

# The Messenger

ADVENT, CHRISTMASTIDE, & EPIPHANY, 2023

## The Church of the Messiah

114 North Third Street at Madison

Pulaski, Tennessee 38478

The Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee

John C. Bauerschmidt, Bishop

*The mission of the Church of the Messiah is to be a growing witness of  
our Faith in Jesus Christ in the midst of the community  
through worship and sacrament in the Episcopal tradition.*

### Our leadership:

- ✘ The Rev. Jess Reeves, Priest-in-Charge
- ✘ Pat Woolard, Music Director
- ✘ Secretary to the Parish, Marqueda Forrester
- ✘ Senior Warden, Catherine Dunnivant ('22)
- ✘ Junior Warden, Dan Lavacot ('24)
- ✘ Clerk of the Vestry, Dr. Cathy Roberts ('23)
- ✘ Treasurer, Kristi Watson ('23)
- ✘ Vestry members: Donny Muth ('22), John Davis ('22), Mary Dubberley ('24)

## Faith & Feelings

When people have to make a choice, and on one hand are one's feelings and experiences and on the other what the Bible states as truth and godliness, it is a pretty sure bet that people opt for the former. Although it be granted that sometimes people use their feelings as a battering ram to evade being countered or un-affirmed, let us go beyond that to the more, we pray, common instance: deferring to our feelings above all. How many times have we heard in personal conversation or broadcast on any media blaring soapbox that following your heart is the answer, the one that fits all. Hogwash. Everyone with a few moments' thoughts knows that feelings are frequently deceptive, misleading, generally self-absorbed, and no true compass. The soldier consumed with fear on the front line of battle, or the woman aggrieved by a disagreeable, even intolerably bad-tempered husband, both want like anything to throw up their vows and run away. Though perhaps appropriate exceptionally, honor and integrity normally bid otherwise.

Let us choose to grant that adhering to the Bible means honoring our vows before God. Even more, it means accepting the view of mankind and morality that is there clearly outlined by God. A Biblical anthropology, for example, leaves no room for a fumbling Creator that wrongly put a female into a male mold. Ridiculous. A Biblical view of life could not hold with our deciding the criteria for making and breaking vows before God. That simply does not make any sense whatsoever. Eve was in willful denial in order to be so beguiled, as God's command was clear: all this is for you, with this exception. She knew right well what she was doing, but like so many of us she chose to dismiss faithful considerations for what felt good and promised more good feelings. Believing that God's Word really is God's Word means a conversion of our thoughts and feelings to His directions, undoubtedly.

As a culture we have unmoored and disregarded the fundamental anthropology of the Bible and taken it upon ourselves to determine right and wrong, *the knowledge of good and evil*. And so, we have billboards saying come here (California) to kill as an application of *love your neighbor as yourself*. To proclaim taking innocent life as agreeable to godly admonition is about as serpent-like as it gets.

It is by no means impossible to bring our choices and behaviors under the judgment of God's Word. In fact, speak to a consistent, faithful-no-excuses believer and you will find that commitment to God's guidance is clarifying and strengthening and even brings with it a peace beyond the world's definition of absence of conflict. As authors, saints, and writers from Augustine to C.S.

Lewis affirm, a godly education is for the heart and the imagination and the brain; the wise of all ages correctly maintain that our feelings must, to be valid, conform to the objective value of what we are considering. In other words, as Dr. Esolen of Oxford put it, *we ought to have the right feelings in a right order and to a right degree*. All that we are and will be comes from and must remain loyal to the hand of the Creator, a moral God inevitably drawing us finally to a purified moral kingdom.

To accept uncritically the modern cant that whatever we call loving is so is indeed about as sensible as propounding that our children do not need information or guidance but to follow their own untutored desires. How many children would survive childhood with that inane rearing?

A further contribution from Professor Esolen: *But if we really felt the breathtaking beauty and mystery of the conjugal act, whereby an immortal soul can come into being, we would feel as contemptible all talk of it as merely recreational or mechanical or even sentimental. Or if we really felt the beauty and mystery of the human person, we would feel as contemptible all reductions for treating that person as if he were merely a machine, an animal, a consumer, a member of this or that race, or a thing to hate because it does or says or thinks the wrong things. For that person, Christ died upon the Cross, and perhaps God's love for him exceeds his love for you—you dare not deny the possibility.*

We pray that God's Spirit will teach us to love as He loves, and we should not have in mind our untampered love as naturally occurs to us as fallen sinners. Even Saint Peter, having received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, performing miracles, and overflowing with blessing found his courage to fail time and again, e.g., Galatians 2, and late into his ministry was still faltering and repenting. Who are we to presume we are not also in need of careful and ongoing adherence to God's Word?

