

Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World

The Evangel



Listening Session—March 24, 2021



ST. STEPHEN'S
united methodist church



We are all, without exception, beloved children of God

A Message from the Senior Pastor

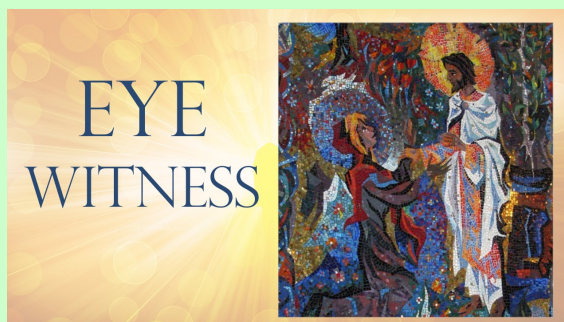
It is hard to believe that it's already April, and that it's already Easter time! What a year we've had, and how glad I am to reflect on the story of Easter in the midst of it.

I think it's easy for us to gloss over the importance of the Easter message. In an increasingly secular world, something interesting has happened in the last decade or so: The folks once jokingly called "Creasters" or "twice a year Christians," folks whose church attendance was only on Christmas and Easter, have become once a year Christians. That one time a year? Christmas, not Easter. I have a working theory on why this is: the calendar. Christmas is always on December 25, but because Easter is a lunar calendar holiday, it moves around. And you know what? Maybe it is okay that people who are not actively part of the church are not as aware of the Christian calendar as they once were.

But what if Christians ensured that people all over the world, even if they didn't know our calendar, knew about the good news of the resurrection? What if we lived so thoroughly as world-changing, love-bringing, hope-filled resurrection people that everyone knew about Easter, even if they didn't know when it was?

This last year has changed so many things for so many people, and some of those changes — good ones and bad ones — are probably here to stay. But what hasn't changed is that the tomb really was empty all those years ago, and Jesus showed us that love wins in the end. Jesus's call to each one of us to live our lives in certain hope of resurrection is as true and as difficult today as it was 2000 years ago. So let's get busy showing people what Easter really looks like.

Paz,
Nathan



We hope you'll be able to join us for the wide range of opportunities we'll be offering this Holy Week!

- We'll have daily devotionals starting on Palm Sunday with reflections on the seven last words of Christ.
- Tuesday and Thursday, we'll have midday prayer at noon on the church Facebook page.
- Maundy Thursday at 7 p.m. we'll have a drive-in worship service including communion in the west parking lot. This service will also be live streamed on Facebook and YouTube, and we'll reserve spaces in the front for families to bring chairs. Mask wearing and social distancing will be enforced.
- Good Friday, we'll include a link to a virtual Good Friday service hosted by our conference's Black Methodists for Church Renewal chapter in the daily devotional email. Additionally, at 3 pm we'll have a special premiere on Facebook and YouTube of a passion play put on by St. Stephen's 20 years ago!
- Easter Sunday, we'll have a drive in worship service at 11 a.m. in the west church parking lot. Attendees are encouraged to bring a flower or 2 from your yard for our ushers to place on the flower cross. This service will also be live streamed on Facebook and YouTube, and we'll reserve spaces in the front for families to bring chairs. Mask wearing and social distancing will be enforced. We will not have Sunday School or the virtual potluck on Easter.

Christ is risen! Hallelujah!!

Cover photo:

At St. Stephen's Listening Sessions members have the opportunity to help shape the reopening and future of our church.

Please submit dates, pictures and information for the May 2021 Evangel by April 26 to info@stsumc.org.

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The church does not belong to us

Family Ministries Update



Summer Camp Update!

Lakeview—Lakeview is a stay-away summer camp located in Palestine, Texas. Children entering the third grade in the fall through recently graduated high school seniors are able to attend.

At Lakeview, your children will take part in a number of faith-building classes, worship, and studies but that is far from all we'll do. There is generous time given for all the classic camp activities you'd expect. From paintball to fishing, ropes courses to crafting, water slides, and square dancing, there's lots for children of all ages to engage in. Registration is at <https://lakeviewmcc.org/summer-camp/> The cost is \$440 and scholarships are available. If you have any questions you can email me at steven@ststx.org

UM ARMY—Our UM ARMY will be a mixed-aged camp so any student who is entering junior high in the fall through those who have recently graduated can attend. Got college-aged kids? They can register too in more of a leadership role. Think of yourself as a big kid? Adults can register too!

