



THE SANCTUARY AT KINGDOM SQUARE

TSAKS National News

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WITH TSAKS NATION

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Mission Statement... Our mission is to promote the spread of the Gospel, the winning of souls to Jesus Christ, the changing of lives, and establishing the presence of the Lord in the world through evangelizing, biblical teaching, economic development, and community outreach. With faith in Almighty God, we seek to be a church preparing born-again believers for the Kingdom of God.

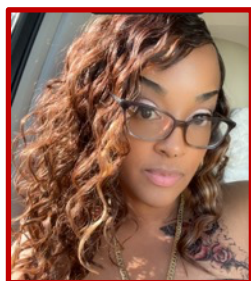
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"Stories of Strength: Honoring Our Breast Cancer Survivors" Told by The Voices of the Survivors

Interview done by Carlette Jameson or JC McCreary

Crystal Wheeler—A Journey of Faith, Strength, and Survival



Two years ago, my world changed when I heard the words, "*You have cancer.*" That was the hardest part of this journey—simply finding out. I was so angry. I was so jealous of other women. I was full of envy and jealousy because I felt like no matter what other women were going through or what they were telling me whether their dog was dying, or that their baby was sick, or they were gaining weight, or they couldn't pay their bills... it didn't matter because they didn't have cancer! All I wanted to scream was "at least you don't have cancer!"

I learned how to pray more and increase my faith. I held on to the promise that all I needed was "*faith the size of a mustard seed*" and that's what got me through. I prayed a lot and had **faith**. I felt comfortable telling God that I was scared and worried. When I prayed, I asked God to give me the **strength** and the peace that I needed not to worry. I was able to be real with God about how I was feeling. I talked honestly with God, and I asked Him to give me the strength and peace that I needed.

My doctor encouraged me the most. She told me, "How you go into this is what matters," and I chose to go in with positivity and faith. I did a lot of praying, research, and spiritual learning. I realized that my fight wasn't just physical, it was spiritual, too. This journey completely changed how I see life. I no longer value material things the way I used to. What matters most to me now is time, peace, and the gift of each new day that God gives me.

Today, I am two years cancer-free! I celebrate August 18th as my "new birthday." I survived surgery, anesthesia, and chemo treatments, and I thank God for bringing me through it all. I pamper myself with all things pink, soft things, peace and tranquility.

If I could give anyone advice who has just been diagnosed, I would tell them what my doctor told me—it's all about how you go into this. If you manifest negativity, you get negativity. There is power in the tongue. At first, there will be no settled answers because you just don't know until you start your journey. Don't expect the physical to change, heal or to manifest until you start with the spiritual.

I want to be there for others walking this same road. No one should go through this alone. I believe God places angels in our path—I met so many women who encouraged me and reminded me that I wasn't alone. I knew that God had placed that person right there with me to tell me, "I got you. You're going to be all right."

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13
"But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds, declares the Lord." Jeremiah 30:17

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Monique Kiser—Faith Over Fear



I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2020 — right in the middle of the COVID pandemic. It's been five years now. Because my cancer was caught early and it was very small, I had a good medical team and a strong faith that carried me through.

After my surgery, I asked my doctor when I could officially say I was cancer free. My oncologist told me that the lump was gone, but that I still needed to go through radiation. Thankfully, I didn't have to go through chemotherapy. I continue to visit my oncologist regularly, but this December marks my fifth year — and I will finally say, "I am cancer free!"

My biggest fear/challenge was that as we were in the heart of Covid, I had just had my mammogram and they called me back because it showed something suspicious. I had to take a series of tests. When the next set of tests came back, the imaging practitioner called me and said, "you have a little bit of cancer." I remember thinking, "What's a little bit of cancer? What does that even mean?"

Hearing those words over the phone was devastating. I sat and cried. My mother had been a double breast cancer survivor, and my first thought was, "I'm glad she's not here to hear this — she would think the worst." But then immediately after that, I was sad, because she wasn't here. I had so many thoughts racing through my mind: "Mama's gone... we're in the middle of a pandemic... and now I have cancer... what am I to do?"

When I got the diagnosis, I had to go into the hospital building during COVID. Everyone was masked up. I was afraid to go in with a compromised immune system. I had to go in to get prepared and each time I went in, my heart rate was up, so I had to keep going back until my heart rate came down. Wrapping my head around the fact that we were right in the midst

of this pandemic and I was diagnosed with cancer — that was the hardest part for me. But the Lord worked it out. When I went in for my procedure, I didn't have to go through the emergency room where the COVID patients were. That was nobody but God.

