

**Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World**

# **The Evangel**



**ST. STEPHEN'S**  
united methodist church



# We are all, without exception, beloved children of God

## From the Family Ministries Director

### Messy Christmas

Sign up now for our annual Messy Christmas! On Sunday, December 20th from 12-2 you can join us for a virtual Messy Christmas celebration. Our theme will of course be the birth of Jesus and we'll have a full set of diverse crafts and activities for your pre-k and elementary-aged kids to take part in. As Messy Christmas is virtual, we will need all participants to register by the end of the day on December 15th so that we can ensure we buy the right amount of supplies and assemble the right amount of kits. You will be able to pick kits up from St. Stephen's between 9-12 AM on December 20th. Alternatively, delivery is also available. Please indicate your preference on the registration. You can register at [www.stshtx.org/events](http://www.stshtx.org/events)

### Christmas UMYF

It's time for our annual Christmas UMYF party! Things might look a little different this year as we follow safe practices but we'll still have our annual thrift gift white elephant, fun games, and dinner to look forward to. All middle school and high school-aged children are welcome to attend even if you don't normally attend St. Stephen's. We'll be meeting on December 20th from 4-6 PM.

### Family Advent Devotional

Come pick up a free Advent Devotional from the brilliant minds at Illustrated Ministry on December 6th. We'll be handing out all of the materials to families during Drive in Communion and Sanctuary Prayer time at noon.

### Thank you, Gladys!

Everyone at St. Stephen's would like to offer poet (and resident jollyologist) Gladys Reeve a huge thank you for all of the wonderful and inspiring poems she has shared over Facebook. Gladys first contacted our Family Ministries Director, Steven Fisher, about sharing some poetry to lift spirits back in April of this year. By the end of November, Gladys had submitted over 100 poems to our Facebook page. Gladys is not on Facebook but has been kept up to date with your comments and likes. If you have a personal message for Gladys, please email Steven Fisher at [steven@stshtx.org](mailto:steven@stshtx.org) and he will collect them and send them to Gladys. Additionally, if you have enjoyed Gladys' poetry, you can find more on her Amazon author page <https://amzn.to/3lweLsT> (edited)



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**Cover photos:** Many thanks to the volunteers who decorated the sanctuary for Advent and Christmas!

Please submit dates, pictures and information for the January 2021 Evangel by December 28 to [info@stsumc.org](mailto:info@stsumc.org).

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# The church does not belong to us

## Johnson Memorial School News

October flew by for JMS kids – we returned to school on October 20 and have loved seeing smiling faces in our hallways again after seven long months! Our traditional Halloween parade in the front parking lot was a hit again this year, especially with the gorgeous weather. Chapel continues each month with Pastor Nathan sharing a message with our students who are set up on picnic blankets outdoors. The students also share their memorized Bible verses with parents who are standing in our parking lot enjoying the event together. Did you know that JMS beat their candy donation from last year for Treats for Troops by 50%?! In a partnership with a local dentist, our sweet preschoolers generously shared 148.8 pounds of Halloween candy with deployed soldiers.

On Election Day, JMS friends created their individual Voter Registration Cards with self-portraits and practicing the spelling of their names. They came to our voting booth to cast their ballots for cat vs dog and then placed their sticker on our graph to help us visualize who the winner of our JMS election was that day. Each student earned their own "I VOTED" sticker that day and learned new vocabulary words about the election process.

For the month of November, we supported the church's effort to collect pantry items for families in need at Stevens Elementary. This is also a special activity for JMS students as they were individually able to bring their can to a designated basket during our Thanksgiving Chapel time! Giving back and our consistent emphasis of kindness to others is an important message for our JMS students so they may learn the true and hands-on meaning of empathy.

### Amazon Wish List Wrap-up - Only a Few Items Left!

Putting into words how much we appreciate your generosity for our classrooms is so hard - our staff has been under immense pressure since we were forced to close on March 13 in so many ways and JMS families truly lifted us up! Your gifts and your prayers for a safe and healthy school year are what make the JMS family so strong - thank you for going out of your way again and again. The items you sent our way from this Amazon wish list our teachers created have been put to use immediately in each classroom - the kids were thrilled!

We are in the final two weeks of our "wedding" registry / wish list on Amazon. We have a few big ticket items (like one air purifier for each class) that can be split between multiple donors as we know they are high in value; if you are willing to contribute even \$5 towards an item, we would be thrilled! After the "wedding" on December 2, we hope to purchase the remainder of our wish list thanks to Amazon's generous 20% off discount for these types of registries. If you prefer to contribute an Amazon gift card instead, we will definitely put that to good use when making those last few classroom purchases. Gift cards can be emailed to JMS at [JMS@stsumc.org](mailto:JMS@stsumc.org) or dropped off in the church mailbox. Tax receipts (and thank you notes) will be mailed to you promptly for your records.

