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The Episcopal Epistle

From the Priest in Charge

The Rev. Jim Strader-Sasser

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5: 1-10)



Photo by [Debby Hudson](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Epiphany is a season of investigation. In Christian terms, the Epiphany Gospels reveal incidents of God's incarnate presence in Jesus. John baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River. Jesus reveals himself to his future disciples. Jesus climbs up a mountain to offer his beatitudes as well as other teachings. One of the Matthean gospel's main points is that Jesus is apparent and engaged in the lives of the

communities around him. He isn't hidden away somewhere. His shares and proclaims his parables and wisdom teachings out in the open.

Jesus' Sermon on The Mount including the Beatitudes is the first of 5 discourses in Matthew, Matthew uses a mountaintop experience to connect Jesus to Moses who encountered Yahweh in the mountains and returned to

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God's people with the Ten Commandments. The Beatitudes offer particularly virtuous behaviors building upon Torah. Life's blessings are found in offering and receiving comfort, healing, and gentleness. Ardent disciples are devoted peacemakers, righteous human beings, and/or merciful friends. Their efforts may lead to condemnation by people in power. Righteousness is difficult because blessing other people requires courage and vulnerability, especially with people who are not like us

Professor [Alyce McKenzie](#) – The Director of The Perkins Center for Preaching Excellence at Southern Methodist University writes:

Matthew, to an even greater degree than the other gospels, emphasizes that to be a disciple means to live by the teachings of Jesus. A major theme of Matthew's gospel is genuine righteousness. This righteousness purifies the inward life and energizes us to seek justice for the vulnerable. This motif is developed in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus exhorts hearers to be obedient to the law of God in such a radical way as to exceed the zeal for righteousness of even the Pharisees ... ([McKenzie, 2011](#), para. 3)

How might Prince of Peace as a church live into a “zeal for righteousness” in 2026 and beyond. The koine Greek word for righteousness is *dikaiosuné*: (δικαιοσύνη).

An accurate English translation for us to individually and collectively use is by offering impartial and just acts that are pleasing to God. In simpler terms – we should strive to be worthy, act fairly, and offer impartial love.



Sermon on The Mount - Claude Lorrain

There are studies suggesting that people who are “spiritual but not religious” are more interested in how a faith community acts rather than what it believes or how it worships. Moreover, there’s some evidence suggesting that people both within and outside of institutional Christianity are not seeking answers to traditional questions. Dan Foster – author of The Backyard Church blog had this to recently say:

“For decades, religious belief in the West was supported by social reinforcement. Faith aligned with family life, cultural norms, political power, and moral certainty. Even when people struggled privately, the larger system held steady. There was a sense that belief made sense

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because the world itself felt more or less ordered (Foster, 2025)."

Such a world doesn't exist anymore. Our world is less predictable and more disrupted. The Church's traditional responses to living with unanswered prayers, confronting hostile polarization, and increasing mental health struggles don't measure up as well as they once did. The world we live in requires Jesus' faithful disciples to cope with uncertainty, while grounding ourselves in contemplative practices, and experimenting with best practices for encountering suffering rather than ignoring it or seeking simplistic solutions. (Foster, 2025).

I'd circle back to living righteously as one adaptive approach for being God's Church in 2026 and beyond. Living and responding sacramentally in difficult times requires offering compassionate love to one another as well as to those who live nearby. Conscientious Christian living requires devoted faithfulness as well as challenging unhealthy and unreliable systems.

In the coming weeks, your vestry will be discerning how best to communicate and creatively expand Prince of Peace's presence through the parish's worship, offerings of hospitality, and diverse ways of touching the lives of those we love as well as those we don't know. My hope is that we'll have more to share at this month's annual meeting and emerging activities in the following weeks

Blessings along The Way, Jim+



Sibling Parish Gathering

St. Gabriel's Episcopal Church in Douglasville will be hosting a sibling parish gathering on Saturday, Jan. 17th beginning at 10:00 AM and ending at about 6 pm. This event is centered around the theme of hopefulness. There will be a check-in and tour during the morning and a variety of exercises/discussions including an opportunity to walk St. Gabriel's labyrinth. Lunch and a takeaway dinner will be offered. St. Gabriel's will also be live-streaming portions of the day's programs for those who aren't able to travel to Douglasville. Please let Jim know if you're interested in traveling to sibling parish gathering, especially if you're willing to drive.

