

Create
in
me

2026
Lenten
Devotional



MANCHESTER
UNITED
METHODIST



What is Lent?

Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The English word “Lent” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word lencten, which means “lengthen,” and refers to the lengthening days of “spring.” The season is a preparation for celebrating Easter.

Historically, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by converts and then became a time for penance by all Christians. Because Sundays are always little Easters, the penitential spirit of Lent should be tempered with joyful expectation of the resurrection.

Holy Week is the final week of Lent, beginning with Passion/Palm Sunday and concluding with Holy Saturday. It is during these days that the readings focus primarily on the last days and suffering and death of Jesus.

—The United Methodist Book of Worship

Encouragement to Pause

Friends,

It brings me joy to know that you've chosen to pick up this devotional resource. It is my prayer that, through the scriptures that have been chosen, the words that have been written, and the prayers offered, God will meet you in a new and a profound way.

Lent is a season that reminds us of the importance of pausing, reflection, self-denial, and deep grace for ourselves and others. If you're like me, you need these reminders more than you care to admit.

How to use this devotional

1- First, read the scripture passage listed. The pastors of Manchester UMC preach from selected scriptures that are part of a weekly preaching plan called the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL). The scriptures that were chosen for this devotional are from the daily RCL readings during the Lenten season. The date for each devotional is printed in the top right corner of each page.

2- After reading the scripture text, move to the devotional message for the day. You'll hear from 35 different voices representing the real diversity that makes up the fabric of our congregation. The authors include members of our congregation, staff, retired UMC clergy who call Manchester their church home, representatives of our Annual Conference—including our bishop—and our own pastoral leadership.

3- The final component each day will be to pray the prayer of the week. The prayers that have been included are personal to me, and I offer them to you. I've found that these historic written prayers ground and shape my faith even more than they help me to express my soul's praise and needs. Six prayers are included, and you can find them on the pages that represent Sundays.

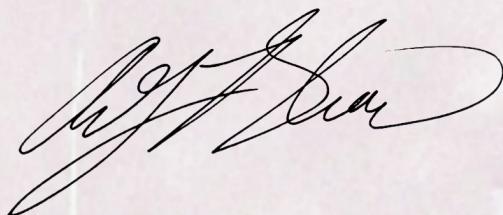
I asked each author to share with you two ways they are involved as a leader or participant within the life of the church and which worship service they are most likely to attend. It is my hope that this will give you a glimpse into the different ministries of our church and that you'll hear from some members you haven't had the chance to meet yet.

Reading a daily devotional is a habit, and habits can be difficult to develop. There will certainly be days when you will miss a reading and need to catch up. When that happens, give yourself that grace. There may be days that you'll be tempted to shortchange the readings by not reading the whole scripture or maybe neglecting the prayer. I encourage you to resist this temptation. Commit to giving yourself the time to pause, reflect on the words, and be formed by the prayers.

Please join me in giving many thanks to all who contributed to this devotional through serving as an author and to Becky Langdon and Will Koehl for their editing work. I hope you'll share with our authors how you were blessed by their work.

I pray that this devotional blesses you as we prepare our hearts for the alleluias of Easter together.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andy Blacksher".

Rev. Dr. Andy Blacksher





FEBRUARY 18, 2026

Ash Wednesday

Invitation to the Observance of Lenten Discipline

Siblings in Christ-

From the earliest days, followers of Jesus learned to linger
with the story—

to sit with the sorrow of the cross

and to wait, nearly holding their breath, for resurrection.

Before Easter's alleluias,

the Church carved out forty days

to slow the heart,

to clear the clutter,

to prepare a place where new life could rise.

Lent became a season of becoming.

Those stepping toward the waters of baptism learned the
shape of grace.

Those burdened by harm done or love neglected found a
path back—

through honest repentance,

through forgiveness offered,

through welcome restored.

In these practices, the whole community remembered
what the gospel keeps both whispering and shouting:

God's grace is greater than our failure,

forgiveness is stronger than our fear,

and renewal is always possible.

FEBRUARY 18, 2026

Lent reminds us that faith is not static—
it must be returned to,
again and again,
by children and elders,
by seekers and saints.

So, in the name of the Church,
I invite you into a holy Lent:
a season of courageous self-examination,
of prayers that open us to change,
of fasting and letting go of what numbs us,
of dwelling in God's Word
until it finds its way into our living.

As we begin this sacred journey—
marked by dust and breath,
by mortality and mercy—
let us bow or kneel before God,
our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,
the One who forms us in His image,
who never gives up on us,
and continually calls us toward love.

Amen.

FEBRUARY 19, 2026

Jonah 3:1-10

Jonah, after running away from God's call and spending three days in the belly of a whale, responds to God's second summons to go to Nineveh and proclaim that the great city full of wickedness will be overthrown in forty days. The people of Nineveh respond to Jonah's message from the Lord; they repent and begin to fast, hoping that God might relent. And God does, pouring out God's grace upon the people.

It is easy sometimes to identify more with Jonah than the people of Nineveh in this story. Jonah's reaction to God's call seems familiar; we avoid the call. We ignore it. Sometimes we run away. We aren't ready or willing to hear what God is saying. But the people of Nineveh, the wicked ones who had turned from God, heard God's message and believed it . . . the first time! What nonsense is this?

During this Lenten season, remind us again that God sees us, all of us, including the parts we'd prefer to keep hidden. Help us respond to the warning signals that we have strayed from the path that keeps us close to God. Help us to believe God's message, offered in love and seeped in grace, and turn from those things that bring suffering into our lives. "Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish." (Jonah 3:9) Remind us again that our faith helps us know God. Deepen our faith and expand our belief this Lent.



Becky Strickland

 Co-Director of Adult Faith Formation and Worship Arts Assistant

 Chancel Choir

 Sunday 9 & 11am

FEBRUARY 20, 2026

Jonah 4:1-11

Starting a Lenten journey is a time to feel close to Jesus, a road to understanding self, and a time to thank Him for the supreme sacrifice He made on our behalf. Struggling with the enormity of the role He took on in guiding us allows for determining whether we are a Jonah or not.

