

THE  
FOURTH  
SUNDAY  
OF  
ADVENT

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF  
ST THOMAS THE APOSTLE



**December 19, 2020**

**The Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**Our Mission Statement**

*Helping Hands - Healing Hearts*

*Welcome All*

**Our Vision Statement**

*To be an engaging, passionate, spiritually healthy  
community, open to all God's people*

## The Rev. Christopher Blake Thomas



December 16, 2021

Dear Doubters of Great Faith,

It hardly seems possible, but the fourth Sunday of Advent has already arrived. The season of preparation, the journey into deeper, fuller expressions of love, joy, peace, and hope, the journey that draws us ever closer to the immanence of divine dwelling among us, is about to come to fruition, yet again.

I hear people ask, “Are you ready?”

Questions of readiness link so closely to worthiness. They really are questions of both/and. Am I ready for a savior? Yes. Am I worthy of this Savior? No. For if I were, completely ready, and worthy, I wouldn't need the Savior, this Savior. Can I face this strange, twisted paradox of readiness and worth?

The answer, I believe, lies in Mary's response. Let's be clear – it's easy to over-spiritualize Mary 2000 years later. “She was filled with the spirit, and knew this was what she was called to do, bear the Savior of the world.” But the real secret to her own preparedness for such a journey can be found in her song, Mary's Song, the Magnificat. For it is in that song that Mary sings of her own struggle with readiness and worth in the face of God's immanence. Courage, the courage that a seemingly unworthy peasant girl exhibits in taking on this arduous task is leveraged by the strength and might that she knows rests in her God, our God, who is the foundation, the well-spring of love, joy, peace, and hope.

No more than she, we cannot ever be fully ready or worthy, and yet, we summon the courage to be just that, in the face of all that we confront in our torn and broken world.

Part of our Advent preparation is intentionally confronting our own humanity, our own fragility within God's creation. Confronting the things that Mary sings about in her song, the powers and principalities, the injustices, are part and parcel of the journey of our ready-making, and yet our ever-unworthiness. We need God to do these things, and yet, we summon our own courage to take on our individual parts of the redemption story. Finding ways to shine love, joy, peace, and hope into the world help us to touch our own worth/unworthiness.

The St. Thomas the Apostle community of faith has been so generous this Advent season in intentionally and courageously being that light of love, joy, peace, and hope. Through Community Partners of Dallas, you provided Christmas for 50 children. You have made Christmas meals and gifts possible for 70 – 100 families of the Dallas Champions Academy. You have provided food for the pantry at the Cathedral of Hope. In short, you have given of yourselves, so that others might have as well.

I would encourage your courageous generosity again as we look to our sisters and brothers throughout the tornado-ravaged central states of the United States. So many are now enduring hardship and devastation, loss due to unprecedented December storms. You can help by giving to the Episcopal Church's mission for disaster assistance, Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD). It is the quickest, most direct way to share from what you have, to bring hope to those who, in this Advent (and soon to be

to ERD (<https://www.episcopalrelief.org/>), or place a check in the offering plate made out to St. Thomas the Apostle, with a memo "ERD."

The way that we prepare the way for a savior, the Savior, our Savior, is by following in the courageous footsteps of Mary singing her song of unworthiness and great worth. We aren't ready, and yet we are. We aren't worthy, and yet we need God now more than ever!

Are you ready?

Yours in unworthiness,  
Fr. Christopher+

### **Remember in December!**

Thank you for your continued generosity to the mission and ministry of the Episcopal Church of St. Thomas the Apostle. As the end of the year draws near, we are grateful for your commitment to fulfill your 2021 pledge. Below are a few helpful reminders for end-of-year giving:

- ◆ All contributions must be postmarked by Dec. 31, 2021, or delivered to the church office by noon on Dec. 31, 2021 to qualify as a 2021 donation.
- ◆ Online donations made before midnight on Dec. 31, 2021 will qualify as a 2021 donation.
- ◆ Stock transfers should be received into our account by Dec. 31, 2021. For information on making a stock transfer to St. Thomas the Apostle, please contact the Controller at [laura@thedoubter.org](mailto:laura@thedoubter.org).

