

THE Messenger

DECEMBER 2025

ST. MARY'S-ON-THE-HIGHLANDS EPISCOPAL CHURCH



Themes of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany

As I was thinking about the upcoming liturgical seasons and their themes, I realized something new that I had not previously connected between the three. Simply put:

Advent is a time when believers make room in their day-to-day for the Messiah.

The believer celebrates the arrival of the Messiah in the season of **Christmas**.

Epiphany asks this question of the believer, "The Messiah is here, so what do you think?" **Epiphany** calls the believer into a deeper understanding of the Messiah.

Advent is not Christmas; Christmas is not Advent; and Epiphany is neither.

All three liturgical seasons can have a significant role in the life of the believer who is willing to take each one seriously and slowly. As I thought about this understanding, one phrase kept coming up in my thoughts: "And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." (Luke 2:7) This is a well-known line we will hear on Christmas Eve- in the middle of the three seasons.



The Rev. H. Huey Gardner

preparing and anticipating. This reality is repeated in the text of Holy Scripture. Joseph, a disliked brother, is sold into slavery and then saves the brothers who sold him. God fed the nation of Israel in the wilderness, and they went on sinning. God used David when he was the youngest and most unlikely of Jesse's sons. A Messiah for the whole world and all of humanity was born in a stable, because there was no room in the inn. God's plan will not return to God empty. A Messiah is born, and now it is our turn to respond to this gift.

"No room in the inn" will not stop the ways of God.

The birth of the Messiah opens the world to a celebration that God offers us. This is a confusing tension. We don't have room for God; however, God has room for us. These three seasons can teach us this love and mercy that only God offers. While we say we love others, we stumble because of our egos, fear, and lack of mercy. In the seasons of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany, we have a front row seat to what God can do in the lives of women and men.

continued on page 7

VISION OF ST. MARY'S-ON-THE-HIGHLANDS

St. Mary's will offer a wide range of worship, education and outreach experiences that draw people closer to Christ.

MISSION OF ST. MARY'S-ON-THE-HIGHLANDS

St. Mary's mission is to serve God by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ within the Parish and into the world by worshiping in the Anglican tradition, by faithfully administering the sacraments, and by ministering to the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of our Parish family and our community.

Adult Christian Education

Adult Sunday School / 9:30 AM- 10:15 AM
Randolph Memorial Hall

Outreach Partners

Visit with two of our international outreach partners. Hear from their leadership, learn about the important work that they do, and how you can support the missions.



Sunday, December 7
Chris King
Executive Director
Amistad Mission



Sunday, December 14
Alan Seelinger
Executive Director
Light From Light

Advent Festival of Lessons and Carols

Sunday, December 14 at 5:00 pm

Presented by
The St. Mary's Choir
and
Dr. John T. Lowe, Jr.

Please join us for this beautiful service which will include music from G.P. da Palestrina, Robert Walker, G.F. Handel, Herbert Howells, Stephen Caracciolo, Thomas Ravenscroft, Peter Latona, and Harold Friedell.

Reception in Randolph Mem. Hall following!

Who Knew???

Carols and Christmas Cheer
Thursday, December 11 ~ 12:30-2:00 PM ~ Living Room

Join us as we welcome the season with festive treats and carol singing led by our wonderful organist and director of music **Dr. John Lowe**.

Lunch will be provided! Please RSVP to Dianne Matheson at dianne.h.matheson@gmail.com.

Contact Emily Rushing (emilyjonesrushing@hotmail.com) or Kaki O'Flinn (kaki@stmarysoth.org) to learn more about our monthly gatherings or to suggest a topic.

The "Loving Well" Support Group for Caregivers

Tuesdays: December 2 and 16
2:00-3:00 PM / Chapel

We invite you to join our support group held on the first and third Tuesdays of each month. This group places a much-needed focus on the caregivers, known and unknown, within our parish. Although we are called to love one another as Christ loves us, at times it can be lonely, frustrating, and confusing. Often, support and relief come in the form of a shared community.

The Loving Well group is an invitation to journey as companions along the same road, in prayer, experience, and compassion. The group is facilitated by Cler Watkins and Kaki O'Flinn.

