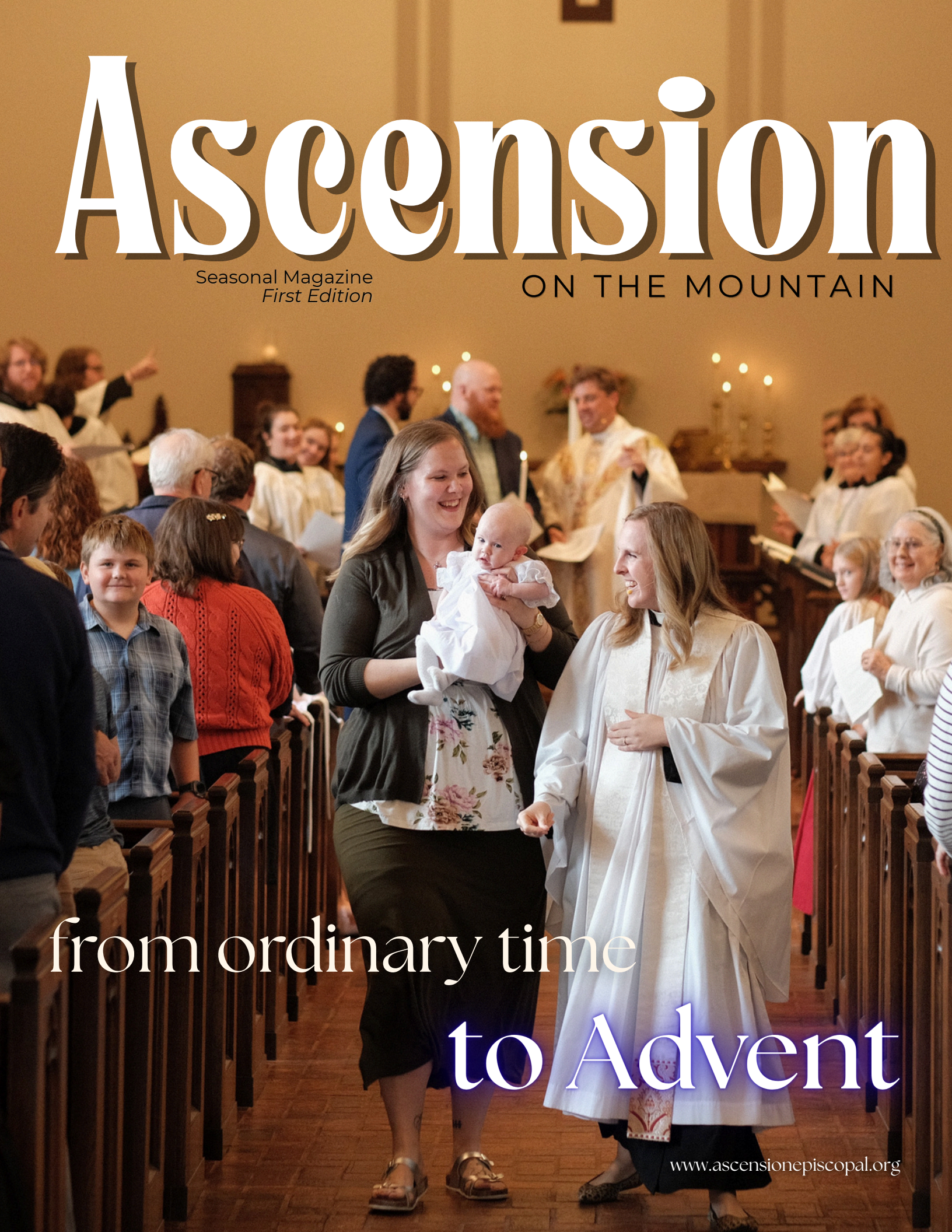
Ascension

ON THE MOUNTAIN

Seasonal Magazine
First Edition



from ordinary time to Advent

www.ascensionepiscopal.org

Ordinary *Time* *to* Advent



Table of *Contents*

What's the Deal with the Saints? 03
by The Reverend Jack Alvey

Daily Expressions of Gratitude 05
by The Reverend Emily Collette

A Letter from your Senior Warden 09
by Elizabeth Tanner, class of 2026

Cursillo: Growing in Faith & Fellowship 11
by Rebecca Posey

Living the Seasons of the Church 13
by Ashley Monachelli

St. Brigid's Guild and Biblical Hospitality 15
by Olivia Hill

















WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THE SAINTS

From The Reverend Jack Alvey, Rector

The Anglican tradition, of which the Episcopal Church is a part, has a complicated history with saints. At different times in our history, saints have been prominent in our prayers and worship, and at other times they have been pushed to the margins. Some feel the practice is too closely associated with the Roman Catholic Church. Others find comfort in connecting with the saints in their life of faith as encouragers and prayer partners.

That complexity should not surprise anyone who understands the DNA of the Anglican tradition. From the beginning, we have sought to hold together a generous spectrum of belief, drawing on both Catholic and Reformed thought. On many questions of faith, we seek to live faithfully within the tension between differing views. The way we talk about the saints is a good example of what this looks like in practice.

"This November, Emily and I will lead a four-week class on the lives of the saints. Each week we'll look at a small group of saints from the Episcopal calendar"

During the Reformation, the Church of England objected to certain medieval practices, including the ways saints were invoked in prayer and worship. Many believed these practices had slipped into superstition and even idolatry. Article XXII of the Thirty-Nine Articles (BCP, p. 872) rejects the "Romish doctrine" of invoking saints, and the first Book of Common Prayer significantly reduced the calendar of saints' days. However, Anglicans never abandoned the saints altogether. We kept a calendar of commemorations, and we kept the Creed's belief in the communion of saints. The Catechism describes the communion of saints as the whole family of God, living and departed, bound together in Christ (BCP, p. 862).

We give thanks for the saints in the Eucharistic prayers and the prayers of the people. Our collects for feast days are addressed to God, not to the person commemorated. We thank God for the saint's life and ask for grace to follow their example.

