

This is the
2016 FEBRUARY—MARCH EDITION!
Of the
PRINTS OF PEACE NEWSLETTER
Of the
Episcopal Church of the Messiah, Gonzales, Texas

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Church of the Messiah is
to live for God, to serve Christ, and,
by being moved by the Holy Spirit, to spread the Good
News by our actions in serving the larger community.

Church office hours: 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Tuesday through Friday
If we are away for some reason, please leave a message on the phone.

Fr. Randy Melton is the Priest and Rector of the parish.
Contact him at one of the following numbers at any time
for an appointment or emergency:
Church (830-672-3407); Cell (830-481-8290); Home (830-437-2722)
Email: soulman4jc@gmail.com
Church Website: messiahgonzales.org

If Rector cannot be reached, contact one of the wardens
Dan Blakemore (Sr. Warden) or Robert Collins (Jr. Warden)
Dan @ 972-839-2332 / Robert @ 713-205-6246

Sunday Worship: 10:30 a.m. Holy Eucharist with Sermon
Bible Study: Thursdays from 2-3 p.m.
AA Meetings every Monday and Friday at 8 p.m.

From the Rector:

"Sabbatical Thoughts"

My first service at Messiah was 8 years ago on Ash Wednesday, February 6, 2008. The vestry generously offered me a sabbatical which is recommended by the diocese after 7 years. As you know from my previous correspondence about this, I will be gone from April through July of this year. While my Sabbatical theme is continuously being hammered out it seems, the essence of it is to observe, reflect and write in response to **"The Sacredness of Place: Where God is Hidden in Plain Sight."** This of course, is everywhere. But one cannot recognize what is seen everywhere until one learns to see it in a particular somewhere. We come to church on Sunday morning to engage the holiness of God's presence, so that we can find it, recognize and engage it anywhere and everywhere in the world, where it is often observed in distressing disguise as well as obvious glory.

But it is more than just about visiting special places. Sabbatical is taking the time to slow down and be still before the Lord (see Psalm 46:10). It is a means of rediscovering what it means to be a child of God who is made in God's Image and intended to reflect the likeness of Christ. What does that mean for me? For each one of us? The answer incorporates a concern for cooperating with the grace of the Holy Spirit to enable one to treat oneself and others as a Temple of the Holy Spirit. How much reverence and care do we truly give to our body, soul and mind? They are integrally connected and affect one another. To abuse or ignore one affects the others. A spiritual rule of life is designed to keep us accountable to all aspects of our spiritual nature, which is, in fact, the heart of who we are.

This Sabbatical will focus on my physical, emotional and spiritual health as well as reconnecting with my creative energy and passion, especially as they relate to the 3 persons of the Holy Trinity. One cannot really address any of those components without addressing all. It is also very important for me to include my wife in this process by connecting with Karen in ways that are renewing to our marriage. Since my journey in life is a shared journey, she is a vitally important component in who I am and what I do.

Aside from spending much time in prayerful reflection, I hope to do some writing and complete a poetry book that I've been intending for finish for many years now. I hope to bring a renewed perspective of my faith and ministry upon returning and look forward to sharing what I learn from this extended exercise in simply "being."

I will soon be giving each family in the parish a gift book that I have specifically chosen to help those of you who wish, to take some time to "Be still and know that I am God." It will enable you to follow my theme on some level during the sabbatical, through short segments of slow reading followed by deep reflection and spiritual insight. This will hopefully help us to share some common experience in terms of reconnecting when I return. In the meantime, I'm looking forward to a very rich Lenten season with all of you, culminating in a joyous and powerful celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday!