Christmas 2025 Worship Schedule

* indicates nursery provided


Sunday, December 21 / Advent IV
8:00 AM Holy Eucharist
10:30 AM Holy Eucharist *
No Parish Breakfast or Sunday School / No 5:00 PM service

Wednesday, December 24 / Christmas Eve
3:00 PM Congregational Caroling (Doors open at 2:45 PM) *
3:15 PM Holy Eucharist Family Service *
5:00 The Music of Christmas with the St. Mary's Choir and Montevallo Brass *
5:30 PM Holy Eucharist*
10:00 PM The Music of Christmas with the St. Mary's Choir and Montevallo Brass
10:30 PM Holy Eucharist

Thursday, December 25 / Christmas Day
11:00 AM Holy Communion from the Reserved Sacrament

Friday, December 26
Parish Office Closed

Sunday, December 28 / Christmas I-Holy Innocents
8:00 AM Holy Eucharist
10:30 AM Holy Eucharist *
No Parish Breakfast or Sunday School / No 5:00 PM service



Year-End Giving Guidelines

Please consider these important guidelines and reminders regarding giving to St. Mary's on the Highlands. Contributions to St. Mary's are tax-deductible as allowed by law. Maximum tax benefits depend on timing.

IRS rules recognize a contribution on the day of delivery. For contributions to be deductible for 2025, they must meet one of the following criteria:

- ▶ **By mail: postmarked on or before December 31, 2025.** Mail to:
St. Mary's on-the-Highlands Episcopal Church / Attention: Director of Finance
1910 12th Avenue South
Birmingham, AL 35205
- ▶ **Hand delivery: received at the church office by noon, Wednesday, December 31, 2025.** Any gifts dropped off after the office is closed will be treated as 2026 gifts.
- ▶ **Online giving:** Please utilize our secure online giving option at www.stmarysoth.org/give. When paying by credit or debit card, you will get credit for the amount the church actually receives, less the 3% fee. Electronic checks are free.
- ▶ **Stock transfer:** The stock gift must be received by St. Mary's brokerage account by December 30. Please consult with your financial advisor and initiate your transfer early. Some transfers take longer especially at the end of the year. **Please contact Rhea Pelekis prior to requesting a transfer of stock.** This will ensure that you receive the appropriate credit and that you have the correct transfer instructions.

- Please note that any gifts given via online bill payment services are dated on the date your bank actually transmits or otherwise removes the funds from your account, NOT on the date you schedule or submit the transaction.
- Please note on the memo line which account you are supporting: 2025 pledge, Christmas offering, prepaid 2026 pledge, or memorial, etc.
- Tax situations vary. We encourage you to consult with your tax or financial advisor regarding any charitable donations or gifts.

Thank you for your continued generous support of the life of St. Mary's-on-the-Highlands. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact Rhea Pelekis at (205) 933-1140 or rhea@stmarysoth.org.

Women of the Church Lunch
Wednesday, December 10
11:30 AM in Randolph Memorial Hall

All women of St. Mary's are invited to meet for lunch and fellowship!



Speaker: The Rev. Huey Gardner

"Confusion, Christmas, and Comfort."

\$10pp / Please take your seats early!

Please RSVP to Pam Stone by Monday, December 8, at pamelalstone@aol.com or 205-612-3773.

Childcare is available if you make a reservation by Friday, December 5, with Kate Dewees at katie@stmarysoth.org.

Discretionary Funds


Discretionary funds are resources allocated for specific needs but are separate from the operating budget. All clergy at St. Mary's have access to "Discretionary Funds."

These funds support projects such as a food pantry, neighboring parishes, or nonprofit organizations, or, at times, aid for a family or individual to buy groceries or cover essential medical expenses. These funds have been used to provide shoes, purchase tools, cover costs related to identification cards, assist with burial expenses, pay part of a utility bill, and even fund childcare needs. They can also be used to buy books or give an honorarium to a priest who steps in to help a family. Discretionary funds are often utilized when a new ministry is started that reaches beyond St. Mary's.

These funds are not owned by any individual but by the congregation. When gifts are donated to a discretionary account in honor of a wedding, baptism, funeral, or as a gesture of thanks, they are used to strengthen God's kingdom and support His people.

New Staff Members


We are happy to announce that **The Rev. John Kennedy is newly affiliated with St. Mary's as our second deacon.** John will serve at Sunday worship and will continue to lead the Centering Prayer Group on Tuesday mornings at 10:30 AM.



John's primary diaconal ministry will be as the Episcopal Chaplain to UAB Medicine for the Diocese of Alabama. He is available to visit Episcopalians, their relatives, and friends from throughout our Diocese who are inpatients at UAB Hospital (Main & Highlands), providing communion from the reserved sacrament, anointing, and general pastoral support as desired. He is also available to visit patients and families in the same-day surgery areas and outpatient chemotherapy.

John's contact information:
email – UAB.episcopal@gmail.com
mobile – 205-386-7076

It is with great joy that we announce two new part-time staff members in Children's Formation: Anne Morgan and Emily Ball!