The Episcopal Church does not canonize saints in the Roman Catholic sense. Instead, General Convention approves people for commemoration on the Church's calendar. The prayer book includes major holy days and commemorations, while Lesser Feasts and Fasts remembers a wider company of faithful people from throughout the Church's history. The Episcopal Church does not require us to ask the saints for their prayers, and Episcopalians differ on the practice.



This calendar is not just a reference book. It can also shape how we worship. At our Wednesday Eucharist, we typically use the lessons appointed for those commemorated on the liturgical calendar, so those who gather midweek regularly hear how their lives bore witness to Christ in word and deed. We remember them not only as examples from the past but as companions on the way, who walk with us still.

This is also why, on All Saints' Day, we include the names of loved ones who have died since last All Saints' Day in the Eucharistic Prayer. We remember them with thanksgiving, trusting that they have joined the saints and angels in the never-ending song of praise around God's heavenly throne. As we gather at the Eucharistic Table, we join our voices with theirs, along with the whole company of heaven, in worshiping the God whose love is stronger than death.

So what is a saint? In the New Testament, the word simply means God's holy people, which is to say all of the baptized. Saints are not people who made themselves holy. They are people God made holy and then sent out. Over the centuries, the Church has also remembered those whose lives showed God's grace in especially vivid ways.



And here is the good news for the rest of us. The saints were sinners, too. They doubted, ran away, denied Jesus, persecuted the Church, and made a mess of things, and they were forgiven. Sainthood is not about perfection. It is about God's grace at work in ordinary, flawed people.

This November, as we keep All Saints' Day, Emily and I will lead a four-week class on the lives of the saints. Each week we'll look at a small group of saints from the Episcopal calendar, including some from our own corner of the country. We'll hear their stories and consider what their lives might teach us about following Jesus in our own time. I hope you'll join us.

Practice

Daily Expressions of *Gratitude*

by The Reverend Emily Collette, Associate Rector

November brings with it a chance to focus on gratitude, on giving thanks to God for the many things we have been given. I was recently at an Episcopal church in town, and I saw that they had a monthlong thankfulness calendar for the month of November. Each day had a new aspect of gratitude that families could discuss together. Examples included: name the one thing you were most grateful to eat today; name an unexpected moment that you were thankful to experience; and name a person who you're not related to that you're glad is in your life.