## Come Celebrate



25 Years – No Shots Fired!!

A guy walks into a bar ... Actually it was a country/western dance hall. Linda was a dance helper and I needed long-term help learning to dance. We celebrate 25 years of wedded mess bliss on December 21, 2021. We also celebrate 25 years at St. Thomas. We hope you can join us after the 10:30 service on December 19 for some cake, fruit, cheese, and laughter.

Best regards,  
John & Linda VanBuskirk

## What is Foyer?



What today we refer to as foyer dinner groups were born in the Diocese of Coventry, England, in the aftermath of the massive destruction at the height of the German bombings of London and Coventry during World War II. The fourteenth-century Cathedral of St. Michael (Coventry Cathedral) was destroyed in the nine-hour blitz of 14 November 1940, but a ministry of reconciliation evolved from that destruction. Rather than dwell on the violent loss of his beloved place of worship, Provost Howard was inspired to found a ministry of reconciliation that he called the *Community of the Cross and Nails*. While sifting through the rubble of the cathedral, he gathered many of the old nails that had fallen among the ruins and was inspired to have them twisted together to form a cross. This cross of nails and the words "Father, Forgive" became the unifying symbol of the International Ministry of Reconciliation, a group of devout followers

who believe that understanding between peoples, nations, and ideologies can come only when human beings meet and know each other as individuals. [ <http://www.allsoulsdc.org>]

In the mid-1960s, the staff of Coventry Cathedral began meeting in small groups to bridge differences, eventually giving these gatherings their present name. What they discovered were the strong bonds that formed from this communal experience. The concept spread to the cathedral congregation and then to Anglican churches across the country. Eventually it spread to the shores of the USA, including St. Thomas the Apostle.

The foyer groups at St. Thomas are strictly social events—sometimes dinners, sometimes brunches; sometimes picnics (I hosted one in my back yard when the house was under renovation), sometimes in a home, apartment, or condo; sometimes a meal at a local restaurant. They are a fun and easy way

for parishioners to gather together on a regular, but informal basis for purely social reasons – to enjoy one another’s company, to strengthen bonds of community, to meet new members and just to get to know other people in the parish, because we believe that participation in small groups, welcoming people into your homes, is the single best way to form personal bonds with fellow parishioners. The only constant is the presence of good food and wine (or beer)! We are Episcopalians, after all!

Foyer groups are what the members of each group decide to make them. It is a chance to visit and socialize outside of church with people from across the parish. There are no "rules," and there surely is nothing that says you have to host a sit-down dinner in your home. Each dinner group rotates having a meal at each group member’s home. The host usually provides the main course. The other group members each bring an appetizer, a salad, a dessert, or beverages. In some cases, the host of each month does the entire meal, with the guests bringing appetizers and beverages. It is up to the group to decide how they want to manage the food part.

Here's what Foyer groups are not: they are not a Southern Homes tour, they are not an Iron Chef competition, nor are they a page out of Martha Stewart Living. They are casual gatherings where the focus is on fellowship and friendship, conviviality and conversation. We meet each other where we live and accept our surroundings as they are just as God accepts us as we are.

Dinner groups are formed with 5 to 8 people—singles, couples, young people, retirees, people with school-aged children, empty nesters, etc. In other words, it is a cross-section of St Thomas. Newcomers are especially invited to join one of the groups. You can even invite your Rector! The groups are put together randomly, such that each of us might have the opportunity to get to know others in the parish who may be outside our normal circle of acquaintances or Sunday morning coffee conversations. I do my very best not to have the same folks in two consecutive foyers. One of the fun parts I get to do is name the foyer groups—books of the Bible, English cathedrals, the seven deadly sins, the seven virtues and former Bishops of Dallas. The foyer stays together for six months (January to June and/or July through December) and then re-ups for a new group for the next six months.

If you have never participated in Foyer before, why not give it a try? If you have sat out a few rounds, consider rejoining. Look for the sign-up sheet inserts that will appear in the Doubter and on the Narthex table during the first three Sundays in December. New groups will be forming soon for January – June 2022. The due date is December 27<sup>th</sup> . If you are brand spanking new to St. Thomas, I encourage you to get to know us.