After the initial phone call, I was in a daze. I thank God for placing the right people around me. I can't remember if I called or she called. But talking with a fellow sister from our Missions Ministry, she was one of the first people I told. We prayed and talked, and I was so thankful that she understood what I was going through because she was also a survivor. I didn't feel alone anymore. The Minister of Missions and our Pastor prayed for me constantly. Even though my mama was gone, I realized that God had given me a family (My Church Family) that would be with me as I went through this.

I had a great doctor. She was thorough, detailed, and she really listened. Whenever I needed something, she referred me to the right specialist. When she sent me to a particular imaging center for my mammogram, I believe that's what allowed my cancer to be found early. I trust her and thank God for putting her into my life early on.

When I went to the hospital to have the surgery, my oncologist was very positive. She said "The good thing is it was caught very early. The size of an M&M. We are going to do this operation so you can go on and get on with your life. And your doctor believes in God and she is a praying person."

I'm telling "Lottie Dottie and everybody" — get your mammograms! While you're healthy, build a relationship with a doctor you trust. Early detection saved my life. I wasn't always great at doing self-exams, but I've learned how important they are. Too many people avoid going to the doctor because they're afraid of bad news, but I tell everyone — go anyway! It's better to know and take action than to not go and not know.

I celebrate my milestones by giving back. I became part of the Breast Cancer Ministry at my church, and I share my story whenever I can. God brought me through, and now I want to help others find the same hope, healing, and faith that carried me.

Romans 8:28 (NIV): "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

Reneé DeShazor—A Faith Strengthened

Reneé DeShazor has been a devoted member of TSAKS for 15 years and currently serves as the Coordinator for our Cancer Support Ministry. Her journey through breast cancer is one of courage, faith, and transformation. She is a 14-year cancer survivor.

After receiving her diagnosis and prior to getting her biopsy, Reneé says she heard God speak clearly to her heart: “You must go through this to get to what I have for you.” She owes her greatest recovery to Almighty God for His favor and grace on her life. The road ahead was difficult. She recalls, “There were days I had to crawl upstairs because I was too weak and in too much pain to stand.” She also suffered from neuropathy in her fingers and feet on a daily basis, and other body impairments during the journey. But she persevered even while still working.

Her family and church friends became her lifeline. Her daughter, sisters, sister-in-law, and nieces—along with her best friend of 52 years from Ohio—stood by her side every step of the way. They each took part in accompanying her to her monthly chemotherapy treatments. Church friends brought meals, prayed with her, and lifted her spirits. Knowing that others were praying for her was deeply encouraging.

The experience changed her outlook on life. “People think they will live forever,” she reflects. “This was my wake-up call.” Her faith has grown stronger, and she feels more connected to God than ever before. She believes she’s gained a spirit of discernment and now understands the power of mindset. “Life is what’s valuable — not stuff.”

For anyone who has been recently diagnosed with breast cancer, Reneé offers these words of encouragement: “I had no symptoms other than a small bump under my arm. I missed my mammogram in 2009, and in 2010 they found a lump. This disease can be a silent killer. I urge others to draw closer to God, seek a faith-based support system, and believe that healing is possible.” She also shares a practical tip: applying Lidocaine and Aquaphor to the injection site before chemo or radiation can help ease burning sensation or pain.

Reneé celebrates milestones by holding on to her Faith and listening to her body. Her advice is clear, *“Do self-examinations every month and GET YOUR YEARLY MAMMOGRAM. Early detection is the best protection.”*



“Do self-examinations every month and GET YOUR YEARLY MAMMOGRAM. Early detection is the best protection.”

October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month

by JC McCreary

October is recognized as **Breast Cancer Awareness Month**—a time of reflection, celebration, and remembrance. We celebrate those who trusted God and triumphed over this challenging journey, and we honor the memory of those who fought bravely but did not survive.

October is recognized as Breast Cancer Awareness

Month, and it is a time of reflection and celebration for those who trusted God and survived the journey. But, October must also be a time of remembrance for those who did not survive their fight with this terrible, life stealing disease. We must never forget them. We must also never forget to: Do your monthly breast self-examinations and get your annual mammograms. Remember—early detection is key!

Celebrating Our Veterans

by Carlette Jameson

During the month of November, we take time to honor the brave men and women of our church family who have served in the **United States Armed Forces** and **Law Enforcement**. Their courage, dedication, and sacrifice remind us of the true meaning of service — putting others before self.

