

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

Dec. 12 • 5:15 p.m. • Vestry Meeting

Dec. 14 • 12:05 p.m. • Capital Brass for St. Paul's Music Series

Jan. 7 • 6 p.m. • Burning of the Greens at Church of the Mediator

Jan. 21 • Annual Meeting

Feb. 2-4 • 2024 Diocesan Annual Council • Jackson

Parish Office will close for the Christmas holiday at noon Friday, December 22, and reopen Tuesday, December 26

Parish Office will close for the New Year's holiday at noon Friday, December 29, and reopen Tuesday, January 2, 2024

As we get closer to the end of the year, the Vestry is preparing the 2024 budget, so please get your Pledge Cards in. Thank you to all who have already sent them in!

Also, finish out those 2023 contributions. All payments must be received by noon, Friday, December 29, to receive credit for 2023.

## Vestry Nominations Open

Nominations are open to elect three new members of the Vestry to serve three-year terms. Forms for nominations are available at the entrances to Nave and on the bulletin board in the hallway and will be accepted until Jan. 15, 2024.

A potential vestry member must be a confirmed communicant, at least 21 years of age, must be canonically resident and actually residing in 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, which is scheduled for Feb. 24, 2024.

## Advent Opportunities for Families at St. Paul's

We know the time between Thanksgiving and New Year's can feel like a bit of a rat race for families with children and youth. There is so much to prepare and so many expectations; it feels impossible to squeeze another thing in! With this in mind, we hope that our pared down programming for families allows for our children and youth to enjoy the fullness of Advent and Christmas without the stressful busyness.

- **Shopping for Care Lodge Residents** – Sunday, Dec. 3 – Meridian EYC will go shopping for Care Lodge families at the Bonita Lakes Walmart on Dec. 3. We will meet at Church of the Mediator at 3 p.m. and take the bus to the store. Families are invited to come along as well to help us fill these wishlists!
- **Christmas Pageant** – Wednesday, Dec. 13 at 5:30 p.m. – Our annual Christmas Pageant will take place in the Nave before Wednesday supper. We will provide the costumes and cook supper, so all you have to do is show up!

## What God has Done for Us

*Love Came Down at Christmas*

—Christina Georgina Rossetti

Love Came Down at Christmas  
Love came down at Christmas,  
Love all lovely, love divine;  
Love was born at Christmas,  
Star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,  
Love incarnate, love divine;  
Worship we our Jesus:  
But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,  
Love shall be yours and love be mine,  
Love to God and to all men,  
Love for plea and gift and sign.

By the time this article is published, my family will have returned from 5th Avenue in New York — quite possibly the center of Christmas capitalism. The season includes the hustle and bustle of hundreds of thousands of people clamoring for many of the same gifts, wondering how in the world anyone can afford another Christmas while seasonal music plays in the background.

And the voice of the Church, more than any other time of year, tries to bring God's people back to the "why" of the season and not get distracted by all these other things. It is exhausting how high those pressures get; trying to make this year "perfect" for those we love. In the meantime, the real meaning of Christmas gets distorted, if not completely lost.

The good news, if we are attentive to it, is that everything we strive for is already real and true at the heart of Christmas. It is already perfect. From before the foundation of the world, God desired to have creation praise God and seek her. God created human beings so that we might seek and love God. Yes, God made us, who would corrupt and distort what that relationship would look like.

We needed a Messiah to come to us and restore all that is broken. And only God can save us from ourselves and bring the focus of that relationship back where it belongs. So, God loves us enough to become one of us in order to save us and to share in what it means to be human. Or, in the words of a traditional carol: "Love came down at Christmas."

And that is perfect. In the words of the famous preacher Fred Craddock:

*"The ministry we do, the words we say, the Savior we stand for, and the church we represent are all part of the most important truth in the universe. God became flesh and dwelt among us."*

God came down, *katabainó*. This is one of my favorite words from Biblical Greek. God came down from the heavens, the highest and furthest places from humanity to get to us. This news is nothing less than perfect.

And how might God's people respond? I wonder how the characters in the story respond. When the angel Gabriel told Mary she would become the mother of Jesus she praised God and rejoiced. When Jesus was born, the angels praised God and sang.

So when we feel tired and weary from everything going on in December — remember we have more than ample reason to be comforted and make space for rejoicing... to sing and be joyful about what God has done for us by coming down at Christmas.

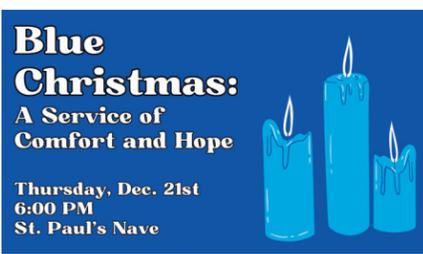
*Austin T*

# A Service of Comfort and Hope

For many of us, it's hard to participate in the joy of the holiday season because life gets in the way. The recent death of a loved one, the loss of a job, addiction, complicated relationships, financial difficulties, prolonged illness and divorce are some of the many reasons Christmas can be difficult. Too often, we as Christians feel guilty for experiencing grief and depression around the time of our Savior's birth. What would it look like if the Church made space for those feelings of sadness, pain and loneliness in the midst of the Christmas season?