Peace,

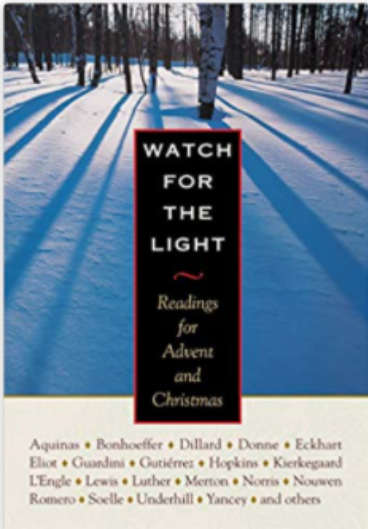
Michael Legacy

**The following is the link to Presiding Bishop Michael Curry’s 2021 Christmas message:**

<https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2021/12/15/presiding-bishop-michael-currys-christmas-message-2021/>



# Advent Book Study



## Watch for the Light: Preparing to Welcome Christ into the World

Each year, we begin the Christian calendar with the celebration of Advent as we recall and prepare again for the coming of Emmanuel, God with Us. Despite how similar and familiar the Advent and Christmas season feels, each year we approach it as different and changed people from the experiences gleaned from the year before. This year, we invite you to join our Spiritual Formation class as we read together the book of daily

Advent and Christmas focused devotions, *Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas* (the book can be purchased at: [www.amazon.com/Watch-Light-Readings-Advent-Christmas](http://www.amazon.com/Watch-Light-Readings-Advent-Christmas)). The class will start **Wednesday, December 1 at 6pm** in the South Classroom and via Zoom and continue each Wednesday through January 5 at 6pm for roughly an hour and fifteen minutes. The readings in the book start on November 24 and continue through January 7. Please reach out to Chris Reed ([creed@weaverjohnston.com](mailto:creed@weaverjohnston.com)) if you have any difficulty getting the book before November 24. While we encourage everyone to read the daily readings, each class will focus on one of the readings for the past week and will incorporate reflections from the visual arts and music on the mystery of the Season. Each class will also start with a brief period of fellowship over holiday goodies and conclude with a brief Advent-themed Compline. Please join us as we prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ into our midst and its call for us to be Christ for the world.



# Epiphany Taize Service

January 6, 2022 at 6:00 p.m.  
in the Parish Hall

Masks required

Doubters of all ages are warmly invited to a special service in observance of the feast of the Epiphany. Join us on Thursday, January 6th in the Parish Hall beginning at 6:00p.m. to celebrate the Epiphany through a Taize-style service. If you've never participated in this style of worship before, it originates from the ecumenical Taize monastic community in France, and uses simple chants, sung prayers, and silence —all while we meditate upon the God who came to dwell among us. If singing isn't necessarily your thing, don't let that stop you! Please feel free to come and pray internally while others lift up the prayers in song around you. Masks are required and will be available at the door. Holding true to the spirit of Taize and the Epiphany, all are welcome. We hope to see you there!



## Epiphany Study



### ***Paired Saints: Exploring Desire, Embodied Spirituality, and the Renewal of Sacred Imagination***

I will lead a study of **Paired Saints** for five Wednesday evenings during the season of Epiphany, January 12, 19, 26, February 2, and 9. Everyone is invited. There is no prerequisite, and no books to read. We will learn about three sets of same-gender saints who have been celebrated by the LGBTQIA+ community for many generations: Ss. Perpetua & Felicity, Sergius & Bacchus, and Polyeuct & Nearchus. Sessions will feature media presentations, icons, and lots of discussion of same-sex desire and

holy love in antiquity and its influence in the present. I will issue a prospectus on the sessions in the near future. Please attend, either in person or online, and bring your imaginations with you!

Stephen V. Sprinkle, Your Theologian-in-Residence



## Angel Tree Update

**We went from this:**



We must congratulate you, our St Thomas family. On December 9, Joe, Kathy, Lee, and I loaded the gifts plus 135 pillowcases and delivered them the designated drop off site that morning. In addition to the 50 CPS children, we were assigned, additional gifts were provided by two generous members. They helped insure that children who were removed from unsafe homes after the cards were mailed to us would have a gift for the holidays.

The Pillowcases were made by a St Thomas team + volunteers and involved donated fabric and labor. Each took approximately one hour to produce, involving cutting, assembled into kits, sewing, ironing, trimming, additional sewing, ironing until a perfect fun pillowcase. They serve the child as their “suitcase” for their belongings when they are removed from their unsafe home to CPS safety.