Do we become angry when the plans we make don't thrive because we didn't consult Jesus or actually did the opposite of what He desires? That's what Jonah did. It may seem that some of us live our lives this way. If they can't have their way, then all is lost.

Consequences exist when we try to thwart Jesus's divine purpose. Lent is the season when self is reminded of what we should do, but even if we fail, Jesus is not done with us. This provides hope to the world and frees us to try again.

How blessed are we! Thank you, Jesus.



Billie Coon



Lydia Circle Leader



Sojourner's Sunday School



Sunday 11am

FEBRUARY 21, 2026

Isaiah 58:1-12

One of our grandsons asked me recently if I ever "gave up" anything during Lent. I was a little startled by the question, and my immediate reaction was "usually not." When I read the Isaiah 58 text, the question came to mind again.

The context for Isaiah 58 is that the ancient Jewish community was in big trouble. Jewish leaders had been in Babylonian exile, and now they were coming home to rebuild Jerusalem and rehabilitate the community. But they were failing at the task. The poet, Isaiah, speaks with a knowing voice about what's wrong! "Your prayers and your piety are ineffective," the poet says. "In the middle of trying to be religious, you are missing the point of what God wants!" Isaiah proclaims that what God wants is for the community to understand the startling proposition that the well-being of others (the stranger, the orphan, the outcast) is linked to our own well-being.

So no, I will not be "giving up" something for Lent. But I will be reflecting soberly on the poetry of Isaiah 58, which calls me (and all of us) to understand God's all-consuming interest in all people having food, shelter, clothing, belonging—whatever is needed for life. I will be reflecting on the reality that wherever God's dream is met, God's light shines brightly, and Easter arrives!

Rev. Nancye Dunlap



Retired UMC Pastor



Sermon Reflection Study



Leader (Monday morning)



Sunday 11am

FEBRUARY 22, 2026

Psalm 32

A fun thing children do on Halloween is put on masks. Masks allow kids to pretend to be someone they're not. As a bonus, children get rewarded with mini Snickers.

A serious thing we adults do is put on masks. We are having a miserable day, and someone asks, "How are you doing?" We put on a mask. "Fine, thank you."

The writer of Psalm 32, though, knew that when God asks us that question, we'd better be honest. Pretending everything is fine when we haven't lived up to our faith doesn't sit well with the soul. The deceit blows up authentic dialogue with God (and others). Prayer is replaced by "groaning all day long."

In reality, though, God yearns for an honest conversation, impatiently waiting for us to start it. That's why when the psalmist confessed, he discovered that God "removed the guilt of my sin." The groaning stopped; the healing began.

Dropping the mask improves our vision. We see God as the yearning Father welcoming home the prodigal son. It also improves our hearing. We hear that Father singing "songs of rescue."

Lent is the mask-dropping season. The reward is even better than Snickers.



Rev. Greg Weeks



Retired UMC Pastor



Christmas Tree Lot



Sunday 9am

FEBRUARY 23, 2026

Prayer of the Week

Prayer For a New Heart (UMH 392)

You who are over us,
You who are one of us,
You who are:

Give me a pure heart, that I may see You;
a humble heart, that I may hear You;
a heart of love, that I may serve You;
a heart of faith, that I may abide in You.

Amen.

First Sunday of Lent

FEBRUARY 24, 2026

Genesis 4:1-16

My brother and I could not be more different. He loves the deer woods; I prefer the theater after savoring a James Beard chef's cuisine.

Genesis has no shortage of sibling rivalries: Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Leah and Rachel, Joseph and everybody else. But the genesis of Genesis rivalries was Cain and Abel—one a crop farmer, the other a rancher.

Cain and Abel both sought to please God with an offering, Cain with pomegranates and Abel with mutton. I don't know if God was fond of Western Kentucky Barbecue, but God was pleased with Abel's gift. In response, a livid Cain lures his brother out into his field and murders him.

The Bible doesn't explain why God chose meat over fruit. Rather, it shows that envy, jealousy, and shame lead to violence. John Wesley urged us to "provoke holy tempers," meaning to cultivate virtues like peace, patience, and kindness. Rather than habituating vices that lead to sin, we should habituate virtues that lead to love.

In disappointment or anger, might we practice holy tempers instead of Cain-like instincts—be our brother's keeper, caring with love?



Rev. Ron Beaton

 Lead Pastor of Manchester UMC

 Sunday 9 & 11am and Saturday 5pm

FEBRUARY 25, 2026

Matthew 18:10-14

Here we have the fairly well-known story of God leaving the flock to go after the one sheep who is lost. We often think of how great God's love is for that one sheep, and if I'm being honest, I typically think of myself as that lost sheep that God cares so much to find.

What strikes me as I read this passage, however, is that God would leave the flock for any one of those sheep who leaves the fold. There is nothing specific to identify that particular sheep or to set that sheep apart, other than the fact that he or she is lost.

Are we capable of realizing that God loves all of us sheep the same? Are we capable of acknowledging that, in God's eyes, we aren't set apart or above the rest of the flock—that we are the same as our neighbor when it comes to God's affection? It's so tempting to think of ourselves as better or more lovable based on our efforts, our accomplishments, our talents, our hearts that are moved toward holiness, etc.

Perhaps some humble reflection upon this passage will remind us that God's love is unconditional, unearned, and unwavering.



Kasey Beaton

 Wednesday Night Parent Group Leader

 Youth Group Volunteer

 Sunday 9am

FEBRUARY 26, 2026

2 Timothy 1:3-7

I hope you hear this passage the way Timothy might have heard it: as a gentle encouragement spoken directly to you, right where you are. I know I could use a letter like this from Paul every now and again, a reminder that faith isn't something we muster out of thin air. It's something that has been planted in us.

Maybe, like me, you're working toward a faith that feels truly your own, sorting through what to keep, what no longer fits, and what needs to be tenderly reimagined. I hope this passage gives you a moment to look back and remember the people who shaped your spiritual life, the ones whose voices, love, questions, and faith still live on in you.

And as you continue on that journey, remember that faith isn't always a roaring fire. Sometimes it's an ember that needs breath and patience. Let this season invite you to honor the faith of those who came before you with compassion, while also giving you the courage to keep building a faith that welcomes and encourages the generations to come.