Fr. RANDY+

MEN'S & WOMEN'S GROUPS

Men's and Women's groups continue to meet for food and fellowship each month at 6 p.m. on the second Wednesday, with both groups normally meeting at the Elk's Lodge unless otherwise noted. **Neither group will meet in Lent as both groups are encouraged to attend the Episcopal-Lutheran Wednesday evening Lenten Programs (see elsewhere in newsletter). The next regular meetings will take place in April.**

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

We had a wonderfully inspiring Annual Parish Meeting, one of very real celebration for the many ministries with which we participate or partner both within the parish and throughout the community. It was a special treat having Bishop Reed make his annual Visitation on this day so that he could participate with us and hear for himself the heart of Messiah being spoken through the generous offering of time, talent, gifts and money. We reported lots of ministry collaboration, from the Ugandan Orphan support to our adopted seminarian family we assist, provided flood relief in Wimberly to tornado relief in Del Rio, as well as a plethora of needs that were met locally in our own community. Our decision to tithe our oil income to various non-profit entities in the area helped benefit the needs of many folks. We recalled the ways that our parish is growing spiritually as members of the Body of Christ. We said goodbye to those we love but see no longer, who have died this past year. We thanked the multitude of lay ministers in our parish life. And we elected and welcomed our newest vestry members, Kasey Floyd and Shirley Crabtree.

The hidden mysteries of the Epiphany cake were all found this year. Bob Williamson was King of the party (bean), Flo Mahan receives increased blessings of the Church for 2016 (cross), Lance Shellenberger receives increased wealth in 2016 (dime), Mary Jane Williamson receives increased ecclesiastical wisdom (button), and Noel Reese receives increased industry for 2016 (thimble) and gets to provide next year's Epiphany cake! Congrats to all!

BIBLE STUDY: The "I AM" Sayings of Jesus

Bible study meets every Tuesday afternoon from 1:15-2:15 p.m. We recently began a new study: "The I AM Sayings of Jesus" from John's gospel. The Holy Spirit is always present to us in powerful ways. Please join us! We occasionally use short videos to supplement our study, and lively discussions abound as new and interesting questions are always being raised. Every once in a while, we come up with some answers! Join us and be a part of this roundtable of personal renewal!

DIOCESAN COUNCIL to Meet in McAllen

Diocesan Council will be held in McAllen on February 18-20. The theme will be "The Joy of the Lord is Your Strength" from Nehemiah 8:10. Delegates elected by the vestry to attend are Kasey Floyd and Lucianne Blakemore, who will join Fr. Randy in representing Messiah. Council elects representatives for a variety of positions within the diocese and beyond. The diocesan budget is reviewed and approved, and several workshops, ministry moments and Bible reflections are made available on varying topics of interest for enhancing our parish ministry and personal devotions. Both Bishops will give addresses that promise to challenge and inspire our hearts and minds. Keep up with all the details, and daily updates by tuning in to the diocesan website at www.council-dwtx.org.

What is Lent?

Lent is a serious time in the life of the Church to get spiritually prepared to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. Christians are expected to set aside time for increased personal devotion, Bible reading, prayer and meditative reflection, personal self-examination of our spiritual lives, confessing and repenting of our sins, and receiving absolution and forgiveness from the Lord. Focusing on Jesus' crucifixion helps make us aware of the gift of salvation that is too often taken for granted. This is a time when we fast on certain days to give more careful attention to our spiritual nature. We may also abstain from certain rich foods as a means of simplifying our diets, taking better care of our bodies which are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and identifying with those who don't have enough to eat. It's a time to slow our lives down and listen to what God is saying to us. Sundays are always feast days commemorating the Resurrection. Even in Lent, Sundays are not technically counted among the 40 days of self-denial between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday, yet they do retain a penitential character to remind the Body of Christ gathered that repentance and grace are the keys to living in the Kingdom of God.

