not My Will but Thy Will be Done

*"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.*

*His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.*

*He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.*

*He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*

The Song of Mary (Luke 1: 47-55)

Dear friends,

On the Christmas before I began seminary, my wife to be, Tiffany, gave me a very lasting gift. She reserved for me an overnight stay at the Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Conyers, Georgia. It was well-timed, a reset with God and with godly people.

I saw Theotokos, the god bearer, there. Mary is depicted in a beautiful rose window above the altar and I remember feeling amazed at the size of her womb. Mary sits in this stained-glass circle with outstretched arms and a womb that is so big that it reveals Jesus standing as a grown man, with arms open and enough room left over for all things.

Hearing Mary's song in that space, and later in seminary every evening seemed dreadfully repetitive at first. But then those stanzas prayed from one side to the other by monks or seminarians became more like a mother rocking her child in the middle of the night. Outside those cloistered worlds, making room for the Magnificat gets hard.

We do not always know what to do with Mary wherever we are in Christendom. Roman Catholics focus on the veneration part while many protestants avoid the conversation entirely. My seminary had a beautiful Marble Mary that we would periodically move in the rafters in the ceiling of the chapel. She is present somehow.

When we do try and have the conversation, the Church focuses on the details; her age, status, title, virginity, what she was wearing or whatever. And then that is as far as it goes. We think we have her figured out and have her labeled. We do that to each other too. We label one another to keep us from doing the work of learning more about their identity.

In Luke, women speak a mere fifteen times. Mary, the mother of our savior, gets a full song. That is a lot of airtime. I wonder then, if Luke is trying to show us something more Mary than those labels, as there is always more to learn from one another too.

We also tend to forget that the Song Mary was outlawed in a lot of countries for centuries. Sure, it begins beautifully but then the song gets dangerous. It gets risky for monarchies and power. Conceit and pride will be toppled. The mighty will become the meek and the meek will be elevated. The hungry will feast and those accustomed to feasting will learn what it means to be hungry. There was a fear that if the people heard it, there would be an uprising.

This vaccine is coming. But for so many, it will not be here soon enough. More than 300,000 people and counting have died related to this pandemic in this country, and this nightmare is not over just yet. For all of us, as we look towards Epiphany, and the magi coming to the stable, this holy season feels different. We are all exceptionally disoriented and off-balance. Everything has been disrupted even in the way we have had to handle death this year. Saying it is a monumental mess is the family friendly way of saying it.

But we also believe that it is in this monumental mess where we find God. What Mary understood is that in the mess is exactly when and where God does God's thing... God does her best work in the mess both in us and in the world where healing is needed. God does not wait for everything to be just right before God acts.

And neither can Mary. She says yes to her faith. She says yes to God who has taken a side and it is not the side many of us want to hear. Then she goes to tell Elizabeth in the form of a song without any worry about what comes with that "yes." Her reputation is at stake of labor outside marriage, the toll on her body just to name a few. It is in saying yes to her faith in God, where it begins the work of changing the world for all time.

One of the greatest places of friction I feel in myself during pandemic time, and I imagine is also a great source of resistance for many of you, comes from trying to put order into God during all the mess. And there, is a whole lot of mess.

We all want to design who God is to be for us, or for the church. Like

We rejoice in the Baptism of Ivy Jane & Milo Joseph Sutton held on December 26 at St. Paul's. Parents Levi Sutton & Scotland Sanders; grandparents Scotty & Albree Florey.

Worship in Trying Times

Being of “a certain age” has both blessings and limitations, but one of the blessings is that I have a longer view of history. My niece, Suzan, has been doing some ancestry research and sent me a copy of my maternal grandmother's death certificate. She died on October 18, 1918, of “bronchial pneumonia secondary to influenza.” I had known that as family story for years, but seeing the document made it so much more real and pertinent today. Along with my grandmother, their infant son died, and all of the other six children were hospitalized, but recovered. Some families in their area were wiped out completely. There were 675,000 deaths in the U.S. The following year, my grandfather returned to his village in Northern Italy to marry my grandmother's cousin to help him raise his children. They subsequently had three more children. My grandfather's butcher and grocery business suffered losses and the fabric of their lives were changed forever.

At that time, there was no medical treatment: no respirators, no antibiotics and no IV fluids. Today, we have much more advanced supportive measures, but we have still been unable to do those things which might help us to contain this awful pandemic. Today, lives are being up rooted due to the Covid-19, illness, deaths, loss of employment and closing of businesses to name a few. There are those in our own close circles who are in crises mode.