UM ARMY is a service-led summer camp. Our church will join churches from many different areas as we work together to assist individuals and families with repair and construction projects. In the evening we return to the host church that everyone stays at for evening programs and worship.

Registration will be open soon. Once it is, we'll send an update out with more information. We also don't have our location information yet but I will let you know separately when we have that. UM ARMY did release a draft of their safety protocols for this summer and I (who am very cautious in these matters) was pleased with the measures suggested. When registration opens, I'll also send out their safety requirements for camp. (edited)

UMYF—Youth will be back on Sunday, April 18th from 5-7 PM. At this session, we will talk about the results of the St. Stephen's listening sessions and about how we may implement some of the suggestions, especially from the youth. Topics will likely include increasing the number of UMYF evenings a month, moving back inside, and any facility or amenity suggestions brought to light. We'll also have our usual fun, games, dinner, and Bible study.

VBS—Our VBS registration will open Tuesday, March 30, at 9:00 am! The link to register www.ststx.org/events will go live and you can also find the volunteer registration on the same page. We have had to make a few changes this year to accommodate the world we currently live in. All of the necessary details can be found during the registration process. This year our theme is Discovery on Adventure Island. At VBS, children will explore ways God shines great light in the world, and learn how they can also shine God's light by reflecting what they've learned. The cost is \$15 for one registration and there are discounts for siblings. Children of volunteers attend for free!

Steven Fisher



God is in our neighborhood and not just

Johnson Memorial School News

Tours for prospective JMS families looking to join us for the 2021-2022 school year are well underway after school hours. Families in our community may drop off their completed registration form; spots will be filled on a first-come, first-serve basis. Our registration forms are available on the church website. Questions can be directed to Candice Croker, Director, at JMS@stsumc.org.



The Houston Audubon Society came to visit JMS students on Tuesday, March 9 as part of our "Texas" unit. Along with seeing live animals native to our great state such as an opossum, a corn snake, a hawk, and a barn owl, a students loved pretending to be owls in flight and measure how long the biggest fish in our state is!

- Did you know that opossums have an average of 50 teeth?!
- Did you know that opossums are the only marsupials in North America and can carry up to 13 babies in their pouch?!
- Did you know that barn owls eat three mice per day but a corn snake only needs one per week?!

Our annual tradition on Go Texan Day to host a Chuckwagon Lunch for our families looked a little different this year since parents are not allowed into the building due to the ongoing pandemic. We hosted a memorable parade in the front parking lot where all classes had created western-themed costumes - parents loved this new event as who doesn't love a preschooler in cowboy boots!? After the parade, Mrs. Paulk led students in our Texas-themed songs for families to enjoy before heading into the Fellowship Hall for a lesson by our very favorite visitor, Cowboy Pat. He shared with us some of his favorite campfire songs on his guitar, what cowboys eat when they are on trailrides, and had us estimate how long his lasso is. For recess that day, students went to the front parking lot with their class to ride on mini horses, hang out with various animals in the petting zoo, and select a special design from the face painter. We are so appreciative for the Pratt family who generously offered to sponsor the face painter for this great event - she was incredibly talented!

Spring Break took place the week of March 15 and everyone returned for the final nine-week stretch of the 2020-2021 school year on Tuesday, March 23. Our last class day of the year will be Tuesday, May 25 with Parent/Teacher Conferences on Wednesday, May 26 and Thursday, May 27. School will resume after Labor Day on Thursday, September 9, 2021.





Worship connects us with God and with each other

From the Pastoral Music and Worship Team

Hello Church Family! I love Easter! What better message of hope do we have than the message that Jesus has risen?! If we have learned anything in the last year, it is probably that we cannot make it without hope. The world is too hard, too sad, and too broken to live in without hope. Jesus is our hope.

I know I've said this a few times since I came to St. Stephen's in August, but we need Jesus. That is one thing that has remained constant from the time of Christ to today. Human beings need Jesus. We need the example of Jesus for how to care for others. We need the love of Jesus to get us through the tough times when they come and they always do. We need the forgiveness and redemption offered by none other than, you guessed it, Jesus.

No matter how many times I go through the readings and worship of Holy Week, it never fails to astound me how broken people are. They were broken before Christ, when Christ was here on earth, and now in the midst of pandemic and adversity from all sides, still broken. The same people that shouted praises to Christ and called him King in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday were the same people that shouted crucify him just a few short days later. Even those closest to Jesus, from Judas to Peter, to those who couldn't stay awake when Jesus specifically asked them to, were broken and untrustworthy. This is why we need Jesus so very much!