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Franklin Friends

Thank you to all those who have donated non-perishable food items to *Franklin Friends* this fall. This group provides meals and snacks to children at Franklin Township Elementary School who may not have access to sufficient food over the weekend. We have had a wonderful response from parishioners in September, October, November and December!

Prince of Peace will continue to collect food for this program throughout the 2025-2026 school year. A list of items can be found on the bulleting board, we have committed to gathering donations and dropping them off on the 4th Thursday of each month (with some alterations to accommodate holidays).

Please continue to look for the donation boxes in the back of the church.

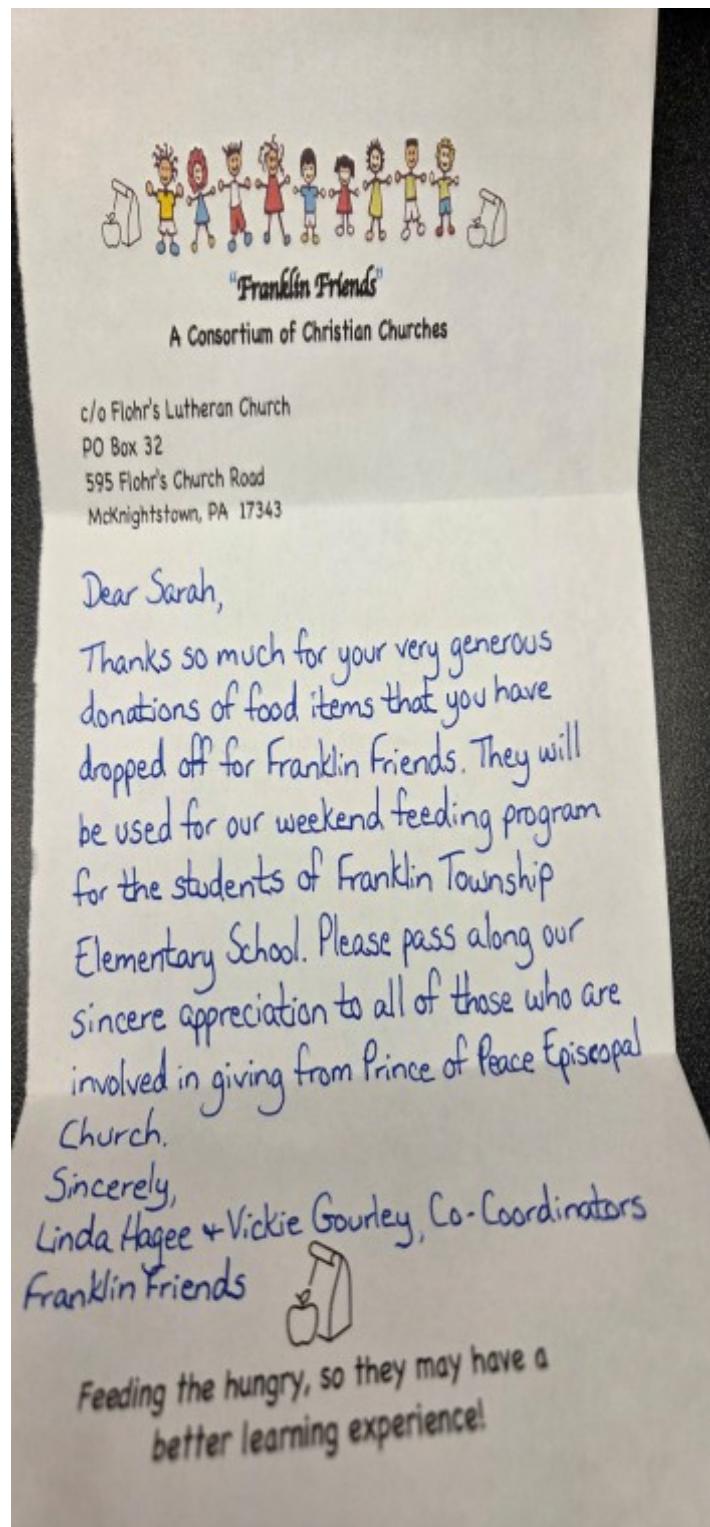
If you would prefer to make a monetary donation you can make a check out to Franklin Friends and can be dropped off with your monthly drop off or mailed to

