

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

# **The Evangel**

**January 2026 Edition**



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



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

## Sure Looks Like the End Times Out There

Spend enough time crisscrossing the United States, and you'll become familiar with an extremely specific kind of "Christian" billboard - black background, white or yellow text, cheesy generic image, 1-800 number, commentary on sin, dead, or hopelessness. You can find them from sea to shining sea, and frankly, with the new AI generated and highly political Jesus billboards that have popped up more recently, I find a certain comfort in them. I don't think that they accomplish their goal, but I suspect that the folks behind them are at least earnest in their attempt.



However, as I drove home from my week in Asheville pretending to be a person with a real life, I joyously spotted a new billboard, which warned about the end times, and it did not leave me with massive theological issues. It was truly a revelation. Back a month-ish ago, I made my thoughts on end times predictions pretty clear and cemented why I will never gain viral fame as a pastor. We. Have. To. Stop. Predicting. The. End. Times. Scripture (including Jesus himself) make super clear that we are not going to know. It's just going to happen. Yet, in an uninterrupted chain of incorrect predictions, we've been trying for two thousand years. This is exactly what my new billboard friends said. "The end is coming. You won't know when. Be ready." In something that I didn't have on my bingo card for reality, more of us should listen to that Christian highway billboard. It really grasps the point of Scripture's approach to the end times.

All too often, the opposite approach still holds sway, and no other Scripture has suffered more from this than the Book of Revelation. We mine it constantly for even the slightest sign that the modern world aligns to its often inscrutable images and references. It gets the point that many just avoid it entirely or have no idea what the book is actually about. Readers peer into Revelation as a bad weather report of the apocalypse rather than Scripture meant to inform us about God and our relationship with God. I can't tell you how many conversations that I've had in the last decade and a half of ministry that boil down to some version of, "Obviously, we live in the end of days," "Of course, this figure in Revelation is obvious my current American political adversary," and "It sure looks like the end times out there doesn't it."

It speaks to a pervading hopelessness. Surely, things have never been worse than they are now, so this must be the end. Yet, spend much time with history, and you'll be reminded of things like the Black Death that killed one third of Europe's population or WWII with its death toll in the tens of millions and its industrialized systems to murder innocent people. What we feel doesn't relate to the reality of our historical moment, but instead, speaks to one of the great struggles of faith. How do we navigate moments when God's victory feels so very far away? If only we had a book in the Bible to help us wrestle with that exact question.

Spoilers for the end of the New Testament: We do. It's called Revelation.

We don't know this because we either avoid it or read it in a way contrary to the original author's intent. John wrote Revelation to encourage Christians to hold on even through the darkest times because no matter how bad it all looks or how far away Jesus's final victory feels, God wins in the end.

In 2020, I heard a lot of, "It sure looks like the end times out there," to the point that I taught a 12-week study on Revelation entitled, Sure Looks Like the End Times. I'll be teaching it again starting on 1/8. I wrote it so that we can stop being afraid of Revelation and stop misusing Revelation, and instead, we can start understanding it and using it as a piece of Scripture meant to help us overcome the hard stuff and hold onto hope in difficult times.

If this sounds like something that you need, I invite you to come on Thursday nights, at 6:30pm, for now until the beginning of April, or if you need a remote option, we post a Zoom link to Facebook every Thursday morning. It does sometimes look like the end times out there, but it probably isn't. Revelation is here to help you with it all.

Vaya con Dios,  
Pastor Trey

Cover photos: Images of Advent and Christmas 2025

## January 2026 Highlights



**The Evangel**  
2003 W. 43rd St.  
Houston, TX 77018  
(713) 686-8241  
[stshtx.org](http://stshtx.org)

/stshtx

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

## Youth and Community News

**Messy Church**—Messy Christmas was our biggest messy Church ever with over 100 people in attendance. The Spring season of Messy Church begins on Tuesday, January 13th at 5:30 p.m. Our theme is “Lost and Found”.

There'll be eight crafts and activities, dinner for the whole family—come and join our growing community.



**UMYF** — Our Youth group for 6th-12th graders will meet twice in January on Sunday the 11th, and Sunday the 18th. We meet from 5-7 PM and play games, discuss faith, and eat dinner together. There's no membership requirement to attend our youth group and friends are always welcome.



**Parent's Night Out**—The first Parent's Night Out of the year takes place on Friday, January 23rd at 6 p.m. Children 3-10 years old can be left at St. Stephen's under the care of experienced and licensed childcare professionals (and employees of our very own Johnson Memorial School).

Registration is open now and can be found at [stshtx.org/events](http://stshtx.org/events).

**Retirement Planning for Families**—For all families: Prepare for your financial future now. There will be a team of knowledgeable financial professionals at St. Stephen's on January 22nd at 6 p.m. They will share practical ideas to help you better prepare for retirement. This community conversation is free to attend.

**January Communion Offering**—Our January communion offering will go towards Summer Camp scholarships. Each year St. Stephen's takes youth and children to various camps over the summer. It is our stated goal that any child or youth who wants to go to camp should be able to without the cost being a barrier. Please consider giving to the scholarship fund this year.