Lenten Rule of Life

Consider adding these things to your Rule of Life in Lent:

- ¥ Attend worship more regularly
- ¥ Give up a bad habit and replace it with a good habit
- ¥ Read a chapter a day from one of the gospels
- ¥ Pray one of the daily family devotions from the Book of Common Prayer (p.137-140)
- ¥ Call friends that aren't present at church to see how they're doing
- ¥ Be kind and encouraging, not critical and judgmental
- ¥ Try a new ministry with a heart to "give" and not just "receive"
- ¥ Develop a heart of **GRATITUDE** rather than complaint
- ¥ Ask someone how you might pray for God to bless them
- ¥ Be a prayer champion for a particular person
- ¥ Invite and offer to bring someone to worship or a church event
- ¥ Ask the Holy Spirit to let **grace & love** characterize your life.
- ¥ In **ALL** things, give thanks to the Lord, and focus on the good!

Is it Shrove Tuesday, Fat Tuesday or Mardi Gras?

...Whatever, it's a Pancake Supper!!

Holy Griddle Batter Batman! It's that time again!! All-you-can-eat-pancakes and sausage! Such a sweet deal! **YUMMM!!** Shrove Tuesday denotes the old custom of one's sins being "shriven" prior to the Lenten season of fasting and prayer. Therefore confessions are sometimes heard on this day. Another more recognizable name for the day before Ash Wednesday is "Mardi Gras," a French phrase translated as "Fat Tuesday," which is traditionally a gala celebration. This is not so much a church celebration as an opportunity for one last indulgent party prior to the fast, the idea being to rid the kitchen of all sweets and fats (the good stuff!).

So our annual Mardi Gras party begins Tuesday, February 9, from 5-7 p.m., with a Pancake Supper. Tickets are \$6 per adult / \$4 per child (Best deal anywhere)! Come and eat, and/or come and serve. Church members are encouraged to get the word out to your friends and neighbors by either selling tickets or buying them and giving them away. Profits benefit parish outreach. The Men's Group coordinates the efforts, but additional help in set up, clean up, preparation and serving is still needed. If you want to help, please contact Robert Collins (713-205-6246).

Ash Wednesday, February 10, 6 p.m.

Ash Wednesday begins the 40 day season of Lent. The Book of Common Prayer describes it as one of only two days of strict fasting (the other being Good Friday), the exception being when prohibited for medical reasons. The ashes smudged on our foreheads are signs of our mortality, humility before God, sorrow and repentance for our sins, and deep prayerful reflection and self-examination of our conscience. Ash Wednesday is a powerful and necessary way to begin the spiritual rhythm of Lent that draws us closer to our Lord as we seek and receive God's grace through Jesus. Consider participating fully this Lent in the Church's wisdom of feeding your soul with the food of life...and bring a friend!

Wednesday Lutheran/Episcopal Lenten Series

THEME: *Open My Life O Lord!*

Once again we're joining our Lutheran communion partners to share a weekly Lenten evening devotion and light supper. Church of the Messiah hosts the service and dinner on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays. The Lutherans will host the 1st, 3rd and 5th Wednesdays. That means that February 24 and March 9 are the dates for which we're responsible. We will need folks to sign up to provide soups, sandwiches, salad, bread, ice and tea on those days. In addition, we need some help with set up and take down. **If you would like to help coordinate these events, please let Fr. Randy know.**

Lenten Wednesday Schedule:

5:15 p.m. Soup and Salad Supper / 6:15 p.m. Worship / 7 p.m. Dismiss

Feb 17: At Lutheran Church (Fr. Randy preaches)

"Open My Eyes O Lord"

Feb 24: At Messiah (Pastor Ildiko preaches)

"Open My Hands O Lord"

March 2: At Lutheran Church (Fr. Randy preaches)

"Open My Ears O Lord"

March 9: At Messiah (Pastor Ildiko preaches)

"Open My Heart O Lord"

March 16: At Lutheran Church (Fr. Randy preaches)

"Open My Life O Lord"

March 23: BREAK for Holy Week services

Wednesday Noon Community Lenten Worship

The Gonzales Ministerial Alliance is sponsoring the annual Community Lenten worship every Wednesday at noon during Lent with guest preachers from various churches. Due to renovations in the Baptist Church, worship will be at the First Methodist Church and lasts only 30 minutes, followed by lunch in the Methodist fellowship hall. What a wonderful opportunity to share the Spirit of our Living God during this Holy time, and a perfect weekly lunch hour discipline to share with others in the community!