I pray that this Holy Week each of you read the accounts of that time, and hear them with a new perspective. That you would connect at a deeper level with Christ this week and continue to deepen that relationship beyond Easter Sunday. May the Holy Spirit infuse each of you with light and love, and a desire to care for all God's people. Amen.

Rev. Heather Velez



Accounting Team Volunteer Needed



The church accounting team is looking for a volunteer with Quickbooks experience to join into our work. If you have experience with Quickbooks and are interested in serving the church in this way, please email operations@stshtx.org.

Thanks!

Get Involved

Texas COVID Vaccine Update

Beginning Monday, March 29, adults of all ages in Texas will be able to get a COVID-19 vaccination. The Texas COVID-19 Vaccine Spotter is a tool to help you track down COVID-19 vaccine appointment openings at Texas pharmacies. Here is the link to the Vaccine Spotter which is updated every minute: vaccinespotter.org/TX/ Please share this with anyone you know who still needs a COVID-19 vaccination.

Oak Forest Deed for Change

The Texas Annual Conference featured an article in the March 25th edition on work begun several months ago to remove racist language in Oak Forest deed restrictions. St. Stephen's member, Ashley Cavazos, decided to begin working to correct this wrong while listening to one of Nathan's sermons at St. Stephen's. You can read the article at txcumc.org/crossconnection.



The stories of scripture transform our own stories

Welcome, New Member!



Joyce Barton has been a part of St. Stephen's for several years, but decided to make it official and become a full member on March 11, 2021. Joyce will celebrate her 94th birthday on May 9! Send her a card or note, or give her a call and let her know how happy we are to welcome her into our church family.

Joyce Barton
1035 Gardenia Dr.
Houston, Texas 77018
(713) 686-6613

In Memory

We extend our prayers and sympathy to the family of **Lavon Mahon**, who passed away peacefully in her sleep at home on March 18, 2021. Lavon joined St. Stephen's in 2014. A few years later, she moved to Spring, Texas, to live with her son and daughter-in-law, Richard and Debbie Mahon, who continued to bring her to St. Stephen's for the senior luncheons and other activities she enjoyed until health issues no longer made such trips possible for her. A private funeral service was held for Lavon on March 25 at Woodlawn Funeral Home. A video of the service is available at woodlawnfh.com.

Our sympathy and prayers are also extended to Karen Alford and her family upon the death of her mother, **Margery Gray**, on March 18, 2021. A service to honor Margery's life was held on March 25.

Lavon Mahon



Prayer Concerns

Karen Alford & family, Dwight Allen, Pat Anderson & family, Sherri Anderson, John & Dorothy Artz, Kathy Ballard, Anita Bishop and daughters, Jeanie & Janya; Hilda Bluett (Steven Fisher's grandmother), Rhonda Boehm, the family of Sandy Bonnin, Florence Bowman, Mary Brennan, Curtis Brom, Arlene Caler, Mark Cass, Delight Clary, Charles Cobler, Chappie & Gloria Collins, Martha Collum, Patricia Creed, Janet Cummins, Ed & Pam Dickson, Andrew Drapkin, Angela Earl, Allen Ebelt, Kayla Ebelt, Walter & Maurice Ebelt, Brenda Edrozo & family, Megan Eyre, Robert Faltisek, Christie Fisher, Rod Fisher, Michael Guadagnoli, Kathy Gunter, Charm Hensley and son, Daniel; Lola Hensley, Harlis & Curtis Hicks, Dorrie Jackson, Dwayne Johnson, the family of Angus Lewis, Dot Lockhart, Penny Loy, Barbara Luikens, the family of Lavon Mahon, Frances Mayberry, Ann McIntire, Henry & Sarah McKinley, Wayne Meyenberg, Bill Niederhofer, Dian Parker, the family of Betty Patterson, the Patton family, Brenda Paulk, Milton & Noni Ray, Rande Richnow, Rogers & Jane Roberts, Terry & Sandra Russell, Barbara Smith, Meranda Soto, Tim & Lee Strouse, Hazel Swearingen, Darrell & Cheree Taylor & family, Preston Taylor, Paul Wieting, Dale Wilson & Donna Ebelt-Wilson, Todd Wilson, David Wright & family, Rick & Johnny Yarbrough, Carol Yip Choy, Judy Zanelli

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

In Hospital

Children's Memorial-Texas Medical Center—Flora Sandt
Memorial Hermann TIRR-Texas Medical Center—David Derr



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united methodist church

The Evangelist

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

PERIODICAL

PAID

HOUSTON, TX

**Communion Offering
for April: UM ARMY**



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 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