I believe that we are in a “between time” right now, perhaps a literal Advent season. After ten months of darkness, we look with hope at the rollout of the vaccines and our eternal promise that God is indeed with us. Thanks be to God that I can shelter at home with all the necessities of life, while I know that so many others are in peril. We are between vaccine and immunity and so must continue the practices of masking, hand washing and physical distancing. This means that our worship is an ever changing dynamic of in-person and virtual.

As an Episcopal layperson I am called, as are we all, to “represent Christ and his Church; ... to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world...”

Our worship is not as we once knew it, but much work has been done to provide online worship and Christian formation, as well as to communicate love, to support our fellow parishioners and give outreach to the community. We are well aware of our flaws and the missing of our best intentions, but please be aware that Bishop Seage, Fr. Austin, our church staff and vestry are doing all in their power make decisions based on the best scientific information and care for all, while giving us the spiritual food we need. They need to hear your words of encouragement, not discouragement. When this is over, the fabric of our lives will be forever changed. I pray that we will move forward, together, to rebuild our lives, learn the lessons we must learn and continue as one church, the community of the New Covenant.

During December's Vestry meeting, Nancy Davis was appointed Clerk of the Vestry by unanimous vote. Lloyd Gray met with his committee and they recommended the following recipients of this year's \$17,000 in Outreach funds:

LOVE's Kitchen - \$4,000; Care Lodge - \$4,000; Crestwood Elementary - \$2,000; Feed by Faith - \$2,000; Trinity Dyslexia Education Center - \$2,000; Sleep in Heavenly Peace- \$2,000; and the Meridian Freedom Project - \$1,000. The recommendation was unanimously approved.

Rob has received only one quote, of the two he solicited for roof replacement, which is \$19,396 from Norman Roofing. He recommended that we go ahead with this bid as the work needs to be done and received unanimous approval to proceed.

Melissa Calcote distributed the first draft of the 2021 budget. Eighty-two pledges have been received at this date totaling \$417,566. She anticipates receiving more pledges.

Thy Will Be Done Continued from front page

the gardens at Versailles, we want our God, our Church, our part of the kingdom to be clean and meticulously laid out. We take comfort in that. Let us call that tradition. It is how we communicate our beliefs and customs from one generation to another. That is what the word means.

And, our faith tradition, at least for the past 6,000 years, has been anything but orderly. God's people believe in the face of hardship. That is the power of our tradition. We share in the story of Jesus Christ because of the hardship that was endured. How do we hold onto God when everything is falling apart? What does Israel do if we stay in the wilderness. What do we do when our kings and temples fall? How can we have faith when we are imprisoned for what we believe, when we are abandoned, betrayed or when people around us are dying?

The same thing we have always done. The same thing we will do for the next 6,000 until Christ comes to complete all things.

“Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly with our God and our neighbor.”

Because we need the authenticity of Friday... and the stillness of Saturday... before we can take in all of the wonders of Easter morning. We have spent a long time leaning into Good Friday in 2020, haven't we?

Even Jesus echoes Mary's words when he is in the Garden of Gethsemane before the death, before the silence, before Easter morning. “Not my will but thy will be done.” My life is not merely my own. It is about God. The Church belongs to God.

COVID may be a hard reset for the church in this way. Maybe, just maybe, it might serve as a nudge back to a God who not a well pruned and arranged garden but to a God who is wild. “Mary's song was and is the most passionate wildest, most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote.

This wildness is the most authentic representation to our tradition. I will be the first to love the pristine, beautiful worship that just is not the reality in these days. Yet, remember we are Christians. We have worshiped God in the catacombs to avoid persecution and death. Soldiers once sang “In the Bleak Midwinter” from the trenches during WWI. “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.”

Madeleine L'Engle describes God coming into a messy world as we continue to hold these twelve days of Christmas.

“He did not wait for the world was ready.

Till people and nations were at peace.

He came when the heavens were unsteady,

and the prisoners cried out for release.

He did not wait for the perfect time.

He came when the need was deep and great.

In the mystery of the Word made flesh

the maker of the stars was born.

We cannot wait till the world is sane

to raise our song with joyful voice.

To share our grief, to touch our pain.

He came with love. Rejoice. Rejoice.”

So, if it seems hard to live into the joy of the Christmas season because of the chaos, loss, the messiness of your life or your family, or the pain of being physically distanced from those you love, know this: You are favored... infinitely. And so are they.

Mary sings because she is reminded that she is favored. This gives her new life. With God there is always, always, always possibility for new life. Like that womb in that window, there is always room for love. There is always room to become more than we are, for God is with us and God is in us. Follow Mary. Say yes and sing long after Christmas Day and Epiphany. Know that God is good and share it. Bear Christ. Lean into the wild. We just might find a savior there.