Yes, St Thomas once again we insured that there will be a Bright and Merry Holidays for these kiddos. We must thank Community Partners of Dallas for insuring we have this opportunity.

**To this, Over 50 Gifts for CPS Children!**



An opportunity to serve!

Join us on Thursday, Dec. 16th at 6:30 pm in the Parish Hall. We will be packing meal boxes for the families of Dallas Champions Academy. If you have questions, please contact Kathy Carson at 214-236-4372 or [kcarson75214@gmail.com](mailto:kcarson75214@gmail.com)



St. Thomas is now the proud owner of an AED. If you have experience with using an AED, please let us know. You can email the office at [pam@thedoubter.org](mailto:pam@thedoubter.org) or contact Michael Legacy.



S.O.S.  
We need you!



We are looking for people who would be willing to help, on an as needed basis, with some of the administrative tasks.

- Proofers for the Sunday Leaflet. We always need fresh eyes to double check copy. You could do this from home - we would email you a draft of the leaflet prior to printing on Friday.
- People to cover some admin tasks during vacation times - answering phones, distributing mail, receiving deliveries and visitors.

If you would like to be part of our Pal Friday Call List, please email [pam@thedoubter.org](mailto:pam@thedoubter.org). Giving of your time and talent for ministering to St. Thomas the Apostle is so appreciated!

# Parish Schedule

# Week of December 19th

<b>19 Sunday</b>		<b>The Fourth Sunday of Advent</b>	
	8:00 am	Rite One Eucharist/Nave	
	9:00 am	Rite Two Eucharist/Zoom	
	10:30 am	Rite Two Eucharist/Nave *Also Live-streamed on Facebook	
	11:30 am	Coffee and Social time/ PH	
<b>20 Monday</b>		<b>Office closed.</b>	
<b>21 Tuesday</b>		<b>St. Thomas the Apostle</b>	
	7:00 pm	Vestry Meeting/SR	
<b>22 Wednesday</b>			
	Noon	Rite Two Eucharist/Nave	
	6:00 pm	Advent Book Study	
	7:00 pm	CoDA/ZOOM	
<b>23 Thursday</b>		<b>Office closed.</b>	
<b>24 Friday</b>		<b>Office closed.</b>	
	7:30 pm	Christmas Eve/Nave *Incense will be used.	
	10:30 pm	Christmas Eve/Nave *Incense will be used	
<b>25 Saturday</b>			
	8:00 am	Step Up/SR	
	10:00 am	The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ/Nave **Serving Altar Guild Members** T. Chaney	
Room Codes:		SR - South Room; NR - North Room; CG - Community Garden; PH - Parish Hall; CR - Office Conference Room; K - Kitchen; N - Nave; IG - Interior Garden; M-Music Room	

# Liturgical Assignments & Lectionary

**Sunday, December 19, 2021**

- Counters:** J. DeuPree & R. Woodward
- LEMs:** Sub-Dcn: 2nd LEM: N/A Ext: R. Lacy
- Lectors:** 9:00 am Zoom Service  
R. Woodward  
10:30 In-Person Service  
1st: M. Legacy 2nd: M. Followill  
POP: Congregation Volunteer
- Ushers/Greeters:** B. Day, J. DeuPree, R. Hering
- Acolytes:** Crucifer: M. Legacy Torches: C. Reed & D. Hess
- Sound:** TBD

## Lectionary

### First Reading

Micah 5:2-5a

### Canticle

15

### Second Reading

Hebrews 10:5-10

### Gospel

Luke 1:39-55



## PRAYER LIST

**Healing in the Lives of:** Ben Gloria Ann Patricia Ginger  
Annie Sandy Merjen Jack Harold Kelly  
David Rusty Chase Maxine Anne Diana Sherry Peter  
Alan Steven Phillip

**In Thanksgiving For:** Annie Jones

**God's Grace for:** Children of Belize Anne

**Guidance:** Gwen

**In Prison:** Allen Orlando Steven Aaron Brandon Hank  
GR Stephanie Frank

**Serving in the Armed Forces:** Alex Aaron Connor Joyce  
Collin Tyler Jesse

**Seeking Employment:** Bryan Maurice Brook Robin Vicki  
Trey Gabby Gabriel Gail Oliver Aarib

**Holy Death:** Glen

**Rest of the Soul:** Reba Helen Jeffrey Yvonne  
Sybil

**In the Diocese:** Rural Church Commission

## Sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent

**Christopher Thomas**

**Sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent, Year C – 12/12/21**

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Canticle 9

Philippians 4:4-7

Luke 3:7-18

Rejoice! Rejoice, believers, and let your lights appear!  
The evening is advancing, and darker night is near.  
The Bridegroom is arising, and soon he will draw nigh;  
Up, watch in expectation! At midnight comes the cry.