<https://www.amazon.com/wedding/share/JMS2020>





# God is in our neighborhood and not just in our building

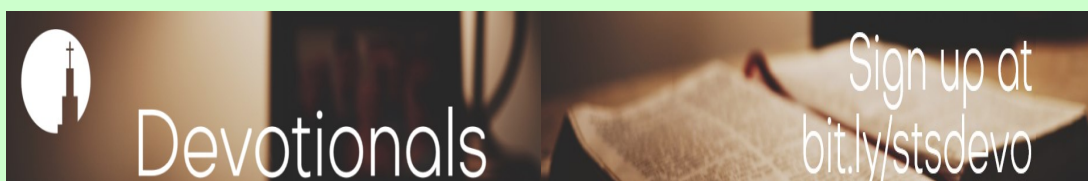
## Get Involved

**Near Northwest Winter Wonderland** - Mark your calendars for a winter wonderland drive through event on December 12th. This collaborative event put together by many area schools, churches, and organizations will be a driving tour around the neighborhood with stops at Christmas light sets, live performances, giveaways, and more. We'll have more details over the next few weeks on our social media channels and emails.

**Stevens Christmas Baskets** - We are still providing food for families at Stevens Elementary this Christmas and although the scale has changed due to the pandemic, gifts will be provided via gift baskets too. The distribution day will be December 12th at St. Stephen's during the Winter Wonderland event. Everything will be handed out in a drive through setting. If you would like to volunteer your time as a shopper, a food box packer, or a gift distributor, please contact Steven Fisher at [steven@ststx.org](mailto:steven@ststx.org)



**Communion Offering  
for December**





# Worship connects us with God and with each other

## From the Senior Pastor

Happy New Year!! I know, I know, lots of you are sick of me making this joke each and every Advent. But, as Christians, our church year actually runs from Advent through to Christ the King Sunday every year. And, given what 2020 has been like, maybe this year you can all agree with me that saying Happy New Year a month early is a good thing!

While I am very hopeful about the next several months (especially with recent news about vaccine development), we continue to plan our activities for the next several weeks cautiously. Your safety and the safety of the vulnerable among us is our top priority.

That being said, we think we have a couple of Advent and Christmas opportunities that will be safe, fun, and joyful! On December 13 at 6 pm, we will join with the other partner churches in Houston's Virtual Choir to host a drive-in Christmas Concert. We will have a big screen set up and an FM transmitter in the West parking lot, and people will be able to enjoy incredible Advent and Christmas music (with some sing-along favorites) from the comfort of their own cars. Other churches around Houston will also be participating in their own ways. It's going to be great!

While the details aren't set in stone yet, we are also planning to do a couple of drive-in Candlelight services on Christmas Eve. Based on response to the concert on the 13th, we will determine the schedule and number of services for Christmas Eve. Be on the lookout for more information about those specifics soon.

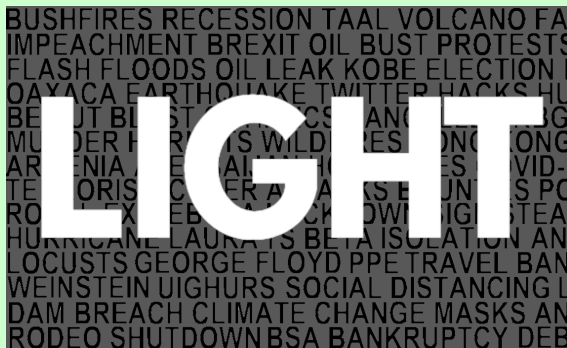
This advent season, our worship series is titled "Light in the Darkness." Each week, we'll be reflecting on the good news of our faith even in the midst of difficult circumstances. It is relevant, timely, and we are very excited about it! The weekly themes are listed on the back of this newsletter. Merry Christmas everyone!

Thank you to everyone who attended our quarterly "state of the church" meeting on Zoom November 8. Based on your feedback, we're going to make the virtual potluck every second Sunday an opportunity to ask questions about church business. That means that Nathan and a couple board members will be available to answer your questions on Zoom December 13 and January 10. Of course, we're also always happy to answer questions via email or telephone.

You should have received a Christmas fundraising letter earlier this week. 2020 has been a tough year, and we hope that you and your family are financially stable. If you are doing okay, would you consider making a special gift to St. Stephen's before the end of this year? You can make a gift through our website, by mail, or by dropping a check through the mail slot on the office doors.

Because of the unprecedented nature of this year, we will be doing our budgeting and our 2021 pledge campaign, "Resolution," in January. Be on the lookout for information about how to submit pledges.