Faithfully, Fr. Austin+

Big Thanks

We are most appreciative to the parish for all the remembrances offered at Christmas and year's end. Thank you for your generosity and thoughtfulness. From Christmas bonuses to treats and gifts to goodies, we are moved by your kindness especially during this past holiday season. THANKS!

David, Claire, Mallory, Joane, John, Brenda, Denise, Rita and Fr. Austin

I wish I could find the perfect way to thank St. Paul's people for being so thoughtful. Caring is such a part of who y'all are! I am extremely grateful for the most generous purse, but even more grateful for the way St. Paul's touched my heart and soul. My life is better because you were in it.

Thank you, Betty Melton

We Remember in our Prayers

Our Parish Family: DJ Wells, Edgar Morrison, Jane Weems, Jerry Greene, Jo Van Devender, John Carrier, Ivy Jane Sutton, Milo Joseph Sutton, Jackson Florey, Joe White, Mike Reich, Norma Veach, Patty Vinson, Peggy Carrico, Scott Carmichael, Scott Hudson, William Davis, William Godwin and DeAnne Hester.

In our senior living Communities: Dixie Pigford, Joyce Welsh, Linda James, Lora Jones, Mary Scott and Nita Neville.

Extended family and friends: Alice Miller, Ally Gressett, Amanda Lockey, Amanda Rainey, Anita Sumrall, Anna Meyers, Barbara Hopper, Barbara Robinson, Baston Geiger, Beverly Bryson, Bill Selman, Bob Hill, Brooke, Brooks Moore, Carrie Eldridge, Charmin Edwards, Chelsie Abston, Christina Harris, Chuck Fishburn, Cory Gaylord, David, Diane Dunn, Delroy Ming, Edesser “Dess” Reid Ward, Rob & Aislinn Ward, Emily Chancellor, Frank Baker, Frank Barrett, Freddie Bea Watson, Gary Dawkins, George Farr, Harrison McClain, Helen Valentine, J.T. Lee, Jada Dooley, James, Jane Wacaster, Jim Bateman, John, Joey Hutto, Joy Richardson, Ken Fisher, Kim Lovette, Kylie Temple, Lee Davis Thames, Lou Dubose, Maddie Walker, Margaret Hadley, Marilyn Mohr, Martha Mazingo, Mary Ann Howell, Mary Hallwell, Michelle Nelson, Mike Covert, Mike Lundy, Mike Stanton, Nell Nichols, Norman, Rick, Roger, Sandra Nicholas, Sandy Carrier, Sallie Gercens, Sally Buntin, Hannah Thompson, Seth Thompson, Steve Plier, Suzanne Benson, Theodore, Tom Schram, Tony Sansone, Wanda Farr, Wanda Scott, Wilfe Manning, Wilma Kangery and Zack Martin.

We pray for those who have died especially; John Chancellor brother of Poo Chancellor; George Ferguson; and Horace May, grandfather of Mallory Davis.

We pray for those serving in the Armed Forces, for all who serve overseas and their families, especially Andrew Behm, Shum Benson, Connor Covert, Graham Ford, T. J. Melton, Nick Mullen and Zack Thomas.

We pray for our Bishop Brian and our Rector Austin and his family.

Birthdays & Anniversaries

Jan. 1	Gene & Judy Wood	Jan. 16	Linda James, Robert Ward
Jan. 2	Jack Martin, Jim Miller	Jan. 17	Ann Katherine Carrier, Matthew Davis
Jan. 3	Scott & Rose Hudson, Cindy McGinnis, Jim McGinnis, Chris Stump	Jan. 19	Mark Davis, Rick & Joanne Entrekin, Gavin Smith
Jan. 7	Kelly McQuaig	Jan. 20	Jo Van Devender
Jan. 8	Rick Barry, Juliet McDonald, Tiffany McGehee	Jan. 21	John Carrier III, Mark & Nancy Davis
Jan. 9	Scott Carmichael, Melissa Hudson, Jamie Smith, Jan Wayton	Jan. 22	Danny & Joane Mackey, Robert & Candy Ward
Jan. 10	Bobby & Sherree Maddox	Jan. 23	Scott Hudson
Jan. 11	Clay & Laura Holladay, Merrell White	Jan. 27	Elizabeth Scott Bond, Anthony Hiatt, Scott McQuaig, Liam Morphis
Jan. 12	Bob Rea	Jan. 28	Sandy Singleton
Jan. 13	Remy Stump	Jan. 30	Hunter Howell, Carolyn Jones, Kay Milhorn, Mike Reich
Jan. 14	Candy Ward	Jan. 31	Cameron Burchfield
Jan. 15	Rainey Breaux, Robby Dreyfus		