Keaton Wolf



Sunday School Teacher



MomCo and Parent Group



Sunday 9am

FEBRUARY 27, 2026

Micah 7:18-20

I confess, when I was given this assignment, the first thing I did was google "What is Micah 7:18-20 about?" I'm no expert on the book of Micah, except I know it includes that famous passage on doing justice (Micah 6:8). What more could Micah, considered a minor prophet, have to say? A lot, if you ask me.

Using words like anger, mercy, compassion, and sin—it's as if he could be with us today, seeing a post on social media or watching the nightly news!

But Micah wanted us to know about how expansive God's love is for us—how big God can forgive. By "pardoning iniquity . . . passing over transgression," and not retaining anger, God demonstrates what we can all aspire to do and be.

It can be hard, almost impossible sometimes, I know. So, start with praying for that individual or circumstance that pains you. Ask for comfort and hope. That's the first step Micah promises and celebrates.



Trish Gunby



Social Justice Ministry
Sunday 9 & 11am

FEBRUARY 28, 2026

Psalm 121

God is always protecting us. He never takes a break from keeping us safe and comforting us. He never sleeps, so that we can sleep peacefully. When we're in danger, God protects us.

One time, my dad was driving to work through a huge snowstorm. I prayed to God, and I felt less scared. God was comforting me. He is always there to help us.

When I was in a spelling bee, I was really nervous that I was going to mess up, but God helped me through it. He gave me the courage to go up there and spell words in front of the whole school.

This passage also tells us God is the maker of heaven and earth. This year, I've been learning about cells so small we can't even see them. I've also been learning about a universe so big we can't even see some of the stars in that universe. It's so amazing to think about how God made all of it.

God is so powerful, and he uses that power to create amazing things, like heaven and earth, and to help us through all the challenges we face in life.



Julia Hood



Children's Choir



Sunday School



Sunday 9am

MARCH 1, 2026

Prayer of the Week

Prayer of Ignatius of Loyola (UMH 570)

Teach us, good Lord,
to serve You as You deserve;
to give and not count the cost;
to fight and not heed the wounds;
to toil and not to seek for rest;
to labor and not to ask for any reward,
except that of knowing that we do Your will;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Second Sunday of Lent

MARCH 2, 2026

Numbers 21:4-9

The Jewish people have been released from Egypt by Pharaoh, but there is a problem: another nation, Edom, says, "You can't come through our land to get to where you're going." Moses begs the king twice to let them through, but the king says no and punctuates the no with an army! It's been a bad year for the people of God, and this is one more thing to stand in their way.

What about you? What are you struggling with this year? Has God brought you to where you are just to abandon you to chance?

God hasn't. The people recognize through the bites of serpents that they have sinned by falsely accusing God and Moses. Moses makes a statue of a snake and puts it on a pole. When people who have been bitten look on it, they live.

That seems superstitious to us now, but it's very much like what we do when we place our faith in Christ—look to him for life. I love this story in Numbers about these Snakes on a Plain for just this reason: it reminds me to look to Jesus when I start thinking that God has left me in the wilderness.



David Gill



Chancel Choir



Modern Worship Vocalist



Sunday 11am

MARCH 3, 2026

ISAIAH 65: 17-25

I chose this passage from Isaiah for my devotional message because it is among my favorite verses from the Old Testament. In these passages, Isaiah focuses on God's promise of the coming of a new heaven and a new earth, where suffering and former things are forgotten. It encourages us to let go of past experiences, both good and bad, so we can focus on new opportunities and God's future plans. It's a call to stop dwelling on old failures and hurts, so we can focus on the present and the "new thing" God is doing in our lives.

I believe Isaiah's message also applies to Manchester United Methodist Church. As we celebrate our 200th anniversary, we are about to enter a new era. An era where God will reveal the plans he has for us. And as promised in Jeremiah 29:11, "those plans are to prosper us and give us hope and a future." This will be an opportunity for our church to fully embrace our mission: "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."



Rich Luze

 Endowment Committee
Chair

 United Methodist Men

 Sunday 11am

MARCH 4, 2026

John 7:53-8:11

My first thought was, *so where is the man?* This is the old "it takes two to tango" situation. The hypocrisy is so evident. But beyond that, it would be hard to imagine the shame and fear this woman was feeling. She likely knew the Old Testament punishment for adultery and had little hope that these stone faced men would vary from those passages. She did not realize she was being used as a pawn to trap Jesus.

Jesus's response was novel. He did not reject the Old Testament teaching; He allowed it to stand, but He only allowed those without sin to carry it out. And, of course, none could reach that standard. Jesus's response to the woman was "go your way, and . . . do not sin again."

Grace—Amazing grace. We know and feel the guilt of sin, but grace allows us forgiveness and the opportunity to grow. We can learn from our mistakes, reflect on the motivations that caused us to error, and overcome the temptations that drew us away. Faith is an iterative process. Because of grace, we can grow in our understanding of Jesus's expectation of us. It is then that we become a more effective witness for Christ!



John Heskett

 Leader of Alpha Sunday School class

 Mission's Team

 Sunday 11am

MARCH 5, 2026

Exodus 16:1-8

When the Israelite people were freed from their slavery in Egypt and were offered the opportunity to journey to the Promise Land, I am pretty certain they did not anticipate a 40-year trek in the wilderness. Now they were desperate and hungry. And as people will do when they get hungry, the Israelite people got grumpy and started to complain.

The USDA defines food insecurity as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Though hunger and food insecurity are closely related, they are distinct concepts. Hunger refers to a personal, physical sensation of discomfort, while food insecurity refers to a lack of available financial resources for food at the household level.

As God's people, we need to step up and step out to be the bread distributors for those around us. We need to speak up and speak out to our community leaders to make sure there are programs in place for those who need assistance. And we need to do our part and not hoard resources so that there is enough for all, daily bread for all God's people. In the prayer that is remembered as the one Jesus shared with his followers and disciples, the words include a reminder of this story of manna given each day—"Give us this day our daily bread." Not more than we need, no less than we need—just the right amount to sustain us so that everyone can have enough.