Some of these days were accompanied by actions to go along with those feelings of thankfulness, such as thanking God that we have enough to eat or calling/texting the person we're thankful for and letting them know we're glad they are in our lives. I loved the idea of this calendar and its consistent reminder to take stock of the many, many gifts we have in our lives. We all sometimes need the encouragement and reminder to thank God for those gifts.



In her book Gratitude: The Subversive Practice of Giving Thanks, public theologian Diana Butler Bass writes that gratitude "like interest, compounds." The more we give thanks, the more we want to give thanks and the more aware we become of all the things we have to give thanks for. She writes, "Seeking out the small things for which I could give thanks … changed my field of spiritual and emotional vision." She goes on to say that gratitude "is a defiance of sorts, the defiance of kindness in the face of anger, of connection in the face of division, and of hope in the face of fear." Butler Bass points out the gratitude doesn't always change the reality of the world we live in, but it does change how we interact with and move through that world. "Gratitude," she says, "calls us to sit together, to imagine the world as a table of hospitality. To feed one another. To feast, to dance in the street. To know and celebrate abundance."



Maintaining a posture of gratitude is good for us. The American Brain Foundation says daily expressions of gratitude lower our stress levels and helps us move through life in a more positive mindset. When we think about what we're grateful for, we quite literally change our mind-set and world-view – when our brains are focused on the good things we have, we become better at filtering out negative emotions like envy, anger, and resentment. When we fill our minds with thanks, we truly don't have space for dwelling on the bad.









As we enter into this season of gratitude, I invite you and your family to keep a kind of thankfulness tally this month (and hopefully beyond). Take notice of the glorious little ways that God is blessing us every day and then share that sense of wonder and appreciation with the God who lovingly gives us those things. May we see the many ways God blesses us, and may we be reminded to respond to those blessings by learning to bless others, too.



The Angel Tree will be in Terrill Foyer through the first Sunday of December. Please take an angel from the tree and purchase that gift. Bring the ***unwrapped*** gift to the church and place it under the tree ***no later than*** Sunday, December 6.

1. Take an angel ornament from the tree. These angels should be used to help guide you with your purchase. *Please do not feel limited to purchasing these items only (but please, no toy guns!!)*
2. Purchase your gift(s).
3. Place your unwrapped gift under the Angel Tree.
4. Place your angel ornament in the return box.

Gift certificates and donations are accepted.
Please contact Kathy Whatley at kwrolltide@icloud.com with any questions.





During this season of gratitude, consider serving with one of our many outreach ministries.
To sign up, click below or scan the QR code to sign-up central at the back of the magazine.

Ascension Backpack Program

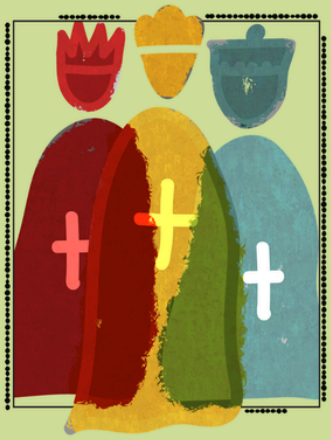
The Abbey

Firstlight Shelter

NOVEMBER
adult formation

Who are the Saints?
And why do they matter?

SUNSHINE ROOM
Sundays at 9:30



Souper Wednesdays

SPECIAL GUEST: HAYS LATIMER ON FINANCIAL & ELDER LAW

Hays Latimer, from St. Thomas Episcopal, serves on the Finance Committee for the Diocese, is a Certified Financial Planner, and Senior Lead Advisor at OneAscent Wealth Mgmt. Join us at ***10:30am, stay for Chicken Corn Chowder!***

Join us November 18th

THIRD WEDNESDAY EACH MONTH

Ware Hall, 11:30-12:30pm

All are welcome! There is no cost, come as you are.

PIER 23 FRIENDS GVING

22 NOVEMBER SUNDAY

Join us for BBQ at Callahan Thompson's house at 5:30 (RSVP for the address). Callahan will provide BBQ, so please bring a side dish to share and whatever you would like to drink. RSVP to Andrew or Emily by Thursday, November 19th.