This year St. Paul's is offering a Blue Christmas Service December 21 for us to gather together in the midst of our sorrow and pain, to remember who/what we have lost and hear a message of comfort and hope. The name Blue Christmas is not a reference to an Elvis Presley song, but an acknowledgment that many of us feel down and "blue" during the holidays. Many churches around the country offer this service on the night of the Winter Solstice, the longest night of the year, to remind us the words from John's gospel, "The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Please join us in the Nave at 6 p.m. Thursday, December 21, for our first Blue Christmas Service.



**Blue Christmas:**  
A Service of Comfort and Hope  
Thursday, Dec. 21st  
6:00 PM  
St. Paul's Nave



**Happening #95 — God is on the move in our young people! EYC members from Meridian, from left: Joseph Brooks, Mary Emma Honeycutt, Lucy Simmons, Ann Revere Davis, Lucy VanVeckhoven, Macarena Frias and Sellers Breaux.**

## Sowashee Youth Convocation

November 12 more than 20 youth from Meridian, Laurel and Hattiesburg met at the Church of the Mediator for the annual Sowashee Convocation Youth Gathering. This event is primarily for Episcopal youth to connect with one another through fellowship and worship, but this year we had the added business of electing our Convocation's youth delegates for Annual Council. These teens are selected by their peers to be the voting voice for our youth as we select our next bishop in February. Congratulations to Joseph Brooks from Church of the Mediator for being selected as delegate, and to Thomas Reich from St. John's, Laurel, for being selected as an alternate!

## Peace Vigil

*"Truly He taught us to love one another;  
His law is Love and His gospel is Peace..."*

On November 8 St. Paul's opened the doors of our nave for community members to come in and pray for peace in our world. In partnership with Jubilee Mennonite Church we had laity and clergy from across Meridian come to hear scripture read and offer our prayers for our neighbors who live in the midst of conflict and war.

As Christians, we follow Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, and we try to live out his teachings of love and peace. Throughout this Advent and Christmas season, I invite you to reflect on how you experience Jesus as the Prince of Peace in your life.

Special thanks to our own Fr. Austin and Mtr. Katie, as well as Kelsey Luke and Joel Diener from Jubilee Mennonite Church, the Rev. Dr. Mark Benson from First Christian, the Rev. Bo Kyle from First Presbyterian, Sabrina William from Central UMC, the Rev. Harriet Simmons, the Rev. Jim Feirtag from Northpark Baptist, and David Benson from St. Paul's for leading us in our readings, prayers and songs for peace.

## We Remember in our Prayers

**For our Parish family:** Cheri Barry, Chip Harwell, Don Pringle, DJ Wells, Elliott Street, Eve Morrison, Jerome Kittrell, Jerry Wayton, Jo Van Devender, Kay Dickson, Larry Nowak, Margaret Van Dyke, Mary Dunn, Patrick Leach, Pearce Dickson, Peggy Carrico, Rick Hasselle, Tee, Wanda Blount and Woodie Abraham.

**In our senior living communities:** Elinor Quick, Joyce Welsh, Lora Jones Mary Weems and Susan Hamilton.

**Extended family and friends:** Alisha Crowell, Betty Perry, Bill Selman, Bill Slay, Brooke, Charlotte Chaney, Christy Covert, Christopher Alexander, Clancy, Colt Chancellor, Cory Gaylord, Davey Simmons, David, Diane Dunn, Donna Polizzi, Emily Rush, Evie Warden, Francois DuPlessis, Frances Leach, Frank Baker, Frank Barrett, Gail Richardson, George Farr, Hays Monsour, Jacob Neely, Jada Dooley, James, Jan, Jeana Bennett, Jo Nell Brown, Jim McGinnis, Jim Thompson, John, Josiah Christian, Ken Fisher, Kevin Williams, Kylie Temple, Lamar McKenzie, Lanier McCullough, Leland Tew, Lou Dubose, Martha Mazingo, Marti & Will Sorey, Mason, Matt White, Michelle Nelson, Mike Covert, Mize, Norman, Pat Carver, Paul Parker, Rachel Neely, Randy Moore, Richard Graham, Rick, Sandra Gray, Sandy Carrier, Shirley Hunter Croft, Steve Waddle, Susan Nichols, Tammy, Thomas Little, Tom Schram, Travis Sadler, Trent Hartzog, Tyler Rainey, Wanda Farr, Wanda Scott, Willie Spencer and Zack Martin.

**We pray for those who have died especially:** Gene Emshoff, Uncle of Tim Hanschke,

**We pray for those serving in the Armed Forces,** for all who serve overseas and their families, especially Andrew Behm, Shum Benson, Cody Blackwell, Connor Covert, Graham Ford, Luke Graham, Zack Hendericks, Brooks Hull, Nick Mullen and DJ Robinson.