Manna from heaven. Bread of life. Community. Our daily bread. Communion. These are the gifts of God for the people of God. I hope Moses stopped and said these words as people gathered with their baskets each morning: "Come, for all things are ready." Just as I say them often as we gather around a table with the offering of bread for us as we celebrate the gift of manna given to us.



**Rev. Dr. Mary Beth
Hartenstein**

 Pastor of Justice and
Compassion of Manchester
UMC

 Sunday 9 & 11am

MARCH 6, 2026

Exodus 16:9-21

When the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, their stomachs growled, and their faith wavered. God responded not with anger but with compassion. In the evening, quail covered the camp to provide meat for everyone to eat. In the morning, bread covered the ground like dew. Each day, there was enough for that day and no more. Gathering too much to save for later led to spoilage, a reminder that dependence on God must be practiced daily rather than just when convenient.

This passage teaches us that God knows our needs even before we voice them. Like the Israelites, we often long for certainty and abundance, but God invites us into trust—into a rhythm of daily relationship to feed our soul.

Manna still falls for us today—not as flakes on the ground, but in the quiet mercies, answered prayers, and strength renewed each sunrise. Today, gather what He gives and trust in the Lord. It will always be enough.



Juli Willeman



Leadership Board



Welcome Team Leader



Sunday 9am

MARCH 7, 2026

Exodus 16:27-35

Have you ever felt like you needed to get just one more thing done, even after a really productive day? Maybe you're already in bed, but your mind is still running through tasks you could knock out. Or maybe you feel the pull to work on days that are meant for rest.

In this passage from Exodus, the Israelites ignore God's instruction not to gather manna on the Sabbath and go out looking anyway. Even after witnessing God's daily provision, they struggle to trust that there will still be enough if they stop. God confronts them—not to shame them—but to remind them that Sabbath is meant to promote rest, not restrict their lives. Rest itself is part of God's provision.

This passage helped me ask myself a deeper question, and I'll invite you to ask it too: What were the Israelites really searching for when they went out to gather manna anyway? Was it security? Control? Relief from fear about tomorrow? How does their story gently bring light to something within us?

May we continue learning to trust God more deeply. From God are all things, and to God are all things. May we find balance in all that God invites us into—our work, our play, and especially our rest. May we receive the Sabbath as the gift it is.

Sammie Shariff



Youth Group Volunteer

Special Event Planning



Sunday 9am

MARCH 8, 2026

Third Sunday of Lent

Prayer to the Holy Spirit (UMH 329)

O Great Spirit,

Whose breath gives life to the world,
and Whose voice is heard in the soft breeze:

We need Your strength and wisdom.

Cause us to walk in beauty.

Give us eyes ever to behold
the red and purple sunset.

Make us wise so that we may understand
what You have taught us.

Help us learn the lessons
You have placed in every leaf and rock.

Make us always ready to come to You
with clean hands and steady eyes,
so when life fades, like the fading sunset,
our spirits may come to You without shame.

Amen.

MARCH 9, 2026

2 John 1:1-13

In searching for truth, we also find justice, respect, and love. We need to share these when we help our fellow citizens and those who are struggling to be living in our wonderful country. Strive to show more kindness and positive attitude, teach truth and hope as we surround ourselves in God's love.

Our Methodist Men's group does our best to use these qualities, helping and assisting various charities in our local communities. Our walk in truth and kindness in God's grace contrasts with those who spread deceit, vice, and infidelity. Let's not let this love of truth decay.

The many deceivers and their untruth bring errors that delude the soul and undermine the glory of God. We all must be watchful and take truthful action.

In comforting our friends and neighbors and remaining in communion with them, we fill find true joy and happiness.



John Klos

 United Methodist Men
 Sunday 11am

MARCH 10, 2026

Psalm 81

In Psalm 81:6-16, an unknown voice sends a message to the people about what God has done for them and how he would like them to respond. It is a warning that they have failed to have faith and follow God's teachings. God laments that they have been "given over to their own devices" and have suffered the consequences.

God has repeatedly told us what we should value and how we should act. We read these scriptures and understand but then seem to quickly forget the passage, the text, the message. After a lifetime of Bible study, the majority of the verses and stories that I retain are the ones I have learned through hymns and anthems. I think that is true for many of us. That is one of the reasons that I have worked with children's and youth music programs for over 40 years at MUMC. I firmly believe that when the Word is read and then reinforced by setting it to a melody, a whole new part of our brain engages in the understanding of and the ability to retain the message. I am thrilled when I hear a child running down the halls of MUMC humming a hymn or a youth on a church field trip singing scripture with great enthusiasm. I think there is a subliminal effect leading to understanding the purpose and meaning of the text.

Maybe that has always been the case. Psalm 81 opens with "Sing for joy to God. Begin the music, strike the tambourine, play the melodious harp and lyre," perhaps to help us understand, live into, and remember.



Sue Belval



Chancel Choir & Coventry
Choir



Children's Ministry



Sunday 11am

MARCH 11, 2026

Jeremiah 2:4-13

Relationships can be hard. Even as they bring great joy, they also require work, attention, and intention. Jeremiah 2:4-13 reminds us that God is a God of relationship, and that means it's a two-way street. Set up as a legal case, here God accuses God's people of abandoning the spring of Living Water (God), and choosing instead "broken cisterns that cannot hold water." In our own lives, the "cisterns" take many forms: they may look like success, comfort, relationships, or scrolling on our screens—good things that become ultimate things. Slowly, they can pull our hearts away from the One who truly satisfies.

The world constantly offers substitutes for God's presence, telling us that fulfillment can be found in distraction, status, or self-reliance. Think of all the ads that tell us what we deserve to have. Yet these wells run dry. Just like God's people in this passage, we can drift without realizing how far we've wandered.

The way back is simple but requires intentionality: turn from the broken cisterns and return to the source. Through prayer, scripture, worship, and Christian fellowship, we can drink from Living Water again, and Lent is the perfect time to embrace this journey!



Debbie Irving

 Co-Director of Adult Faith Formation

 Mo-Hab

 Sunday 11am

MARCH 12, 2026

Ephesians 4:25-32

Lent provides an excellent time to “get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice” (Ephesians 4:31, NIV). Paul continues in Ephesians to offer advice: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”, Ephesians 4:32.