Franklin Friends

C/O Flohrs Church

PO Box 32

McKnightstown



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Hospitality Committee

Happy 2026 from the Hospitality Committee, we are so thankful for everyone who contributed in 2025! For 2026 we hope to grow our group of volunteers even more than the last year. Our fellowship time after the 10:15 service is strong, Fellowship between services is also growing. Please contact Helen, if you or your group would like to contribute on a specific Sunday. She is working towards getting a sign up sheets after this very busy holiday season. If your committee is providing something for the assigned week, if someone can also help with clean up, it is appreciated. While all the sweet goodies are appreciated, some parishioners have dietary restrictions or needs, other items, such as cheese or fruit are also appreciated.

Helen Stonesifer
**Women's
Christmas
Lunch**



Some women of PoP got together for an Advent Luncheon at the Carriage House Restaurant in Emmitsburg, MD. on November 22, 2025. While we were small in number, we were strong in spirit and good cheer.



Annual Meeting

The annual congregational meeting will take place on January 26th. As a reminder, there is only one worship service that day at 10:15. There will be a small luncheon to follow in the Stahle Parlor. The meeting itself will take place thereafter, beginning no later than 12 noon. Please plan to attend. We look forward to seeing everyone!



Cat and Dog Product Donations

We continue our monthly ingathering of products for the two no kill shelters in the area we are supporting: Forever Love in Gettysburg and the Helen Krause Animal Foundation in Dillsburg. When you go to the grocery store think about "God's Little Ones" and pick up a can or two or a bag of cat or dog food to help these shelters feed, rehabilitate and find good loving homes, "Forever Homes". We thank everyone for the very generous outpouring of support on Sunday, December 28th. The bin was filled once again and Lee has picked the products up for delivery to the shelters. He expresses his sincere thanks to everyone who donated. The bin will be in place for the next scheduled intake date, January 25th .

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A Note From Cathy Elkiss

Greetings to the Members of the Congregation of The Memorial Church of the Prince of Peace,

It is with a sense of joy and anticipation that I look forward to returning to Prince of Peace as your Organist and Choir Director beginning on Sunday morning, February 1, 2026. I eagerly look forward to being again with friends from when I served here before, as well as to making many new ones; and I especially look forward to working with the choir(s), and to experiencing again the beauty of the music and liturgy of the Episcopal Church.

After having attended your recent *Service of Lessons and Carols* in December, I was completely taken with the beauty and sincerity of your musical presentation: I truly worshipped with you as you took those of us present through God's plan of salvation and redemption through Scripture, prayers, anthems and carols. I look forward to continuing your tradition of musical excellence in offering meaningful, uplifting and well-prepared music for the worship services and community.

In addition to serving at the church, I continue to serve as Seminary Organist and Music Director at the United Lutheran Seminary (ULS) here in Gettysburg; as well as directing the Schola Cantorum of Gettysburg, a choir specializing in choral music from the Renaissance to the 21st century, a group founded many years ago by The Rev. Dr. Stephen Folkemer.

When I'm not involved in my musical activities, I operate, along with my husband, violinist Dale Elkiss, the *Tossed and Found Cat Sanctuary of Gettysburg*, a shelter for approximately 30 homeless, abused, and/or neglected cats in the area, as well as fostering cats and kittens for some of the local area shelters when needed.

So until we meet on February 1st, I wish all of you the blessings of this Epiphany season.

Cathy Elkiss



Thursday Evening, January 29, 2026

The Old Testament Scripture from 2 Chronicles 5: 13-14 describes a worship service the day the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Solomon's splendid new temple: "*The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as with one voice, to give praise and thanks to the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals and other instruments, they raise their voices in praise to the Lord and sang: "He is good; his love endures forever."* Then the temple of the Lord was filled with a cloud, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God."