Lenten Stations of the Cross and Rosary

Every Friday

Each Friday at noon (February 12 - March 25) this Lenten devotion allows us to follow the last steps of Jesus' journey to the cross. We gather with prayerful intentions for the Lord to fill us with the grace and will to better follow the way of Jesus as we strive to take up our own cross, deny ourselves and follow him. We will alternate every other Friday using the traditional Stations of the Cross and the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary. Each devotion takes about 25 minutes, and is a worthwhile substitute for Friday lunch by feeding us spiritually rather than physically. In fact, Lenten Fridays are traditionally fasting days in remembrance of Good Friday, the day Jesus was crucified for our sins.

CONFIRMATIONS WITH BISHOP FOLTS

Bishop Folts will be with us the week after Easter on **Wednesday, March 30, at 7 p.m.** to celebrate the Holy Eucharist with Confirmation. As of this writing the confirmands will be Dawn O'Donnell, Susie Richardson, and Carson Reese. Others in the Confirmation Class who are already confirmed may reaffirm their Baptismal vows. Please make a point to attend this service in support of those who are being confirmed. A reception will follow!

WHAT IS HOLY WEEK?

Holy Week is the Church's way to help us relive the last week of Jesus' life, from his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, to the last supper with his disciples, his agony in the garden and ultimate betrayal, his unjust trial, and subsequent suffering, torture and crucifixion, all of which prepare us for the Day of the Empty Tomb. Following Jesus' footsteps throughout the week promises to have a profound impact on our Easter experience. The opportunity to be formed in the shape of Jesus' cross allows us to celebrate a deeper and more powerful resurrection.

THE SUNDAY OF THE PASSION (March 20)

Palm Sunday is the Sunday before Easter. Since ancient times, it has been devoted to special memories of our Lord's Passion (suffering). The principal focus of the liturgy on this day has been the Gospel lesson; this year the Passion of Our Lord according to St. Mark. During the 4th century, however, the Church in Jerusalem instituted on this Sunday, a solemn procession from the Mount of Olives to the principal church of the city, in commemoration of Jesus' triumphal entry. The custom of such a procession of palms soon spread to other churches in Christendom, and became a regular preface to the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Day.

Liturgy of the Palms: We gather prior to the Eucharist in the parish hall, where palms are blessed and distributed. We then process to their pews. Once inside the church, the altar party continues the procession as the congregation sings "All Glory, Laud, and Honor, to Thee Redeemer King!" This procession symbolizes the aforementioned Jerusalem procession in that it is a joyful one! THEN, the mood changes abruptly as we're quickly snatched from that ever so short-lived glory of Our Lord. We're now drawn to hear again in detail those events summarized in the middle of the Creeds, and the words, "crucified, suffered, buried," creating a cruel contrast with that exaltation so recently expressed. The congregation is asked to read the Gospel in parts with the priest.

Passion Gospel: The Gospel is read in parts at this service to allow the congregation to participate more fully in this drama of redemption. We are both the cheerers and the crucifiers of our Lord at different times, which reflects our inner nature that Jesus came to redeem.

MAUNDY THURSDAY, March 24, 6:30 p.m.

Holy Eucharist & Foot Washing (Part 1):

The name "maundy" comes from "mandate" or "commandment" Thursday due to its emphasis on Jesus' mandates to his disciples. It was "on the night in which he was betrayed," that Jesus commanded his disciples to "Do this in remembrance of me." The service includes the "foot washing," symbolic of the command of servanthood which Jesus asks of each of His disciples at the last supper when he says, "As I have done to you, so you are to do to one another."