Hateful and personally offensive words between people seem to abound in the world, especially through social media. Paul presented excellent advice to us: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Ephesians 4:29). I hope to recall Paul’s advice if I am ever tempted to comment or respond to someone in a harsh way.

We contemplate Jesus’s death on the cross, dying for our sins. The compassion of Jesus is immeasurable. This season offers an opportunity to watch all our comments and bring more kindness into the world. The Bible’s teachings are powerful in their ability to be applied today in ways that Paul could not have imagined. Who knew that Paul was giving us advice in Ephesians on social media postings?



Dwain Baldridge

-  Sermon Reflection Group
-  Community Dinners
-  Sunday 9 & 11am

MARCH 13, 2026

Ephesians 5:1-9

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds us that the gospel is not only a story we believe but a life we now live. In Christ, we are given a new identity as beloved children of God. Because our identity has changed, the way we live must change too.

Paul speaks plainly. If we are to imitate God, our kind and wise parent, we can no longer participate in behaviors that belong to our old life. Disordered desire, greed, and careless speech promise fulfillment but always leave us empty. The way of Jesus forms us instead through habits of love, humility, and truth.

This is not about rigid rule-keeping. It is about freedom through faithful boundaries. Like guardrails on a mountain road, God's guidance does not restrict joy. It protects what is life-giving and helps form a community shaped by love. "You were once darkness," Paul says, "but now you are light in the Lord." During Lent, we remember that we no longer have to live in the shadows. We are invited daily to walk in the light and become who we already are.



Rev. Kim Jenne



Director of Connectional
Ministries for the Missouri
Annual Conference

MARCH 14, 2026

Psalm 23

Psalm 23 reminds us that God is a shepherd who cares for His people and guides us through difficult times. Just like how a shepherd will always protect his sheep from danger and lead them to safety, God will provide for us and guide us in times when we feel lost or confused. It is important to remember that just because you follow God, that does not mean there won't be hard times in your life. We will all "walk through the valley of the shadow of death," but we will never have to walk through it alone because God will be by our sides, guiding us through these hardships.

Even with God's promise to protect me, I still find myself worrying about small things that I know God will take care of. I often stress about school or small inconveniences. This stress is caused by me feeling like I need to be perfect, but Psalm 23 reminds me that God is in charge, and I can trust him even when I am not perfect. The chapter also reminds me that God will protect me, even when I feel overwhelmed by stress. The best way I have found to relieve stress is asking myself the following question: How would my life change if I trusted God to take care of my stress instead of constantly worrying about small things?



Matthew Ungles



Spirit Camp Leader



Youth Event Planning

Team



Sunday 9am

MARCH 15, 2026

Fourth Sunday of Lent

**Prayer for Courage to
Do Justice (UMH 456)**

O Lord, open my eyes
that I may see the needs of others;
open my ears that I may hear their cries;
open my heart so that they
need not be without support;

let me not be afraid to defend the weak
because of the anger of the strong,
nor afraid to defend the poor
because of the anger of the rich.

Show me where love and hope
and faith are needed,
and use me to bring them to those places.
And so open my eyes and my ears
that I may this coming day
be able to do some work of peace for You.
Amen.

MARCH 16, 2026

ISAIAH 59:9-10

Lent for me has always been a time of personal reflection. Being raised Catholic, reflection and confession are still a significant, though now a much more private and personal, part of my faith.

In Isaiah 59, the prophet Isaiah shares with the people of Israel that though God stands ready to give grace and justice, their sin and oppression have built a barrier preventing its arrival. In verse 9 and 10, we see the result of this sin—life surrounded by darkness and gloom.

Though I know I am free from direct participation in the greatest sins and atrocities man is capable of, I still must confront my role in bringing “darkness” upon my life and those I love.

Lent is a time for me to examine this “darkness” and find the areas where I “stumble at noon” in my daily actions. It is only by acknowledging and reconciling these shortcomings that I am able to fully receive the grace and justice of our God and continue to grow more as a light of Christ for the world.



Kurtis Heinrich

 Director of Cantate Youth Choir

 Choir & Modern Worship

 Sunday 11am

MARCH 17, 2026

Psalm 146

Psalm 146 tells us to praise the Lord as long as we live, and my favorite way to praise God is through song. One of my greatest memories of singing praise to God is when I sang a solo during the Hanging of the Green service. The fourth verse from "In the Bleak Midwinter" explains that you don't need fancy gifts to give to God, but giving your heart is enough.

Everyone should remember that God loves us, no matter what. Psalm 146 promises us that if you trust in God, you will be happy and God will always be watching over you. I have had problems with friends this past year, but I've prayed for help, and God has led me through the obstacles bit by bit.

I give my heart through song and praise to thank God for all he has done. I encourage everyone to sing, dance, play an instrument, or clap your hands to lift your soul to the Lord.

Thank you for giving us ways to praise you. Give us strength through difficult times and confidence that you are always here.



Genevieve Pikaard



Children's Choir



Sunday School



Sunday 9am

MARCH 18, 2026

Matthew 9:27-34

After reading Matthew 9:27-34, multiple times, one message that jumps out to me is how Jesus's healing is always a combination of his power and the faith of the person being healed.

The two blind men cried out for Jesus to heal them, but first Jesus asked them if they believed he could heal them. The healing occurred only after they said, "Yes, Lord."

"According to your faith let it be done to you." And, voila, they could see. Can you imagine if you were unable to see and in a split second you could see the world around you? You could see the face of Jesus looking at you—his eyes, his smile, his hands. You could see the reactions of the other people in the room who witnessed the miracle. You could now see your surroundings, the house you were in. Can you imagine the excitement and joy you would feel? Even as I write this, I'm getting goosebumps.

Lent is a time to strengthen our faith and deepen our relationship with Christ. I hope you will find some excitement and joy that you can't contain and want to share on your journey.

Marty Dauer



Stephen Minister
Community Dinners
Sunday 11am

MARCH 19, 2026

Psalm 130

Every morning during Lent, Mark walked the same quiet trail with his old dog Cooper. The world felt still in those early hours, and Mark often carried a heaviness in his heart—regrets, impatience, and missed opportunities that seemed to surface more sharply during this season of reflection. Yet Cooper trotted faithfully beside him, tail gently wagging, as though nothing could ever separate him from his beloved companion.