Their service reminds us of the scripture found in John 15:13: “*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*”



Left to Right: **Carolyn McDermott**, U. S. NAVY (Retired); **Donny Cupe**, USMC, 1976; **Alvin Blake**, CMSgt, USAF (Retired); **Minister Darryl Butler**, U.S. Army; **Rev. Jeffrey Jordan**, U.S. Army (Retired); **Deacon John Addison**, U.S. Army 1953 (retired)

John 15:13:

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

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Left to Right: **Clarence McIntosh**, U. S. Army (retired); **Deacon Joe Jones**, USMC (retired); **SSG David Williams**, U. S. Army (retired); **Joseph Jupiter**, U.S. Army (Retired); **Dr. Okechukwu C. Nwaneri**, D. Min, M. Div, BCC, U. S. Air Force (Retired); **Joyce Williams**, Metropolitan Police Department (Retired); **LTC Rhoan Dennis** and **Mrs. Franka Dennis**, Army Reserves (Retired) | Mr. Rhoan Dennis (32 years) | Mrs. Franka Dennis (U. S. 6 years); **Mr. and Mrs. Ryan** and **Cassandra Sanders**, U. S. NAVY (Retired) | Mr. Ryan Sanders (7 years) | Mrs. Cassandra Sanders (20 years); **Sis. Raenell Drafts**, Petty Officer 2nd class (Gunner's Mate), U. S. Coast Guard

John 15:13:

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”



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*“Greater love has
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Left to Right: Wallace Moore Jr.; Angelica Wiggins, U.S. Army Veteran (15 years); Nathaniel Williams, U.S. Navy E-5 (Retired); Benjamin J. Holmes Jr., US Army (Retired); Montien Miller, U.S. Army; Gail Scarborough, U. S. Army National Guard; Elisha Stearns, U.S. Army; Niambi Stearns, U. S. Air Force



SANCTUARY HAPPENINGS . . .

FRANGelism at TSAKS: Sharing Faith Through Meaningful Connections

by Minister George Sparrow



What is FRANGelism?
FRANGelism is a heartfelt approach to evangelism that focuses on reaching those already within our lives—our **Friends, Relatives, Associates, Neighbors,** and

Guests. It serves as a reminder that sharing the Gospel begins with genuine relationships and everyday interactions beyond the walls of the church. As ambassadors and disciples of Christ, Jesus reminds us of our responsibility in the Great Commission, found in **Matthew 28:19–20:**

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Last but not least, the purpose of FRANGelism is to encourage believers to live out their faith intentionally—demonstrating God’s love through words, actions, and compassion. Its impact extends far beyond individual moments. As each person reaches out to those within their circle, the message of Christ spreads organically, building stronger communities and transforming lives for God’s glory.



FRANGelism

A Life of Light, Laughter, and Love

In Memory of Latrisha D. Chappin
(as told by her husband Rodney Chappin)

When we think of **Latrisha D. Chappin**, we remember a woman full of faith, humor, and heart. Even as a child, she held tightly to *Psalm 23* and loved the songs of CeCe Winans. And whenever life got frustrating, her famous saying, “**LAWD...**” could make anyone around her smile. Her love for Beyoncé’s “*I Was Here*” said everything about the legacy she hoped to leave—one of impact and presence.

Latrisha inspired many people through her work with USAID, serving on panels in the U.S. and South Africa, encouraging people to improve their lives through both government programs and through their own personal strength. She didn’t just talk about helping—she genuinely showed up for people, offering advice or getting involved herself when someone needed help.

When she was not at work, Latrisha enjoyed the things that made her uniquely her. She considered herself a bit of a nerd because of her passion for comics and comic figures. She loved dressing up in costumes and going to the various Comic Con events. She found joy in imagination, creativity, and having fun in her own way.

Some memories still bring a smile to me, like her ongoing fear of heights—from the Ferris wheel at National Harbor to crossing the Bay Bridge. She’d give me the side-eye when she got nervous but would then always burst into laughter once she got past it.

She was known as the “**Intellectual Diva.**” She wasn’t the type to get her hands dirty with things. I felt that was due to her Southern



upbringing. She was involved with any and everything—from helping with doing yard work, to moving furniture. She had two sides to her—the fine polished side of her that most people saw, and the down-home ratchet side (that only some knew about which was one of the reasons she became part of Beyoncé’s Beehive Club.) But she loved the Lord and knew just about every song that she heard. But she wasn’t extreme in either way she would go. She lived her life with balance, joy, and authenticity.

Above all, Latrisha loved her family. She adored her relatives, her godchildren, and especially her niece Aniyah, for whom she would do absolutely anything.

Her life reminds us that faith can be joyful, love can be bold, and laughter can carry us through even the hardest moments. And in every story told about her, her light continues to shine.