Waiting...

Watching...

Straining my eyes, across the horizon, into the abyss, darkness, the far-off distant night of wilderness soul, into that for which I long so deeply, so dearly, so seemingly clearly, the embrace of vulnerability for my beloved, the bridegroom for whom the arms of my heart ache.

Come, thou long expected Jesus, come.

How long must I, you and me, we, wait?

It feels like an eternity, and yet, I know it is not.

I must admit, in full transparency, that I do not “wait” well. Waiting connotes time. There is something inherently fleeting about the nature of time, our time, Chronos, humanity, that pulls against my ability to “wait” well. There is simply too much urgency and not nearly enough Chronos to keep my agitation at bay. Oh, there was a time when I thought Chronos was never-ending in supply, an infinite commodity. But with each gray hair, with each additional wrinkle, with every new ache and each new pain, with every passing year, I know now that is not the case. Chronos will end.

I want wrongs righted, justice served, bodies made whole, the salvation of Creation. I want the bridegroom at hand. I want the now to collapse into the not yet. In short, I want the fulfillment of the promises of God! (Surely I am not the first or the last who will give utterance to this desire?)

To do all of this takes time, Chronos, lots and lots of Chronos, and as my days wane, it seems there isn't enough.

It feels to me like a prison of time – waiting, watching, straining, wanting, desiring, ever-hopeful, always longing.

Turns out, I, you and I, we, are not the first to know the constraint, the limitations, the prisons, in which we find ourselves. I want the now to collapse into the not yet, for Jesus to come again, as I know he will, so faithfully, splitting the deep dark night of the soul somewhere between December 24<sup>th</sup> and December 25<sup>th</sup>, all so still, all so still.

## Sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent

And I find myself wondering if that is where every imprisoned person (for aren't we all, in some way, imprisoned) meets Jesus? If anyone knows, surely it is Paul, waiting, writing from the midst of his own Roman prison, imprisoned, and yet somehow, in some way, strangely not. In the face of his own suffering and uncertainty, Paul somehow manages to scale the walls of his own prison.

But how, how can this be? How in this moment of waiting and watching, of impending death can life possibly spring forth?

In Paul's letter to his beloveds, the Church at Philippi, Paul's heart cries out in joy! He loves these people, and he longs so deeply to be with them, to be in relationship with them, to cross the bounds of time and place and space, to hold them again. Paul ruminates on all the ways that the Philippians have loved him, and how he has loved them.

And so, Paul calls upon them to "re-joyce," to "re-joy," to joy, again, and again, and again, in the face of waiting, in the face of fear, and even, yes, in the threat of suffering and uncertainty, in unknowing.

"Re-joy!"

This is how Paul escapes time and space and place!

"For Paul, joy is not a feeling dependent upon circumstances. Joy is a theological act. (Joy) is choosing (intentionally) to reflect on God's actions to redeem the cosmos even when all the present circumstances might indicate that some other power has won."

Joy is the human acknowledgment that Kairos, God's time, is most definitely at work in the world, even when Chronos, human time, would have us to believe differently.

The joy we turn to when we want to "re-joy," to renew our joy, to give joy, to live joy, to be joy, is found in the Ebenezer moments that inhabit our Chronos. I guarantee you, as people of privilege, we all have them. We all have the moments when God showed up for us in all of God's wonder and great glory. Maybe it was your baby's first cry. Maybe it was the passing of a test, or the granting of a degree, something that sprang from years of hard work and waiting, maybe it was a meeting or a wedding, something totally unexpected.

Ruminating on these moments, when we knew and felt the presence of the bridegroom Christ, is fundamental for the "re-joy-ing" process. Celebrating these Ebenezer moments is imperative to finding our joy in the midst of waiting, to transmuting and transforming time and space and place.