One morning, as Mark whispered a weary prayer, the words of Psalm 130 rose in his mind: “Out of the depths I cry to You, O Lord.” He felt as if the psalmist understood his very soul. Mark paused, watching Cooper sit patiently at his feet, gazing up with absolute trust. That steadfast gaze reminded Mark of God’s own unfailing love—constant, waiting, unshaken.

Just as Cooper stayed with him on every path, God remained near even when Mark felt lost. “With the Lord is unfailing love and full redemption.” During Lent, Mark realized that confession was not an act of despair but of hope. God hears our cries from the depths and walks with us toward new life. And like Cooper’s gentle presence, God’s mercy meets us every morning.



Prudy Bertolino

- Sojourner's Class Leader
- Former UMC clergy
- Sunday 11am

MARCH 20, 2026

Revelation 11:15-19

Wow! The headlines! It is difficult to imagine a world where true justice prevails, where peace is the rule of the land, and where we so value our relationship with God that it translates to unbounded care for each other and the Earth.

Yet this is exactly what the seventh trumpet announces: our world will transform to become the kingdom of Jesus Christ. We are promised that gloom and doom will not be the final word! When we look at Jesus's life and teachings, we see that he cared for those whom others cast aside; he welcomed people to God's kingdom that others turned away. Not only did he reference the natural world when teaching, Jesus valued quiet places in nature to rest and reenergize.

Even though we might not fully grasp this vision of a perfect world of peace and care, there are small things we can do every day to help bring it about. As you go through this day, take advantage of opportunities to show kindness to someone else and to care for creation. Reflect on kindnesses shown to you today. In these small actions, we will see glimpses of God's kingdom on earth.



Debbie Irving



Co-Director of Adult Faith
Formation



MO-Hab



Sunday 11am

MARCH 21, 2026

Luke 24:44-53

In the final verses of Luke's gospel, the risen Jesus opens the minds of His disciples so they can understand the scriptures. What was once confusing or misunderstood suddenly makes sense in the light of His divine presence.

Jesus reminds the disciples that His suffering and resurrection were not accidents but the fulfillment of God's plan, leading to repentance and forgiveness for all people. Understanding scripture, however, isn't the end. Jesus blesses the disciples and sends them out, promising they will be in the presence from power on high.

Sometimes amidst our busy and chaotic lives, we too can be confused or feel alone. We can pray for our eyes to be opened and to truly recognize Jesus, for our hearts to be strengthened by His presence, and for the courage to go out into the world bearing His message of forgiveness, hope, and new life.

Lord, open my eyes. Let me see You in Your Word and in the ordinary moments I might otherwise overlook. Help me to recognize Your glory and let me find ways to love and serve my neighbor. Remind me that You are always with me.



Doug Christopher



Leadership Board



Bike Rehab



Sunday 9am

MARCH 22, 2026

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Prayer of St. Francis (UMH 481)

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so
much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving
that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are
born to eternal life.

Amen.

MARCH 23, 2026

1 Kings 17:17-24

Last year my Nana was diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer, her third recurrence. She was given medicine to help stop the spread, but the cancer spread to her bones. Elijah teaches us that even when hope is dimming, we should look for God, and we will find support and love that endures forever.

Even though my Nana received discouraging news, she held on to hope. One incredible quality she possesses is her ability to stay positive and push away negativity, which makes her stronger. This allows us to see her for her remarkable qualities instead of just her illness.

The woman in the scripture has resentment towards God. It's a common reflex to blame God, but staying true to God can bring hope. When our family heard that the cancer had come back for a third time, it was like a rock hitting our faith and making it hard to see joy and brightness. Our family learned that we shouldn't blame God; God isn't creating these bad things, but God is there to help us push past them and gain joy.



Brayden Haupt

-  Worship Team (Lay Reader and Acolyte)
-  Youth Group
-  Sunday 9am

MARCH 24, 2026

Ephesians 2:1-10

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul reminds us of the transformation we have experienced from a life of spiritual death to a life where we are fully alive in Christ. We may think that we have found God, but the truth is that God has been seeking us all along. The grace of God has been with us on every step of our spiritual journey—even before we knew anything of God. God rejoices when we notice Him and turn toward Him because he is always waiting for us.

Grace is a gift from God, freely given, that none of us deserve and that we cannot earn. We are each created for a life of purpose, and God's grace will lead us to reflect God's goodness in all we do.

Today, take a moment to reflect on the enormity of this gift: you are loved and valued, not by what you achieve but by simply being. Let gratitude fill your heart and allow grace to shape everything you do and say.

Holy God, thank you for Your endless grace and love, which sustain me each day. Amen



Jana Lippard

- “Growing in Faith” Bible Study Leader
- Stephen Minister
- Sunday 11am & some Saturdays 5pm

MARCH 25, 2026

Matthew 22:23-33

This scripture about seven brothers dying in succession and a wife marrying each brother in turn is very confusing. The Sadducees come to Jesus asking him to clarify whose wife she would be in life after death. I believe they were setting him up with a ridiculous question.

In today's world there are numerous rules about how we are to live our lives. In the Christian faith alone, many factions are at play, telling us how and what we must believe and deriding us if we interpret differently.

Jesus tells the Sadducees that they are focusing on the wrong things, because "in the resurrection you will be like angels in heaven." There won't be questions about the rules of marriage or any other ridiculous rules. "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob," Jesus says. "I am the God of the living."

Let us focus on this God of the living, and not get all caught up in the frustrations around us.



Penny Kleebe

-  Prayer Shawl Co-Leader
-  Chancel Choir
-  Sunday 11am

MARCH 26, 2026

Philippians 1:1-11

This scripture passage reminds me how much I love this church family and how thankful I am for all of you. It adds so much joy, purpose, and comfort to my life to be a part of this beautiful community of Christ followers.

Paul felt this joy deeply. After all, he wrote this letter from a jail cell in chains, and still he prayed with joy because of his partners in the gospel, his friends from the church in Phillipi. No matter our circumstances, we can have joy in being part of Christ's family. We can feel joy because we share in God's grace and peace, incredible and priceless gifts He has given us.