Holiday Food Faire

12.6 Sunday

prepare and donate your favorite holiday goods
purchase treats & dishes for your holiday parties!
learn more on our website, register on Realm
questions? contact Jeannie Duke or MM Jones
all proceeds support the Ascension Scholarship Fund

ASCENSION EPISCOPAL DAY SCHOOL

Annual Greenery Sale!

Orders due Friday, November 13th

PICK UP NOV. 30 & DEC. 1 IN WARE HALL

Print order forms available in Terrill Foyer

JINGLE & MINGLE

Our next parish lunch is on Sunday, Dec. 6, following the 10:30 service. RSVP on Realm by 11/29. The church will provide the entree & drinks! We invite you to signup to bring a dish to share.

HOMEWOOD THEATRE OUTING

Come see a sequel to Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley on Sunday December 6 at 2:30pm. Tickets cost $10. Sign-up in Terrill Foyer or on Realm

A Letter *from our* Senior Warden

Dear Friends,

My year as Senior Warden, and my term as a member of the Vestry, will come to an end on December 31. As I reflect on my time in these roles, I remember both the times of reward and the times of challenge. Thankfully, the rewards have far outweighed the challenges! We have experienced wonderful growth in membership, fellowship opportunities, and programs. There is also a new energy surrounding us as a parish. I can feel it!

The challenging times were usually related to building and grounds issues that caused inconvenience and occasional frustration. Yet we managed to work through these challenges together. That is one of the things I appreciate most about Ascension: when something needs to be done, our members pull together and simply deal with it.



As Senior Warden, I felt a deep responsibility to be present for our members and to serve as a source of support for our Rector.



New Energy *Surrounding Us*





One of the highlights of my year was serving as Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee. With God's help, we met our goals: creating a Vision Statement, defining our Strategic Priorities for the next five to ten years, and reviewing our Core Values.

Throughout this work, we kept our Mission Statement at the center of our discussions:
To Make Christ Known by our Love for All.

Another highlight was involving the entire parish in developing our Master Plan for the years ahead. Through questionnaires and interviews with leaders of our ministries and committees, we invited members to share their thoughts, ideas, and hopes for Ascension's future.



I have had the privilege of serving on the Vestry several times, beginning in 1998. Each Vestry was led by a different Rector, but the fundamental purpose of our service has remained the same: to serve God, our neighbor, and Ascension through prayer and discernment; to make decisions in the best interests of our parish, and to be faithful stewards of our finances, buildings, and grounds.

Being elected to the Vestry by your fellow parishioners is an honor. Serving in this capacity brings you closer to the decisions, responsibilities, and challenges that shape parish life. It also provides an opportunity to deepen your faith, build relationships, and contribute in a meaningful way to the life and future of Ascension. I would encourage you to prayerfully consider being a member of our vestry.

As my time on the Vestry draws to a close, I am grateful for the opportunity to have served as Senior Warden and to have worked alongside so many dedicated people. I am thankful for the support of our Rector, the commitment of my fellow Vestry members, and the willingness of our parishioners to step forward whenever they are needed.

I leave these roles with gratitude, confidence in Ascension's future, and great anticipation for what lies ahead. May we continue to grow in faith, welcome others into our fellowship, and live out our mission in all that we do.

Blessings,
Elizabeth

Vestry Nominations for 2027 are now open. Nominate someone by November 22nd. Elections and our Annual Parish Meeting will be held on Sunday, December 6th. For more information, click/scan here.



CURSILLO: GROWING IN FAITH & FELLOWSHIP

One of the beautiful things about being part of the Episcopal Church is knowing that we are connected to something much bigger than our own parish. Connecting with others across the Diocese of Alabama is meaningful, and Cursillo offers an opportunity to build those relationships on a deeper, more personal level. In a world where the demands of daily life can easily distract us, these intentional connections remind us of the importance of growing in faith alongside others.

Cursillo is a Spanish word meaning "short course." It is a Christian renewal movement that encourages people to grow in their relationship with Christ and to live out their faith in everyday life.