Both will be present on Sunday mornings to help things run smoothly. Anne will be present during the week primarily to help with maintaining atrium environments and will have other responsibilities. Emily will help with larger projects such as Vacation Bible School, Catechesis Training Courses, and Created for a Purpose.

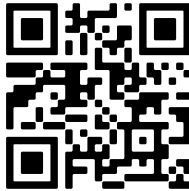
Welcome to Anne and Emily!

*Pictured:
Anne Morgan (above)
Emily Ball (below)*

Outreach Ministries

Reverse Advent Calendar

Most often an Advent calendar is used to count down the days until Christmas by opening a box or door and discovering an ornament or something that helps one focus on the Advent journey. A *reverse* Advent calendar focuses on giving something instead of receiving— a Christ centered idea indeed – since Christmas is all about God giving Himself to us as a baby. The idea behind a reverse Advent calendar is simple. Pick out a sturdy box and fill it with donations – one item for every day in December.



Then, when your box is filled, bring it to St. Mary's anytime between December 24 and January 5. The items will be donated to our GED Program and the Blessing Box in the motor court. To access the calendar with the suggested item for each day, please scan the QR code to the left.

The Mercado-2026

Calling All Crafters, Knitters, Bakers, and Other Creatives!

On February 1, 2026, St. Mary's will host the Mercado (market) and silent auction to benefit Amistad Mission in Bolivia. **We are seeking contributions from all of our creative parishioners to sell at the market or include in the auction.**


If you would like to be involved in the planning or have items to contribute, please contact any of these individuals:

- Monica Sargent (monica@stmarysoth.org)
- Cindy Wiley (cindy@stmarysoth.org)
- Jessica Hall (jessica@stmarysoth.org)
- Ann Jones (annwjones@icloud.com)

Hope Tree Up Until December 14

We are helping the elderly, adults, and children from agencies around the Birmingham area such as Glen Iris, our GED Program, and Episcopal Place. The tree will be in Randolph Memorial Hall with available tags until Sunday, December 14. **Please drop your gifts off in RMH no later than Sunday, December 14 .**

No time to shop? You can still help! We are accepting donations to use toward shopping for these deserving people. **Donate by scanning this QR code.**



If you have any questions please contact Jessica Roussel at 205.238.0388 or Elizabeth Yeilding at 205.515.4805.

December Outreach Events

- **Episcopal Place Christmas Sing Along:** Monday, December 8 at 4:00 PM. All are welcome!
- **Food Packing for Glen Iris Students:** Saturday, December 13 at 1:00 PM in Randolph Memorial Hall

Continued Support for Highlands UMC Homeless Ministry

- **Clothing Collection for Highlands UMC:** We are collecting the following items to support HUMC's clothing closet: **gently used men's and women's clothing (such as t-shirts, tops, sweatshirts, jackets, belts, and pants), gently used men's and women's tennis shoes, and new men's and women's underwear and socks.** All donations can be left in the St. Mary's Outreach office.
- **Highlands UMC Breakfast Ministry:** Four days a week HUMC prepares and serves a hot meal and a sack lunch to those in need. St. Mary's provides volunteers for its breakfast service on Thursdays, 8:30-10:00 AM. To volunteer, visit www.stmarysoth.org/outreach.

Questions? Contact Monica Sargent (monica@stmarysoth.org or 205-913-4689).

Children's Ministries

Las Posadas

The word “posada” means lodging, or inn. Originating in Latin American countries to celebrate the nativity story, Posada is a period of time during Advent when Mary and Joseph travel around to different households and stay there for one night. **Families can sign up to take part and then become hosts to the holy family for one night during Advent.** During this time, children have an opportunity to learn more about the Christmas story, and everyone can meet others from this parish family as the figures are passed from one house to the next. At the Christmas Eve service, the Wise Men begin their journey to Bethlehem to see the Christ child, so families continue hosting figures in their homes until the Epiphany service on January 4.

Scan the QR code to sign up! Check out our social media accounts to follow the journeys to Bethlehem! SMOTH Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (Facebook) and SMOTHCGS (Instagram). If you have questions about the Posada, please contact Anne Morgan: anne@stmarysoth.org.



Solemn Communion Meditations

St. Mary’s will offer Solemn Communion for all interested third graders in early 2025. This program is part of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and is designed to help your child explore and enjoy the mystery of Christ’s gift of himself to us in the sacrament of communion.

This month we will have two parent meetings. Please choose ONE to attend so you can learn more about this formation for your child.