We can also feel joy because God began a good work in us and promises to carry it on to completion until Jesus returns. The Holy Spirit lives in us, helping us be more like Jesus. Even when we feel far from God, even when we feel like we are messing up constantly, God isn't going to give up on us.

Let's hold each other in our hearts. Let's remember how great a gift it is to be a part of this family.



Kelli Hood



Leadership Board



Children's Sunday School



Sunday 9am

MARCH 27, 2026

Psalm 31:9-16

Have you ever moved to a new job or town or church where you knew nobody? Been an outsider or an outcast or just not accepted because you weren't "one of them"? Felt as if "they" were conspiring against you. Felt as if you were unseen or forgotten, or thought you heard others whispering about you?

I have, and two things have gotten me through. With my musical background, the song by Rogers and Hammerstein, from the musical *Carousel* "You'll Never Walk Alone" has carried me through many a dark day. And crying out in prayer, "But I trust in you, Lord; I say you are my God. My times are in your hands. Deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me. Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your unfailing love."

"When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high, and don't be afraid of the dark . . . Walk on, walk on with hope in your heart, and you'll never walk alone."



David Howenstine



Chancel Choir & Coventry
Choir



Lay Reader



Sunday 11am

Mark 10:32-34 MARCH 28, 2026

Lent presents us with the opportunity of a spiritual journey to reflect on our lives. For some, it's a time of self-sacrifice. For others it's a time to change our ways.

Some people say spiritual journeys are about the ultimate destination—Heaven. Others say it's about the experiences you have along the way—the journey itself.

I have discovered that the greatest outcomes of a spiritual journey are the relationships you make along the way.

Today's scripture (Mark 10:32-34) describes a spiritual journey that Jesus and his disciples made as they moved toward Jerusalem. Jesus is leading, and as he walks ahead of them, he spells out, with some frightening detail, his coming suffering, death, and resurrection.

Jesus's determined demeanor about these unsettling events troubles the disciples and generates fear about their future—even though Jesus's conclusion proclaims the good news of his resurrection and hope for all of them.

I'm convinced it was Jesus's caring relationship with his disciples, and their relationship with each other, that sustained them through their most difficult journey to restoration.

May you follow Jesus so closely that you have the dust from his sandals all over you. Journeying with Jesus and his disciples . . .



Rev. Dave Bennet



Retired UMC Pastor



Modern Worship Band



Sunday 9am

MARCH 29, 2026

Sixth Sunday of Lent

Wesleyan Covenant Prayer (UMH 607)

I am no longer my own, but Yours.

 Put me to what You will,
 rank me with whom You will.

 Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be employed by You or laid aside for You,
 exalted for You or brought low for You.

 Let me be full, let me be empty.

 Let me have all things,
 let me have nothing.

I freely and heartily yield all things to Your
 pleasure and disposal.

And now, O glorious and blessed God,
 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
 You art mine, and I am Yours.
 So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth,
 be ratified in heaven.

Amen.

MARCH 30, 2026

John 12:1-11

The stories of Mary and Martha remind us to delight in the present. In Luke 10, Martha is painted as a worker bee, who is focused on service, while Mary spends her time at Jesus's feet in worship. In John 12, we see another example of Mary choosing extravagant devotion through anointing Jesus's feet with expensive perfume. In both stories, Jesus defends Mary's actions, illustrating the importance of cherishing precious moments. Jesus tells Martha that Mary has chosen the better part, and Jesus reprimands Judas, assuring him that Mary's act was appropriate praise. Surely Jesus's heart was heavy, knowing that His time on earth was coming to an end, but he continued to prioritize teaching and being in community.

As an eldest daughter, I relate to Martha's preoccupation with getting things done, however I know I can learn from Mary's commitment to presence. Savoring our time doesn't diminish the importance of service and hard work. We can take solace in Jesus's encouragement to experience daily delights, amidst the never-ending to-do lists of the world.

This Holy Week, I pray for the courage to pause and be present as witness to God's greatest gift, unconditional love through Jesus Christ.



Emily Pikaard

 Director of Children and Family Ministries

 Coventry Choir

 Sunday 9 & 11am

MARCH 31, 2026

John 12:20-36

Holy Week is about sadness, suffering, and pain. Jesus could have escaped it all by going out the back gate of the Garden of Gethsemane. I can imagine the disciples saying to him, "Let's leave. It doesn't feel safe here." They likely could feel tension in the air, in the posture of the soldiers, in the judgment of the Sanhedrin, in the nervousness of the crowd. John even writes, "Jesus hid himself." Yet in the end, here is Jesus, resolutely facing forward. "The hour has come . . ." Jesus didn't ignore or avoid what was coming though he likely didn't know exactly what would happen.

We do not need to be afraid of what this world offers us or asks of us. It is out of the craziness of life that faith can come. We are given permission to become intimate with our own experiences, learn from them, and allow ourselves to descend to the depth of things, even our mistakes, before we try too quickly to transcend it all in the name of some idealized purity or superiority.

God hides in the depths and is not seen as long as we stay on the surface of anything—even the depths of our sins. To stay on the surface of anything is invariably to miss its message. In this Lenten season, God calls us to observe, touch, and love the physical, the material, the world around us—in all of its suffering state. This is the starting place for any healthy spirituality and any true maturation. Death and resurrection, not death or resurrection.



Rev. Brenda Becker



Retired United Methodist

Pastor

Tuesday Bible Study

Leader

Sun. 11am

APRIL 1, 2026

John 13:21-32

If you have ever had someone betray you, it's a gut-wrenching experience. While we don't often use the word betrayal today, we are familiar with being double-crossed, being lied to, or having someone go behind our backs. No matter, any of these experiences is painful.

It's hard to imagine Jesus knowing what was about to happen and remaining patient, calm, and collected, even as Judas is getting ready to betray him. Patience with purpose seems to be key with Jesus. Jesus's example reminds me to look at the bigger picture, a picture that I might not be able to see at a moment when I experience hurt or betrayal.

Some say Judas's actions were all a part of a grander plan already known by Jesus because Jesus did not seem surprised at all by Judas's actions. We might ask ourselves, what was Judas trying to do? Perhaps Judas was trying to push Jesus to reveal the new kingdom with Jesus as king. Then Judas could assume his own role as he envisioned in the new kingdom.