There is, of course, a bit of mystery surrounding Cursillo, and those who have attended are often accused of keeping secrets! I promise there is nothing to be afraid of, but there are some surprises best left for you to discover firsthand.







What I can share is that Cursillo reminds us that faith is not something we are meant to practice alone. Through prayer, study, and service, we encourage one another to keep growing. For me, one of the most meaningful aspects of Cursillo is knowing that the experience doesn't end when we return to our own churches. The friendships, shared experiences, and encouragement continue long afterward, reminding us that wherever we are in our spiritual journey, we have people walking alongside us.

Recently, I had the opportunity to serve on staff for a Cursillo weekend, and it was an incredibly meaningful experience. I expected it to be a chance to serve others and give back to a ministry that has meant so much to me. What I didn't fully anticipate was how much I would receive in return. Serving on staff rekindled the feelings I had when I first attended Cursillo, and I came away with a renewed sense of gratitude and an even stronger connection to the Cursillo community.

If you have not yet attended Cursillo, I encourage you to reach out to Mary Beth Basu or me to learn more about it and how you can register for the next weekend, April 8–11, 2027, or one of the upcoming weekends in fall 2027. You may discover that its greatest gifts extend far beyond a weekend of spiritual renewal, offering lasting relationships and a renewed sense of belonging within the larger Christian community.

If you have already attended Cursillo, I encourage you to stay involved! Consider attending a staff training, attending a Diocesan Ultreya weekend, or participating in the Ultreya gatherings here at our own parish. There are many ways to continue growing in faith and supporting this ministry. Whether you are just beginning your Cursillo journey or have been part of the community for years, there is a place for you. I hope you'll take the opportunity to stay connected and experience the joy of continuing this journey together.







Are you interested in attending Cursillo?

Ascension's Lay Rectors are Rebecca Posey, rebecca.p.posey@gmail.com, and Mary Beth Basu, marybethbasu@gmail.com. They will be happy to answer any of your questions.



LIVING THE SEASONS of the Church





There were many things our family loved about living in Houston. Great Tex-Mex, sports, and the wonderful people we met are just a few. But one thing I always missed while living in Texas was experiencing real seasons. Houston weather seemed to have two settings: hot and less hot!

The changing seasons help me imagine God's ongoing work in the world and in my own life. Winter reminds me that things sometimes die or lie dormant. The days are darker, and growth seems to have come to a standstill. Yet the first daffodils of spring remind us that new life is coming. Even when we cannot see it, God is at work.

Just as there are four seasons that guide the rhythms of nature, there are also seasons that shape the life of the Church. The liturgical calendar unites Christians around the world, inviting us to celebrate and worship together as the one Body of Christ.

Unlike the secular calendar, which primarily marks the chronological passage of time, the liturgical year invites us to enter more deeply into the sacred mysteries of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. Year after year, we return to these stories, not simply to remember them, but to experience them anew and allow them to shape our faith.

In Godly Play, our Sunday school program for children in 3K through second grade, we introduce children to the rhythms of the Church year through stories, colors, and special materials that help make these seasons tangible. These lessons give children a foundation for understanding how the Church celebrates God's story and how their own lives are part of that story.



Why does this matter for our children?

Our Hearts Become Centered on Christ

The liturgical calendar helps keep Jesus at the center of our lives and our children's faith stories. As children grow, they begin to understand that the story of Jesus is not just something that happened long ago. It is a story they are invited to live into every day.

It Builds Spiritual Resilience

Moving through the seasons of the Church helps children recognize that life includes waiting, joy, sadness, uncertainty, hope, and new beginnings. These rhythms help children develop a faith that can sustain them through life's changing seasons.

It Engages Our Senses and Imagination

Children often understand big ideas best when they can see, touch, hear, and experience them. The changing liturgical colors—purple, blue, green, red, and white—along with candles, wreaths, stories, and other meaningful symbols, help children connect with theological truths that might otherwise feel abstract.

Bringing the church year into our homes

There are simple ways we can help our children experience the rhythms of the Church calendar at home. Advent is a wonderful place to begin!