Next to these verses, in the margin of his biblical commentary, the great composer, J.S. Bach wrote: "*Where there is devotional music, God is always at hand with His gracious presence.*

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Following in that same devotional spirit, all those who currently sing in the Prince of Peace Choir, or have sung in the past, OR would like to consider singing in the choir . . . you are all invited to join us as we begin choir rehearsals again on **Thursday evening, January 29th at 7:00 PM.**

The choir's membership is open to anyone of high-school age through adult. Please come and bring a friend as we celebrate together "*Singing and making melody unto the Lord,*" – all are welcome!

Prince of Peace Handbell Choir(?)

Prince of Peace has a beautiful three-octave set of handbells and choirchimes, and at one time had quite a fine and dedicated handbell choir. We are exploring the possibility of getting a handbell choir up and running again: if there is an interest in this, please speak with Cathy Elkiss.

Stars For Cancer

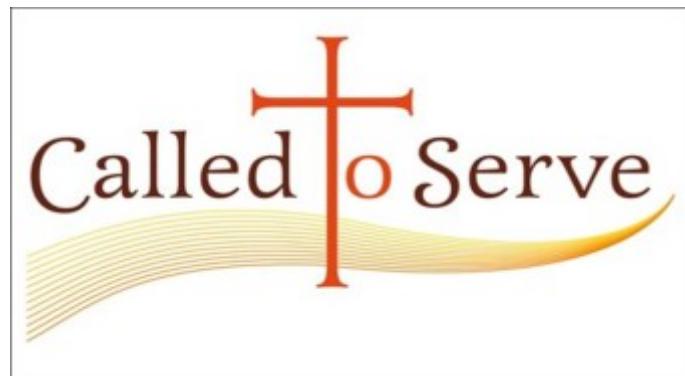
Marking the Christmas season, our Prince of Peace congregation donated \$1200 in Giant gift cards to patients at the Wellspan Adams Cancer Center.

In support of this effort, individual parishioners made donations during Advent, which took the form of stars hanging from the church's Christmas tree. The stars were then converted into monetary donations, which were collected and used to purchase the gift cards. (Thanks to our Art the Elf on obtaining the Giant cards.)

News and Notes

Thank you to everyone who participated in the Stars for Cancer Advent Tree initiative. Women of Prince of Peace, thank you for the preparation of the "Stars." We want to thank Abby and Carolyn Finafrock for decorating the Advent Tree. Merry Christmas to all!

Service Participants



We are encouraging newcomers and longtime parishioners alike to join in offering our worship services. The schedulers can use some help too. We're especially seeking servers/chalice bearers/lectors for the 8 am worship services. There's room for more lectors, chalice bearers, and servers at 10:15 too.

Those who volunteer see and experience the worship service in a different and meaningful way. Teenagers and adults of all ages are all welcome. Training and refresher training is provided. If you are interested, please contact the office and Marrie will add your name to the list. You'll receive a contact person to tell you more about that ministry. **As a reminder if you are already a volunteer; please send your availability for February and March to Marrie by January 15th.**

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EpiscoPals 2026

Joy to all this Christmas and in the New Year. Olive Donolli and I are hoping to sponsor with your help 2 or 3 supper gatherings in 2026. The format will be much the same as before with 2 hosts welcoming the gathering and other people bringing side dishes, hors d'oeuvres and desserts. When dates and hosts are in place, we will let you know more details. Olive and I look forward to a fine time of fellowship and PoP cuisine. We give much thanks to previous participants. Happy New Year!

Cornelia Saltzman

Advent Wreath Making

The Season of Advent is upon us. We got together in the Stahle Parlor with fresh greens, hand made wreath bases, and a full complement of Advent candles after the 1015 Service. While the number of wreathes made is not known, the joy, laughter, and glee was palpable. We thank all who helped out.