Judas's impatient actions ruin his reputation. Ultimately, he feels so guilty that he doesn't wait for Jesus to forgive him and commits suicide, a tragic end to Judas's life that is remembered throughout history.

APRIL 1, 2026

It's easy to experience impatience even in our own lives. However, sometimes we must face life's failures, difficulties, or sufferings to find true purpose and meaning in our journey. We need to exercise patience with purpose to see that all of life, good and bad, is essential for us to find meaning.

Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work for the good of those who love him and those who are called to his purposes according to the scriptures."

No doubt God can use every circumstance in our lives for growth and ultimate good, even when we feel hurt or betrayed—patience with purpose that might reveal deeper spiritual meaning because of God's sovereignty, plan, and actions of salvation.

Friends, I invite you in this Lenten season to think about where we need to find patience as we look for the good of all things working together in Jesus Christ.



Bishop Bob Farr



Bishop of the Missouri
Annual Conference of the
United Methodist Church

APRIL 2, 2026

MAUNDY THURSDAY

John 13:1-17 & 31b-35

Just three days ago, Jesus was instructing Martha to worry less about being a good host so she'd have time to join Mary in sitting at Jesus's feet. Today we find Jesus sitting at the disciples' feet and acting as a servant of the meal's host. The incongruity is impossible to miss.

I don't think Jesus is reversing his position here. He is expressing the need for both service and spiritual growth. A need for wholeness and a kind of balance—a middle way.

We once had a washing machine that easily got out of balance. Too many clothes on one side caused the whole machine to rock violently and stop early, certainly putting undue stress on the machine. The only solution was to pause the washer and physically move the contents to bring them back into balance.

The Lenten season is a reminder to pause, to assess our how we love God and others, and to rebalance the load as needed. Make time to pause today and ask God, "Where am I out of balance? How can I better love God and others?"

And remember that Jesus didn't suggest we love others—it was nothing short of a command. Love everyone completely.



Rev. Dr. Andy Blacksher



Executive Pastor of
Manchester UMC



Sunday 9 & 11am

APRIL 3, 2026

GOOD FRIDAY John 18:1-19:42

By the time you read this, Christmas will have been months ago. But I'm writing this on Epiphany, the day we remember when magi came to pay homage to the "newborn king of the Jews." In that story, a paranoid King Herod tried to kill Jesus, and the holy family fled to Egypt.

On this most solemn day of the year, Good Friday, we are once again confronted with the powers that be seeking Jesus's life, and this time they are successful. Jesus is crucified by the powers that be. His life of redemption, liberation, and love threatened the powerful. The one who was born at Christmas and called Emmanuel, or God with us, is utterly and devastatingly without us.

John's gospel says he carried his cross alone. Unlike the synoptics, there is no random Joseph who helps picks up the cross. His disciples scatter (John 16:32), Judas betrays Jesus (13:27-30), and Peter denies even knowing Jesus (John 18:15-27). God sought to be with us, and yet in this moment Jesus dies without us.

Jesus still desires to be with us. I wonder if we can commit to being with him? I wonder if we can find him in those who suffer? With those in the ER, on the streets, across the border, or within the church? I wonder if we might even bear a cross to be with Jesus?



Rev. Ron Beaton



Lead Pastor of Manchester
UMC



Sunday 9 & 11am and
Saturday 5pm

APRIL 4, 2026

HOLY SATURDAY John 19:38-42

The Rest of the Story. This was Paul Harvey's famous radio segment that had true stories with surprising twists, revealing often unknown details about these sometimes forgotten tales. He would conclude with this famous tagline, "And now you know . . . the rest of the story."

Although this devotional piece is for Holy Saturday, the events here, from John's remembrances of Jesus's death, all happened on Friday. "After these things . . ." is how this part of the account begins because there was more to tell. There were still characters who needed to do their part beyond the tragic death of Jesus.

Joseph of Arimathea, despite his fear of being labeled and known as a follower of Jesus, steps up and out to ask Pilate for the body. Nicodemus, a tax collector, who had once only wanted to be seen with Jesus in the cover of night, comes out in the daylight carrying more than an armload of spices to place with the body. Two men, who would not have imagined themselves in this situation, are brought together so that the rituals of the death could be done in the proper way for the man, the prophet, the Holy One, whom they had come to know as God with them—Emmanuel.

I can only imagine that they thought their part was the final piece. The myrrh and aloes had been placed so that the body would smell less; the tomb was secured because Jesus probably did not have the means to have one; and a stone was rolled into place. Done. Final. Finished.

And yet . . . little did they know that the rest of the story was about to unfold.

Rev. Dr. Mary Beth Hartenstein



Pastor of Justice and
Compassion at Manchester
UMC



Sundays 9 & 11am and
Saturday 5pm

APRIL 5, 2026

EASTER SUNDAY

Christ Is Risen! Hallelujah!

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55). Death has been defeated! The Easter message doesn't deny death's reality—we've wept, mourned, and felt its sting. But today, tears give way to joy because death does not have the final word. Jesus Christ, crucified and buried, is alive!

John tells us that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb "while it was still dark." She expected death but found life. At first, she mistook Jesus for a gardener—how fitting! A garden is no place for death; it is a place for life. When Jesus spoke her name, Mary recognized her risen Lord. In that moment, despair turned to hope, and darkness gave way to dawn.

The resurrection is God's promise that death becomes compost for new life. In Christ, brokenness is redeemed, sin is forgiven, and hope is restored. The same power that raised Jesus is at work in us, making all things new.

Christ calls us by name. Will we turn toward Him? Will we live as Easter people—sharing His love, practicing justice, and planting seeds of life? The tomb is empty. Christ is risen! Hallelujah!



Rev. Ron Beaton

- Lead Pastor of Manchester UMC
- Sunday 9 & 11am and Saturday 5pm







Lenten Worship Services

Ash Wednesday

7 pm

Palm Sunday

9 am—Modern

11 am—Traditional

Maundy Thursday

7 pm

Good Friday

7 pm

Holy Saturday

7 pm

Easter

6:30 am—Sunrise

9 am—Modern

11 am—Traditional