Jesus reinterprets the Passover meal to mean that the passover lamb was actually a foreshadowing of what he came to fulfill. He prepares his disciples for the tragedy that is to come by transforming that meal into the sacramental means made available to us to share in his real presence. His presence will forever be encountered in the Holy Eucharist where "he is made known through the breaking

of the bread." After Jesus **washes the disciples' feet**, Judas leaves to betray him. Jesus takes his disciples and goes to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray in anguish about his impending suffering. There he is betrayed and arrested as all of his friends run away in fear, leaving him alone to face his torturers. He's taken to the religious and secular authorities, where he is given an illegal trial, scourged, mocked and beaten. The next morning, Jesus then carries his own cross to the site of his crucifixion. This night is deeply moving as we participate in it across time.

The Stripping of the Altar (Part 2)

Following Communion, the Reserve Sacrament is removed to the sacristy. The priest returns and Psalm 22 is said with the congregation as the altar is stripped of all its appointments. Our joyful recollection of the institution of the Lord's Supper gives way to prayerful meditation on the events of the next day, Good Friday. The priest leaves the sanctuary and returns with the Sacramental Body of Christ and processes to the Garden of Repose from the main altar in silence. The persons who have signed up for the first time on the "watch" join the procession, and as soon as the Blessed Sacrament has been placed on the Garden (or altar) of Repose, take up their vigil. Everyone then leaves the church in silence---**PLEASE---**in silence.

Regarding the Vigil at the Garden of Repose (Part 3)

Jesus' sacramental presence, usually reserved in the sanctuary, is removed to the Garden (or altar) of Repose, symbolizing the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus anguished over what lay ahead for him. The garden is set up in the Urban building, where a vigil is kept until midnight. Each parishioner is asked to take an hour of the vigil, in response to Jesus' remark to his disciples, "Could you not say awake with me for one hour?" Any number of people may sign up for any given time or times. For security purposes, Fr. Randy will be in his office until the end of the vigil. A schedule of hours will be posted at the entrance of the church on Palm Sunday.

Please do not leave the Sacrament unattended during the Vigil. Also, keep in mind during your time at the watch that you are spending this time with the Lord. **So please observe silence and do not visit!** At midnight, the Blessed Sacrament will be taken away (as Jesus was arrested and taken away from the Garden). We're left with a very empty and alone feeling, making us aware of how his disciples must have felt...in a sense, "the Real Absence." ...a time of confusion and fearfulness.

GOOD FRIDAY (God's Friday), March 25, 6:30 p.m.

This day is called "Good" in spite of the crime perpetrated and the suffering endured on the original day, because the redemption of all humankind was brought about as the Divine Life of Jesus is offered for all people forever. "Good" Friday is, in fact, a derivative of "God's" Friday, the Christian Day of Atonement, our Day of reconciliation with God. This is a day of strict fasting (page 17 of the BCP).

The Noon Hour: (Traditionally, the hour Jesus was hung on the cross)... We will observe the "Stations of the Cross." Walk with Jesus on his journey as he takes up his cross. Listen carefully as you hear the words of our Lord calling to you in a special way, "DENY yourself, take up YOUR cross and FOLLOW me."

Sacramental Absolution: This is an especially appropriate time to examine one's conscience and make a confession in anticipation of Easter. Fr. Randy will be available in the church to hear confessions from 5-5:30 p.m. on Good Friday or at other times by appointment.

Good Friday Liturgy, 6:30 p.m.: We participate in that event that expresses both the ultimate powers of chaos and evil and the ultimate expression of God's love for us. The church is empty of all the usual symbolism as we begin our worship with a long period of silence. **The cross is venerated** as the means used for our salvation, and we're given an opportunity to lay our burdens with grateful hearts at the foot of the cross.

The Holy Eucharist is never celebrated on this day. The Pre-sanctified bread from the Maundy Thursday celebration is brought to the altar and consumed by the faithful. It's an odd and incomplete sort of communion because it's an odd and incomplete kind of day.