Mark Your Calendars

Please mark your calendars for the upcoming events at Prince of Peace:

Wednesday, December 24th 6:00 PM

Christmas Eve Eucharist

December 25th– January 4th

Office Closed– No Noon Eucharist

Saturday, January 3rd 11:00 AM

Book Club Stahle Parlor

Monday, January 12th 5:00 PM

Vestry Meeting Stahle Parlor

Tuesday, January 13th 9:30 AM

Quilt Bee Upstairs Conference Room

Thursday, January 15th 12:00 PM

Service Participant Information Due

Saturday, January 17th 10AM– 6 PM

Sibling Parish Gathering

St. Gabriel's Episcopal Church, Douglassville

Monday, January 19th

Office Closed Martin Luther King Day

Sunday, January 25th

Annual Parish Meeting

After the 10:15 AM worship service, starting no later than 12:00 PM.



Stewardship Committee

As we begin the new year, the stewardship committee would like to thank all those who have made their pledges in support of the church's 2026 budget. We are grateful and will provide more details on this year's campaign at the annual meeting at the end of the month. In a final effort to make this year's campaign as successful as possible, to provide an opportunity for some of our parishioners to showcase their talents, and to give us all a little mid-winter fun, the committee has decided to host a **silent auction starting on January 11th**.

Those who want to bid will register for a bidding number (so that the person remains anonymous) and use that number to bid on items! The friendly competition is fun, and you may not know WHO you are bidding against! When the bidding is over - the last number on the bid sheet for the item WINS!! Bidding will start before the 8:00 service on January 11, 2026, and conclude at the start of the Annual Meeting on January 25, 2026.

All members of the parish are invited to contribute an item or service to be bid

upon! Suggestions for donations: deliver a home cooked meal to the winning bidder's home, detail the winning bidder's vehicle, mow the winning bidder's grass for a month, contribute artwork, decorative items, homemade baked goods or crafts, themed gift baskets... the options are endless! All ways we can Share Love and Shine Light.

Please email a description of your donation (and a photo if possible!) to Heather Swope any time between now and January 7th. All items (except for homemade baked goods) need to be given to Heather by January 7, 2026. Any questions? All proceeds will go toward the Stewardship Campaign for this season.

Altar Flowers

A reminder that you may sign up for providing altar flowers anytime. The notebook is now located in the Parlor, and includes the dates for 2026. The cost is now \$60, but please fee free to donate what you are able to donate toward the flowers.



SERVICE SCHEDULE SUNDAY WORSHIP

8:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist
10:15 a.m. Holy Eucharist

WEDNESDAY
12:00 p.m. Holy Eucharist

*Help us keep our records up to date.
Have we missed listing your birthday or anniversary in the past?
We may not have the information in our database. Please contact Marrie at the office*

New Year Prayer

A special prayer is offered
For you
on New Year's Day—
May God in His unceasing love
Send many gifts your way,
And may He fill your heart with peace
And be forever near,
Blessing you and guiding you
Throughout the coming year.
Happy New Year

January 4 Second Sunday After Christmas

Jeremiah 31:7-14
Ephesians 1:3-6,15-19a
Matthew 2: 13-15, 19-23
Psalm 84:1-8

January 11 First Sunday After the Epiphany

Isaiah 42:1-9
Acts 10:34-43
Matthew 3:13-17
Psalm 29



January 18 Second Sunday After the Epiphany

Isaiah 49:1-7
1 Corinthians 1:1-9
John 1:29-42
Psalm 40:1-12

January 25 Third Sunday After the Epiphany

Isaiah 9:1-4
1 Corinthians 1:10-18
Matthew 4:12-23
Psalm 27:1, 5-13

The Memorial Church of the Prince of Peace

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Gettysburg, PA 17325-3005
Telephone: 717-334-6463

The Rev. James Strader-Sasser
Priest In Charge

The Rev. Pamela Cooper White Ph.D.
Priest Associate

The Rev. Richard A. Ginnever
Priest Associate

The Rev. Cathy McKinney
Chaplain for Pastoral Care

Marrie Sanders
Parish Administrator

princeofpeace@gettysburgeepiscopal.org

Cathy Elkiss
Organist and Choirmaster
Tim Back, Sexton

Office Hours:
Monday-Thursday
9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.