Paz, Nathan







# The stories of scripture transform our own stories

## Blue Christmas Service

This year has been hard on all of us, but it has been especially hard for those who are alone and feeling isolated. If you lonely, hurting or grieving, we welcome you to join us for a Virtual Blue Christmas Service at 7 pm December 17th. This service will remind us that we are not alone; God is present for those who struggle and grieve.



## Member Milestones

### Address Update

**Joan Booth** made a move recently to Brookdale The Heights. Brighten her day by sending her a card or a note to: 2121 Pinegate Drive, Apt #2101, Houston, Texas, 77008.

### In Memory

We extend our prayers and sympathy to the family of **Patricia Gideon** who passed away on November 11th in Pascagoula, Mississippi, from complications following heart surgery. She was 70 years old. Pat was actively involved at St. Stephen's for many years as a member of YEAS and a thoughtful participant in the Seekers Sunday School class. She also worked on teams for a number of "Walk to Emmaus" retreats. Pat moved back to her hometown of Pascagoula a few years ago and was able to enjoy re-connecting with several of her school days friends. Pat's son, Taylor, and her grandson, Avery, were able to visit with her in the days before her death and will return to Pascagoula at a date to be determined for a memorial service.

Our prayers and sympathy are also extended to Steven Fisher and his family upon the death of his uncle, **Donny Fisher**. Donny passed away in the United Kingdom on November 21st after an extended illness.

## Prayer Concerns

John & Dorothy Artz, Anita Bishop, Hilda Bluett (Steven Fisher's grandmother), Rhonda Boehm, Sandy Bonnin, Florence Bowman, Tom Burton, Arlene Caler, Gloria Catalan, Jess Chambers, Delight Clary, Chappie & Gloria Collins, Janet Cummins, Andrew Drapkin, Allen Ebelt, Kayla Ebelt, Walter Ebelt, Megan Eyre, Robert Faltisek, Steven Fisher & family upon the death of his uncle, Donny Fisher; the family of Pat Gideon, Charm Hensley and son, Daniel; Curtis Hicks, Harlis Hicks, Dorrie Jackson, Mr. Lawrence, Dot Lockhart, Penny Loy, Barbara Luikens, Frances Mayberry, Bill McIntire, Henry & Sarah McKinley, Wayne Meyenberg, Dian Parker, Brenda Paulk, Mary Peek, Joel Ray, Milton & Noni Ray, Rande Richnow, Rogers & Jane Roberts, Terry & Sandra Russell, Barbara Smith, Meranda Soto, Preston Taylor, Paul Wieting, Patricia Williams, Todd Wilson, Carol Yip Choy, Judy Zanelli, Shara Zatopek

Social Justice Prayers: The sin of racism and its effects on all of us; Members of the CITGO6: Tomeu Vadell, Gustavo Cardenas, Jorge Toledo, Alirio Zambrano, Jose Luis Zambrano, Jose Angel Pereira; and all who are imprisoned or persecuted unjustly

**In the Military** Allen Clutter, Keanna Piercefield

**In Hospital** Memorial Hermann Heights—Barbara Johnson



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**The Evangelist**

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### **“Light in the Darkness” Advent Worship Series Themes**

**Sunday, Nov. 29: “Hope in the Exhaustion”**

**Sunday, December 6: “Peace in the Outrage”**

**Sunday, December 13: “Joy in the Loss”**

**Sunday, December 20: “Love in the  
Loneliness”**

**Christmas Eve: Lessons & Carols, Communion**

**Sunday, December 27: “Joy in the Everyday”**

## **Our Vision**



**We are all, without exception,  
beloved children of God**



**The church does not belong to us**



**God is in our neighborhood and not  
just in our building**



**Worship connects us with God and  
with each other**



**The stories of scripture transform  
our own stories**

## **Stay at Home Schedule**

Here are the weekly activities during our Stay at Home schedule:

**Daily:**

**Devotional Emails**

**Sunday mornings:**

**Sunday School: 9:30 am (Zoom, Facebook )**

**Worship: 11 am Youtube, Facebook**

**Feast Virtual Potluck: noon, Zoom**

**First Sunday of the Month:**

**Drive Through Communion and Silent Prayer in the Sanctuary: 12:30-2pm**

**Tuesdays at noon and Thursdays at 7 pm:**

**Houston's Virtual Choir Rehearsal**

**(Anybody may join via phone, smartphone, tablet or computer. Contact Pastor Suzi at [suzi@stsumc.org](mailto:suzi@stsumc.org) for information.)**

**For information on how to connect with Zoom, where to find us on Facebook or YouTube, or to sign up for our email list, visit [stshtx.org/coronavirus](http://stshtx.org/coronavirus)**