With the consumption of the Lord's sacramental body in the pre-sanctified bread, the church building is left without the sacramental presence of Christ. It seems strangely empty and hollow, and we're able to share some of the emptiness of the apostles who knew that Christ was dead and buried. Prior to the 33 bell tolls commemorating the years of Jesus' life, the priest announces, "Jesus is dead." After the bell tolls, we leave the church in absolute silence - **PLEASE - in silence.**

RESURRECTION SUNDAY, March 27,

The Easter Day Festival Eucharist is celebrated at 10:30 a.m. This is the apex of all Christian feasts because without the resurrection, our faith is futile and our hope is in vain. Without the resurrection, we're still in our sins. The truth of the Resurrection is the foundation upon which the Christian faith stands or falls. God has overcome the last enemy, death, and won the final battle over Sin and evil. This is the day when the "Alleluias" reappear, which means "Praise to the Lord!" Christ is Risen...God's victory dance over sin, evil, death and Satan!

Flowering of the Resurrection Cross: Everyone is invited to bring flowers on Easter Day to decorate the Resurrection Cross prior to the worship service.

SMALL CHURCH CONFERENCE! Coming soon!

Saturday, May 21 @ St. George's in San Antonio

More details will be forthcoming about this diocesan event designed to address the needs of small parishes. I hope we will have a delegation attend.

TIME CHANGE ALERT:

REMEMBER TO *SPRING FORWARD* ONE HOUR ON THE SATURDAY NIGHT PRIOR TO SUNDAY, MARCH 13!!!

CALENDAR EVENTS:

- February 2: 1:15 p.m. Bible Study
- February 7: 9:18 a.m. Confirmation Class
- February 9: 1:15 p.m. Bible Study
- February 9: 5-7 p.m. Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper
- February 10: Noon, Community Lenten service
- February 10: 6 p.m. Ash Wednesday services
- February 12: Noon Stations of the Cross
- February 14: Confirmation Class
- February 16: 1:15 p.m. Bible Study
- February 17: Noon, Community Lenten service
- February 17: 5:15 p.m. Lenten dinner and service at Lutheran Church
- February 18-20: Diocesan Council in McAllen, Texas
- February 19: Noon Rosary—sorrowful mysteries
- February 21: 9:18 a.m. Confirmation Class
- February 23: 1:15 p.m. Bible Study
- February 24: Noon, Community Lenten service
- February 24: 5:15 p.m. Lenten dinner and service at Messiah
- February 26: Noon Stations of the Cross
- February 26-27: Vestry Retreat
- February 28: 9:18 a.m. Confirmation Class
- February 28: 10:30 a.m. Instructed Eucharist
- March 1: 1:15 p.m. Bible Study
- March 2: Noon, Community Lenten service
- March 2: 5:15 p.m. Lenten dinner and service at Lutheran Church
- March 4: Noon Rosary—Sorrowful Mysteries
- March 6: 9:18 Confirmation Class
- March 8: 1:15 p.m. Bible Study
- March 9: Noon, Community Lenten service
- March 9: 5:15 p.m. Lenten dinner and service at Messiah
- March 11: Noon Stations of the Cross

CALENDAR EVENTS (continued)

- March 13: 10:30 a.m. Morning Prayer (no confirmation class)
- March 15: 1:15 p.m. Bible Study
- March 15: 6 p.m. Vestry Meeting
- March 16: Noon, Community Lenten service
- March 16: 5:15 p.m. Lenten dinner and service at Lutheran Church
- March 18: Noon Rosary—Sorrowful Mysteries
- March 20: 9:18 a.m. Confirmation Class
- March 20: 10:30 a.m. Palm Sunday
- March 22: 1:15 p.m. Bible Study
- March 23: Noon, Community Lenten service
- March 24: 6:30 p.m. Maundy Thursday Liturgy
- March 25: Noon Stations of the Cross
- March 25: 6:30 p.m. Good Friday Liturgy
- March 27: 10:30 a.m. Easter Resurrection Festival
- March 30: 7 p.m. Confirmation Eucharist