What is it, of the world, that keeps us from seeing, from "re-mem-ber-ing," from "re-joy-ing," from "re-joicing" in each and every one, see all of these Ebenezer moments? For there should be every expectation that if God showed up for us in the past, there is absolutely no reason to think, feel, or believe that God will not show up for us in the present or in the future.

But things, life, the way of the world, our anxieties, spring up in front of us, stealing joy, when we are trying so hard to be oaks, trees of righteousness, waiting, watching, straining, hoping into God's imminent return. And so I find myself wondering if that is why John, our Baptist so faithfully crying in the night wilderness, lays the ax at the foot of the tree? John, are you trying to tell me I am the tree,

## Sermon for the Third Sunday of Advent

that God would have me reduced and thrown into the fire were I not bearing good fruit? How in the world am I to measure the appropriateness of my own fruit? Who or what is the arbiter of that?

Imagine my surprise to consider that I, you and me, we, are not trees to be chopped down and burned, rather the forest. Imagine my great joy, to learn that John places the ax, so appropriately, on this third Sunday of Advent, as we wait and wander our way toward what we hope again to be incarnation, God dwelling among us, at the base of all of those trees that keep us from seeing, and feeling, and hoping, remembering, and rejoicing in all that we know to be true. Cut down that which keeps you from seeing God right in front of you! Throw it into the fire!

The crowds gathered 'round John understood enough to ask, "What should we do, to be this?"

Share your joy. Joy is the fruit of peace, after all. They will know you live in God's great shalom, God's wholeness, restoration, and goodness, when your joy becomes known to all. Share from all that God has so generously given to you. Live lives filled with great expectation for the coming fulfillment of God!

I know people who live lives rooted in joy.

I stand in awe of people who live lives rooted in joy, bearing the fruits of joy.

People rooted in joy wait in a completely different way than people who are not.

Joy is an active pursuit. Joy changes our demeanor. Joy changes who we are. Joy changes how we exist. And so joy changes how others exist.

Therefore, it is in joyful, joy-filled expectation that we light the joy candle this third Sunday of Advent. Because we know in great joy that all-too-soon Chronos and Kairos are going to intersect yet again!

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Carla Works, Commentary on Philipians 4:4-7, Third Sunday of Advent, *WorkingPreacher.com*.



# December Birthdays



Fr. Christopher  
Dec. 5th



Barbara Foster  
Dec. 6th



Pamala Gilliland  
Dec. 9th



Sandee Lowe  
Dec. 11th



Chris Schilling  
Dec. 17th



Jim O'Neal  
Dec. 18th



Bob Walker  
Dec. 22nd



John Lambert  
Dec. 31st



Kabir Master  
Dec. 31st

**Parish Office hours are 8:00 AM until 2:00 PM**

**Tuesdays through Fridays**

**214-352-0410**

**Emergency contact: Rev Christopher Blake Thomas 214-352-0410 ext 6**

*(Please leave message with name, call back number, and brief explanation of urgency. Fr. Christopher will receive an urgent message to call back as soon as possible.)*

**The Most Rev. Michael Curry, Presiding Bishop**

**The Right Rev. G. Wayne Smith, Bishop of Oversight (Missouri Diocese)**

**The Right Rev. George R. Sumner, Bishop of Dallas**

**The Right Rev. Michael Smith, Assistant Bishop of Dallas**

The Rev. Christopher Blake Thomas, Rector

[christopher@thedoubter.org](mailto:christopher@thedoubter.org)

The Rev. Stephen J. Waller, Rector Emeritus

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Dr. Steven V. Sprinkle, Theologian-in-Residence

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Mr. Allen Junek, Seminarian-in-Residence

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Mr Lee Corbin, Organist-Choirmaster

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Mr. David Aston, Assistant Organist

Ms. Pam Liles, Parish Administrator

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Ms. Annelies Moeser

[annelies@thedoubter.org](mailto:annelies@thedoubter.org)

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**The 2020 Vestry**

**Joe DeuPree**

**Senior Warden**

**Michael Legacy**

**Junior Warden**

Andrew Besterman, David Hess, Kathy Carson, Lisa Pearson,  
Ruth Woodward, Murray Followill, Randy Hering

Chancellor  
Rusty Rippamonti

Treasurer  
Randy Hering

Paul McCright  
Clerk