Advent is a season of waiting and preparation as we get ready to celebrate the birth of Jesus and his coming again. An Advent wreath, family devotions, or an Advent calendar can help create meaningful moments of faith amid the busyness of the holiday season. Even a few minutes spent lighting a candle, reading a Bible story, or talking about what we are waiting and hoping for can help our children experience Advent as more than a countdown to Christmas.

At Ascension, we have several opportunities this Advent season to help our children and families enter into the story of Jesus together.

St. Brigid's Guild

and the Meaning of Biblical Hospitality

by Olivia Hill





According to tradition, Saint Brigid of Kildare, born in 451 A.D., founded the first nunnery of Ireland. During her life, St. Brigid moved with an air of piety that afforded her many opportunities by her superiors. And just before laying the foundation for the Christian community in Ireland, she was released from parental control by the King, for he too saw something holy in her daily walk.

Saint Brigid's reverent nature and devout obedience to God's will, is common among the Saints and the monastic communities around the world, and throughout time. The faithful who walked the earth before us, made it their mission to watch the world with Christ, to see God in others, and to allow this love to change and inform their interactions with all people.

Lately, I've been reading about our Desert Mothers and Fathers, otherwise known as some of the founders of our monastic orders and the first Christians after the apostles. I've learned that they viewed the incarnation of God, after the crucifixion, as one that exists within every human being. They believed that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God is now incarnate in each of us. Our Desert Mothers and Fathers felt this with such certainty, that they interacted with each person they met, as if they were interacting with God.

Think about that. If I treated every person like they were God, wow, I would be a much kinder person. I would hope to have unending faith in the possibilities for their life, to know that unconditional love is somewhere inside of them, and I would treat each person with grace and true hospitality.

I see many people here, at Ascension, live their lives with reverence for God, in step with the faithful ones before us. Through the hospitality and love extended to our neighbors in Avondale, and the joyful, inclusive, study of Exodus by Club 345, we are all members of the body of Christ, practicing our faith and noticing God in our daily walks.





I also see this bountiful hospitality embodied by the St. Brigid's Guild each time they organize, pray, and care for the families who have lost loved ones. St. Brigid's Guild exhibits the biblical hospitality taught to us in the life of Christ. Leading up to each funeral service at Ascension, members of the guild file in with their baked goods and supplies, with their flower arrangements, and pressed linens. I believe that their attention to detail is a way to revere God, to keep God, in the reception of those grieving.

About a month ago I had the honor of speaking with Barbara Hash about the origination of the guild, its purpose, and what she hopes for its future. Mrs. Barbara shared with me stories of love, prayer, and thoughtfulness behind the preparation and facilitation of funeral receptions. When someone calls Ascension to plan their loved one's burial or funeral service, Jack or Emily will meet with the family, and then St. Brigid's Guild gets to work. They become a support system for all families, and for some less familiar, or comfortable, they act as a liaison for the planning of the reception. They prepare everything for the reception following the service, if requested, and they care for the needs of the families after the service, making sure they have food to take home and something memorable from the day to ground them in the days and weeks of grief that follow loss.

Attention to detail is biblical hospitality, and so is the sharing of care. Mrs. Barbara and St. Brigid's are hoping to expand their guild! All are invited and welcome to join. If you are interested in learning more and discovering how your gifts can uplift and support, please email Barbara Hash at bab64h@aol.com.







Click Here for Sign-Ups!



LAST ONE THIS YEAR:
WEDNESDAY, DEC. 9TH

ROCK SOLID KIDS

Open to all 3rd - 5th graders

Once a month, after school from 2:45-3:45pm



Bishop Richard will be here on March 7, 2027. Be on the lookout for Confirmation class details – set to start in January of 2027

Parish Retreat registration will open by mid-November. You don't want to miss it! January 9-10





Saint John's Decatur will join us again this year for Lessons and Carols on Sunday, December 13, at 5:00pm.



Rector, The Reverend Jack Alvey
Associate Rector, The Reverend Emily Collette
Layout & Design, Olivia Hill
Professional Shots throughout, courtesy of Justice Allen
Cursillo Photographs, courtesy of Tara Dorsey