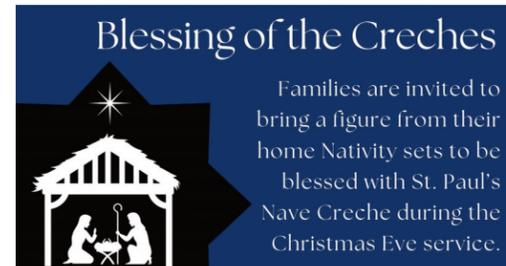
**We pray for our candidates** for Bishop and their families; Dorothy, Jason, Jennifer, Rob and Walton.

**We pray for our Bishop Brian,** for our Rector Austin and his family and our Curate Katie.

## Birthdays & Anniversaries

Dec. 1 .....Bob Covert, Henry Hiatt, Lee Keeton	Dec. 13 .....Bob & Polly Covert
Dec. 2 .....John Breaux, Anne Warren Swindoll	Dec. 17 .....Chandler Hogan
Dec. 3 .....Michael Hasselle	Dec. 21 .....Carlyle Breaux, David Batchelor III, Tiffany Benson Kelly, Ralph & Martha Young
Dec. 4 .....Bonnie Allen, Sandy Carrier	Dec. 22 .....Geoff McIntyre
Dec. 5 .....Stephen Wilson	Dec. 24 .....Harriet Simmons
Dec. 6 .....Annie Martin	Dec. 27 .....David Batchelor, Dotty Graham, Laura Holladay
Dec. 7 .....Jack Crowe, Paige Watson	Dec. 28 .....Anne Warren Swindoll
Dec. 8 .....Sharon Davis, Dawn McCormick, John Michael McDonald	Dec. 29 .....Hemi Gaddie
Dec. 11 .....Kelly & Paige Watson	Dec. 30 .....Melissa Calcote
Dec. 12 .....Ann Revere Davis, Reid Perry	

Services	DEC. 3	DEC. 10	DEC. 17	DEC. 24
VESTRY COUNTERS	Gloria Chancellor & Bob Covert			
8 A.M.				
CHALICE	Malcom Gee	John Carrier	Bob Covert	Malcom Gee
READER	Malcom Gee	John Carrier	Polly Covert	Malcom Gee
USHER	Malcom Gee	John Carrier	Bob Covert	Malcom Gee
10:30 A.M.				
READER 1	Patrick Leach	Sally Gray	Malcom Gee	Jerome Kittrell
READER 2	Lynn Waddle	Wayne Wuestefeld	Lloyd Gray	Katie Simmons
PRAYERS	Helen Abraham	Kay Reich	Candy Ward	Joan Moore
USHERS	Joey Martin	Marsha Miller	Michelle Lewis	Reid Davis
	Graham Martin	Jim Miller	Patrick Lewis	Mallory Davis
ACOLYTES	Payton Hanschke	Sellers Breaux	Olivia Davis	Ann Revere Davis
	Jack Martin	Carlyle Breaux	Caroline Lewis	William Davis
	Annie Martin	Britton Dunn	Henry Hiatt	Patrick Leach
ALTAR GUILD	BJ Ray	BJ Ray	Gloria Chancellor	Gloria Chancellor
	Melissa Calcote	Melissa Calcote	Edie Simmons	Edie Simmons
CHALICE	Lynn Waddle	Edie Simmons	Gary Jones	Rick Entrekin



**Blessing of the Creches**  
Families are invited to bring a figure from their home Nativity sets to be blessed with St. Paul's Nave Creche during the Christmas Eve service.

**This Christmas Eve families and individuals are invited to bring a piece from their home creches/nativity scenes to be blessed with the St. Paul's Nave creche during the service. You can take your blessed piece home after the service.**

**Celebrating Christmas December 24, 2023**  
**Advent 4 • 8 a.m. & 10:30 a.m.**  
Service will be in the chapel  
**Christmas Eve Service • 5:30 p.m.**  
Festival Choral Eucharist in the Nave



**BISHOP SEARCH**  
Diocese of MS  
Candidate Meet and Greets

January 17th, 2024  
St. James, Greenville  
Check-in: 5:30 pm; Starts 6:00 pm

January 18th, 2024  
All Saints, Tupelo  
Check-in: 5:30 pm; Starts 6:00 pm

January 19th, 2024  
Coast Episcopal School,  
Long Beach  
Check-in: 5:30 pm; Starts 6:00 pm

January 20th, 2024  
Chapel of the Cross, Madison  
Check-in: 10:00 am; Starts 10:30 am

## Bishop Meet and Greets

**All of the "Meet and Greets" will be live-streamed so those who cannot attend can watch.**

**Beginning December 1 there will be an RSVP form on the Bishop Search website**

**<http://msbishopsearch.com/> nominees for those planning to attend.**

## Poinsettia Dedications

It is a tradition at St. Paul's to place poinsettias on the altar in memory or honor of loved ones at Christmas. Flower forms are available in the Sunday bulletin or you may call the Parish office 601.693.2502 to make your dedication. Any excess funds will be used to assist in beautifying the altar and our worship during the year. Dedications must be received by Monday, December 18, to be printed in the Christmas Eve bulletin.