Sunday, December 7:
9:00-9:30 AM in the Living Room
OR
Sunday, December 14:
9:00-9:30 AM in the Living

Epiphany Pageant

Sunday, January 4 at 5:00 PM

On Sunday, January 4, we will share the story of Jesus’ birth at the 5PM Epiphany service. Children 3K through 6th grade will come to church in costume and sit with their families. The printed order of service will indicate when each group is to come to the front of the church and sit by the manger. Costumes can be as simple or elaborate as you want. Bathrobes welcomed!

Beginning Sunday, December 14, costumes will be available to borrow on the children’s hall. Here are the age group assignments:

3K: Angels
4K: Sheep
5K: Stars
1st and 2nd Grades: Donkeys and Cows
3rd Grade: Shepherds



The roles of Mary, Joseph, Gabriel, Micah, Elijah, and the narrators will be played by 4th-, 5th-, and 6th-graders. **Questions?** Contact Katie Dewees: katie@stmarysoth.org or 205-881-0704.

Nurseries for Christmas Services

St. Mary’s has a staff of caring and capable nursery workers who are here during education and worship every Sunday. The nurseries open at 9:00 AM on Sundays we have Christian education and also at 4:45 PM for the 5:00 PM service. **Since the holiday schedule is slightly different, please note the following nursery hours:**

Sunday, December 21:

- No Education
- Advent IV worship is at 10:30 AM; nursery opens at 10:15 AM.
- No 5:00 Service

Wednesday, December 24:

- Nursery for Christmas Eve services opens at 2:30 PM and remains open through the end of the 5:30 PM service.
- There is no nursery for the 10:30 PM service.

Thursday, December 25:

- No nursery for the 11:00 AM Christmas Day service

Sunday, December 28:

- No Education
- Worship is at 10:30 AM; nursery opens at 10:15 AM.
- No 5:00 PM service

Thank you so much for providing a wonderful Thanksgiving meal for our GED families! They genuinely appreciate your love and generosity from the bottom of their hearts; St. Mary's means so much to them.

Betsy Henley & Beverley Hoyt
Program Directors



Continued from cover

My hope for all of us is that we will take a seat and watch this drama unfold. We will prepare for the Messiah, celebrate the Messiah, and then begin to realize what this love of God can do in our lives. St. Mary’s will offer all believers many ways to approach these seasons. There will be Sundays of preparation, Sundays of worship, services of celebration, and many opportunities to serve others in the name of the Messiah. All three seasons are needed to grow one’s understanding of what God is doing in this world.

I hope you will not let being consumed by busyness take away the opportunity God has presented to us. Come and worship! Come and celebrate! Come and grow your faith! There is room for all of us in God’s plans.



Transitions

Births

Edmond Whittlesey Hoffman
Son of Murray and Deets Hoffman born August 27
Grandson of Allison and Duncan Manley
Great-grandson of Allison Murray
Born August 27, 2025

Edward Hampton McFadden
Son of Evalyn and Hampton McFadden, III
Grandson of Harriet and Hampton McFadden
Great-grandson of Ed Pascoe

Baptisms

Conrad Andrew Coady
Son of Stephen and Gabrielle Coady
November 2, 2025

Marriages

Claire Elizabeth Fox and Keeton Scott Kelly
November 5, 20205

Melody Phyllis Lake and Charles Eric Erbskorn
November 11, 2025

Rest In Peace

Bruce MacClary
November 18, 2025

Preaching Schedule

December 7: The Rev. Deacon Kaki O’Flinn
December 14: The Rev. H. Huey Gardner
December 21: The Rev. Richard Ahlquist
Christmas Eve: The Rev. H. Huey Gardner
Christmas Day: The Rev. Deacon Kaki O’Flinn
December 28: The Rev. Huey Gardner

St. Mary's On-Call Clergy Number:

205-881-3278

This number is only active on the weekends. Weekday Pastoral Emergency Calls should be directed to 205-933-1140.



ST. MARY'S

ON THE HIGHLANDS
1910 12th Avenue South
Birmingham, AL 35205

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 2858
Birmingham, AL

Return Service Requested



The Rev. H. Huey Gardner
Rector
huey@stmarysoth.org
(205) 933-1140 x109



The Rev. Richard Ahlquist
Associate Rector
richard@stmarysoth.org
(205) 933-1140 x110



The Rev. Deacon Kaki O'Flinn
Deacon
kaki@stmarysoth.org
(205) 933-1140 x397



The Rev. John I. Kennedy, Jr. MD
Deacon / Episcopal DIOALA
Chaplain to UAB Medical Center
UAB.episcopal@gmail.com
(205) 386-7076



The Messenger is a monthly newsletter of St. Mary's-on-the-Highlands to inform readers about what is happening in and around our parish community.

Visit us on-line at stmarysoth.org