In humility we should always honor the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Scriptures over our own feelings, for as the prophet said, the heart is deceitful above all things, quoth Jeremiah. No one is immune to letting his heart and/or desires beguile thinking, behaviors, and opinions into wrong pathways. But God is always there to lead us into right pathways for His Name's sake. Therefore, follow your shepherd, not your feelings, and you will not get lost, and eventually He will use your faith to conform your feelings to His.

An excursus by the priest-in-charge as informed by Lewis, Esolen, and the Holy Scriptures

### Relative righteousness is none

It is interesting how many Christians and/or Christian organizations think God forms approval judgments based on relative righteousness. Notice how often it happens when a Christian group is cited for bad judgment either theologically or culturally. That is, when criticized for supporting questionable cultural fads or theological aberrations, rather than answer the charge the discussion is deflected. The response points to how many people were baptized last year, how much good has been done for the Kingdom, or the response is ambiguous at best and untruthful at worst. For example, consider those who jump on the cultural bandwagon promoting Critical Race Theory, or join the chorus of those pronouncing systemic racism or white privilege as the social evils of all evils. When confronted, there is little to no discussion of the facts, an examination of terminology or a consideration of the implications for Christian theology and witness. In fact, too often the truth issue fades into the background as if it is not the key issue.

The default position is to boast of the commitment to love, affirmation, or how keen by these we intend to change the world. To the last point, it is absurd. It is as if God has called His people to change the world by their own resources and in their own time. Jesus said the world is our enemy (John 15; 1 John 5), it is against both God and His people. This is not to suggest that all that is being done, at least in the name of Christ if not always in the nature of Christ, is of no value. It is commendable and should not and must not be denied or minimized. However, that is not the problem. The problem is that the typical response is off point with the criticism. The assumption is that if good outweighs wrong, then there should be no criticism. However, the economy of God's Kingdom does not operate by weighing the amount of right against the amount of wrong as a way of justifying the wrong. It is not as if the right counterweighs the wrong then all is well. That leads to throwing out the baby with the bath water.

The economy of God's Kingdom operates on the foundation of absolutes---His Truth. Such a defense not only misses the point of the criticism, it reduces Christian faithfulness to a mere form of relativism. I know that Christians say they reject relativism, moral or theological. However, in this case, I think they have not thought deeply about the theological implications either of what they are doing or how they defend it. God does not weigh the good against the wrong and then say, okay there is more good (quantitative measurements) than wrong so you still have my blessing. The highest score, as in a game, wins! If anyone thinks that is how God operates, I suggest they consult Moses or Ananias and Saphira for there I think they will find a rather different view of God's reckoning.

Much Christian activity today is grounded in pragmatism which leads to relativism. Although there would be a strong denial of this, thoughtful arguments themselves defeat the denial. It seems that the truth question is often overshadowed by commitment to an organization (even a good organization) or the desire to show the world our sensitivity and respectability---you know, no longer any of that old Fundamentalist thinking. That may not be the best argument for a Christian-based response to culture. When nice, avoidance of consternation, and going along with the flow to get along are preeminent, that is riding a current that just goes down and down and down.

Saint Peter built a church by exhorting his hearers, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” <sup>Acts 2</sup> Let us, then, be as discerning as the Spirit gives utterance, while being humble and tame as can be, and our commission will have been fulfilled such that we will be greeted someday as good and faithful servants.

Bruce A. Little, PhD, redacted

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### *ANNOUNCEMENTS*

#### **2023 Stewardship Drive:**

Messiah’s Stewardship letters and pledge cards have been mailed out to the parish. Please prayerfully consider your pledge for 2023. They may be given to John Davis, Catherine Dunnivant, or mailed to Stewardship, The Church of the Messiah, 114 North Third Street, Pulaski, TN 38478. We ask that they be returned as soon as possible.

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#### **Annual Meeting:**

Church of the Messiah’s annual meeting will be Sunday, January 29, 2023 immediately following the church service. All reports are due in the office typed and ready to be reproduced by Wednesday, January 25, 2023.

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#### **Diocesan Annual Convention:**

The Diocesan’s Annual Convention will be held at St. David’s Church, Nashville, January 20 – 21, 2023. Delegates for the convention are Catherine Dunnivant, Marqueda Forrester, and Alternate Tabitha Lavacot.

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#### **Poinsettias’...**

for Christmas decorations are \$20 each from Chapman’s and the order must be in by December 18. Sign-up sheet is in the back of the church if you would like to buy some to adorn the church. If you have any questions please notify Catherine Dunnivant or the office.

## **IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS WE SAY TOGETHER**

“Not a problem.” Asking your wait...person, or anyone for anything and as likely as not you will hear this in favor auto-response: not a problem. After 10,000 “it’s not a problem” replies, I strenuously object to this casual, revealing, and disagreeable commonplace banality. I am afraid that it must be concluded as indicative. So, what?

To imply that my request for someone to give me ketchup, hold the onions, or make any extra effort no matter how minute is, graciously, not a problem is indicative of an attitude that grips our self-centered culture. Of course, this is a small thing, but that is not true, either. What we habitually say demonstrates how we think. That it could conceivably be a “problem” to accede to a minor request is simply impolite. What would be a positive reply, avoiding the negative and self-oriented “no problem?”

Think on these:

- My pleasure
- Of course
- (I will be) glad to
- I’d love to

Christians and even courteous pagans must see the grace of the latter as compared to the me-centered former. Why on earth should a waiter tell me it is not a problem (to them, of course) to add French fries to my order? If the speaker’s convenience is paramount, that is not only misguided “service,” but such is a Christian who has not integrated the basics of serving another into their attitude and expression of it.

Strange it is when a culture dogpiles the misuse of a gendering pronoun and cannot use courteous verbal usage. Something is going on there – think about it. So, start acting out that “love your neighbor as yourself” standard that should be generative in word and speech; try, “I’d be glad to....,” instead. Such little windows into a right relationship to God and fellow men might make for a bit of good influence rather than affirming the, well, it’s all about me “no problem (for me)” response. JLR+

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### **From your Senior Warden:**

The Vestry revisited the issue of homeless person(s) staying overnight in the sanctuary at our November meeting. Due to ongoing problems with them disrespecting the sanctuary as well as safety considerations the Vestry voted to begin locking the sanctuary during the overnight hours. Father Reeves has spoken to the police on many occasions about what more they will do, but it has not eradicated the problem. Should you have any questions/concerns you may contact a member of the Vestry.

~ Catherine Dunnavant, Senior Warden

## **With the Ear of Your Heart**

Ten years ago, I dedicated myself to the service of God and humanity according to the Rule of St. Benedict. I became a Benedictine Oblate to the Community of St. Joseph in Natchez, Mississippi. The Community was founded by Brother Vincent Ignatius, our Superior and Benedictine monk. The purpose or mission of our Community is to assist the Church in proclaiming the gospel of Christ Jesus through parish work, study, reflection, and spiritual development. Our members include the vowed religious (monks) and the oblates. The oblates are priests and lay persons; married and single.

An oblate is to monastery as a deacon is to a parish; an emissary, so to speak, of the Community or Bishop, respectively. As an oblate to the Community, I endeavor to be a reflection of the values and life as described in the Rule of St. Benedict.

The tenants that guide my life are obedience, stability, and conversion of life. Obedience is to God's teachings, to the Rule, to Brother Superior, and to our parish priest, Father Reeves. Stability is developed through the study of God's Word, the Rule, and other readings. Stability is knowing that, no matter what life events happen, Christ is the rock onto which I can dash all fears and concerns.

Through obedience and stability, you might think it a mighty task, unattainable and daunting, to follow this life. It is a life of discipline, balance, perseverance, and incremental progress. It is like the soft drops of water that continually flow until your heart and mind converge in understanding. The conversion of like life is not instantaneous; it is ever so steady and fluid as long as you listen with the ear of your heart.

I met Brother Vincent at the Annual Council for the Diocese of Mississippi. We talked, I looked them up on the web, I studied, applied, interviewed, attended a retreat, reflected, and decided to ask to become an oblate. My novitiate period was a year and a half before my final vows. As you can see, this sort of life is not one of hurried decisions. One has to study, reflect, study more, reflect more, discern with others in the community, discuss with Br. Vincent, and so on. It is the deliberate and thoughtful way of life that speaks to my heart. I like to ponder and think. It is the way of my heart.

In service to our parish, I am a licensed lay reader. As many of you have noted, I wear a black set of vestments. They are the official habit of the Community and I am to wear them when serving the church. 1600 years ago, the Benedictines were known as the black monks because of their black habit. The cassock represents charity, the belt girds me with strength, the surplice is the mantle of humility and service, and the cross is our Community cross that reminds me to take up my cross and follow the Lord. Early on, I

hesitated to wear the habit. I felt unworthy and pretentious. As the Work and Rule sank into my being, I realized the habit was for me; to remind me of the promises I made at my final oblation.

If you are interested in learning more, you might start by reading St. Benedict's Toolbox, Jane Tomaine or The Cloister Walk, Kathleen Norris, or The Rule of St. Benedict.

“With Christ’s help, keep this little rule that we have written for beginners. After that, you can set out for the loftier summits of the teaching and virtues we mentioned above, and under God’s protection you will reach them. Amen.” The Rule of St. Benedict  
Respectfully submitted, Cynthia Mary ObCSJ

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#### **Up & Coming Event:**

The choir will be singing the National Anthem during the first 2023 homestand for the Trash Pandas. They will be singing on Saturday, April 8. Cathy Roberts will have ticket price information later this winter. She has contracted for twenty (20) tickets but there will be plenty available. For further information please notify Cathy.

#### **Parish Birthdays:**

##### December:

9 Ann T. Hays

##### January:

2 Judy Hines

13 Rich Woolard

21 Teresa Hughes

##### February:

2 Liz Holt

3 Pat Woolard

23 Samantha Muth

**DECEMBER 24, CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE, CAROLING 10:30 PM  
HOLY EUCHARIST 11:00 PM.**

As we enter the seasons of Advent and Christmas let us give thanks to our Lord and Savior for all our many blessings, not only in prayer but in action. Share a smile, give a hug, offer words of encouragement, express gratitude for a job well done, give as you can to those in need around you, and love one another as Christ loves you. For it is giving that we receive. Wishing you and your family much peace and joy in the days ahead.

*From Senior Warden, Catherine Dunnavant*

**Serving our Worship ----- The Church of the Messiah:**

***NOTE: WE WOULD PREFER TO FIND SUBSTITUTES. PLEASE DO NOT  
MANAGE YOUR OWN REPLACEMENT.***

**December 4, Advent II:** Organist: Pat Woolard; Chalice bearer/reader: Cathy Roberts; Acolyte: Logan Muth; Altar Guild: Connie Baker; Greeter: Donny Muth.

**December 11, Advent III:** Organist: Pat Woolard; Chalice bearer/reader: Cynthia Low; Acolyte: Calum Lavacot; Altar Guild: Tabitha/Dan Lavacot.

**December 18, Advent IV:** Organist: Pat Woolard; Chalice bearer/reader: Lewis Foster; Acolyte: Bella Muth; Altar Guild: Marqueda Forrester; Greeter: Mary Dubberley.

<p><b>December 24, Christmas Eve:</b> Organist: Pat Woolard; Chalice bearer/reader: Catherine Dunnivant; Acolyte: all acolytes; Altar Guild: members available.</p>
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**December 25, Christmas Day:** Organist: Pat Woolard; Chalice bearer/reader: Rich Woolard; Acolyte: TBA; Altar Guild: Marqueda Forrester.



**January 1:** Organist: Pat Woolard; Chalice bearer/reader: Lewis Foster; Acolyte: Calum Lavacot; Altar Guild: Catherine Dunnivant.

**January 8:** Organist: Pat Woolard; Chalice bearer/reader: Cynthia Low; Acolyte: Bella Muth; Altar Guild: Samantha/Donny Muth; Greeter: Catherine Dunnivant.

**January 15:** Organist: Pat Woolard; Chalice bearer/reader: Mary Dubberley; Acolyte: Logan Muth; Altar Guild: Connie Baker.

**January 22:** Organist: Pat Woolard; Chalice bearer/reader: Andy Hoover; Acolyte: Calum Lavacot; Altar Guild: Tabitha/Dan Lavacot; Greeter: Cathy Roberts

**January 29:** Organist: Pat Woolard; Chalice bearer/reader: Cathy Roberts; Acolyte: Logan Muth; Altar Guild: Marqueda Forrester.



**February 5:** Organist: Pat Woolard; Chalice bearer/reader: Teresa Hughes; Acolyte: Calum Lavacot; Altar Guild: Catherine Dunnivant.

**February 12:** Organist: Pat Woolard; Chalice bearer/reader: Cynthia Low; Acolyte: Bella Muth; Altar Guild: Samantha/Donny Muth.

**February 19:** Organist: Pat Woolard; Chalice bearer/reader: John Hughes; Acolyte: Calum Lavacot; Altar Guild: Connie Baker.

**February 26, Lent I:** Organist: Pat Woolard; Chalice bearer/reader: Lewis Foster; Acolyte: Logan Muth; Altar Guild: Tabitha/Dan Lavacot.