Continued on next page—

A Light Sent by God: Remembering Our Beloved Trish

by Cheryl Chappin

I I first met Latrisha aka Trish, when my son brought her to our home to introduce her to his family as they were seriously dating. She was quiet, observant and I saw a fellow introvert. She made herself at home and our relationship grew quickly. Later I found out that she loved to dance and when she had the choice to sit out or dance, she danced!

I grew to love her as my own daughter because of her willingness to step in and help regardless of situations or circumstances. My love for her was just as if I had birthed her.

Recently, I had the privilege of reading a document from her workplace where more than 150 coworkers and colleagues praised her for her kindness, her teamwork, and her eagerness to support others. She truly believed in giving people meaningful and memorable experiences.

Before the first *Black Panther* movie came out, she kept trying to convince me to go. Eventually, she took

me herself. We had such an awesome time, and to my surprise, I loved the movie. My excuse had always been that I didn't want to see any "cartoon movies." Boy, was I wrong!

She loved my husband and made him a special cake that he loved. Because she valued creating memories, she planned a family Mediterranean cruise where all my adult children, myself, her mom, and her aunts traveled together. We traveled the Mediterranean with stops in Venice, Greek islands, and Croatia. No detail was overlooked. She arranged everything—transportation, hotels, day trips, and more. On the last day of our cruise, she even gave us all matching t-shirts so we could take photos and remember the experience.

I will never forget the day that she and my son got married. Since she was from Texas, of course we all flew to Texas for a few days, where she had the whole weekend planned for us. From her 3 uncles each with a barbeque grill for 3 specific types of meat, to reception, games etc.

all before the wedding. And the wedding was another unforgettable experience that we still talk about to this day. She and my son, Rodney, were so happy! Again, she paid attention to all details even down to the reception!

At the reception, she provided a basket filled with slippers—matching her bridal colors—for guests whose feet became tired from dancing in formal shoes! Who does that? Obviously, someone who is always thinking of others.

My heart was filled with joy when Trish joined TSAKS! I knew that she would be a wonderful soldier for the Lord! She took His love and spirit wherever she went, whether it was on her work trip to the African continent or to her office in downtown DC!

If I were to summarize my experience with her, it would be like viewing the Aurora Borealis for the first time. You knew that something very special had happened and that God had just shared a little of His marvelous creations with you!

Thanks Abba! *Continued on next page—*

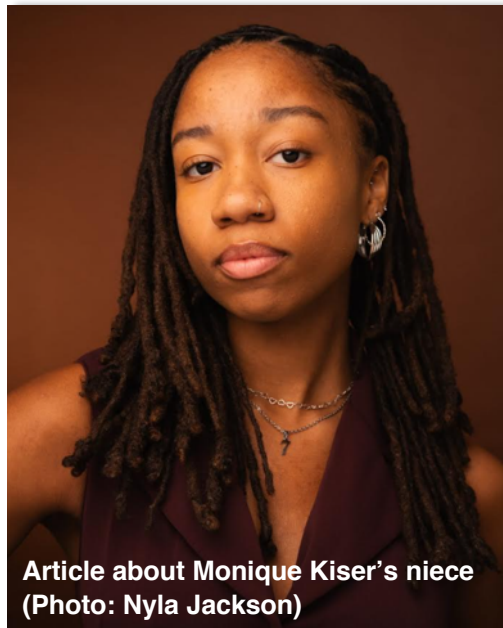




“Her life reminds us that faith can be joyful, love can be bold, and laughter can carry us through even the hardest moments.”

Nyla Jackson—Dancing To Her Own Beat

by Carlette Jameson



Article about Monique Kiser's niece
(Photo: Nyla Jackson)

Nyla Jackson is a senior at Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She is the daughter of Sherryle and Arvell Jackson, and the niece of Monique Kiser here at The Sanctuary.

Nyla was raised in the Glendale Baptist Church—now The Sanctuary at Kingdom Square—where she grew up actively participating in Bible Babies and other youth ministry programs.

Nearly twenty years later she has quietly become a dancing star to be reckoned with. She was recently featured in an online magazine called “*thiNKingDANCE*” about her latest production entitled “*Can You Feel It?*”

We are so very proud of Nyla and all that she is and that she continues to become. Her accomplishments and journey show us that when we nurture a gift and encourage our youth to stay on the path that God puts before us, that we will always soar high. May Nyla’s story inspire us all to move boldly to the rhythm of God’s purpose and keep dancing to the beat that He places in our hearts.

Here is her article.

[Dance Article on Nyla Jackson](https://thinkingdance.net/articles/2025/10/11/still-sitting-this-is-your-cue/)—<https://thinkingdance.net/articles/2025/10/11/still-sitting-this-is-your-cue/>

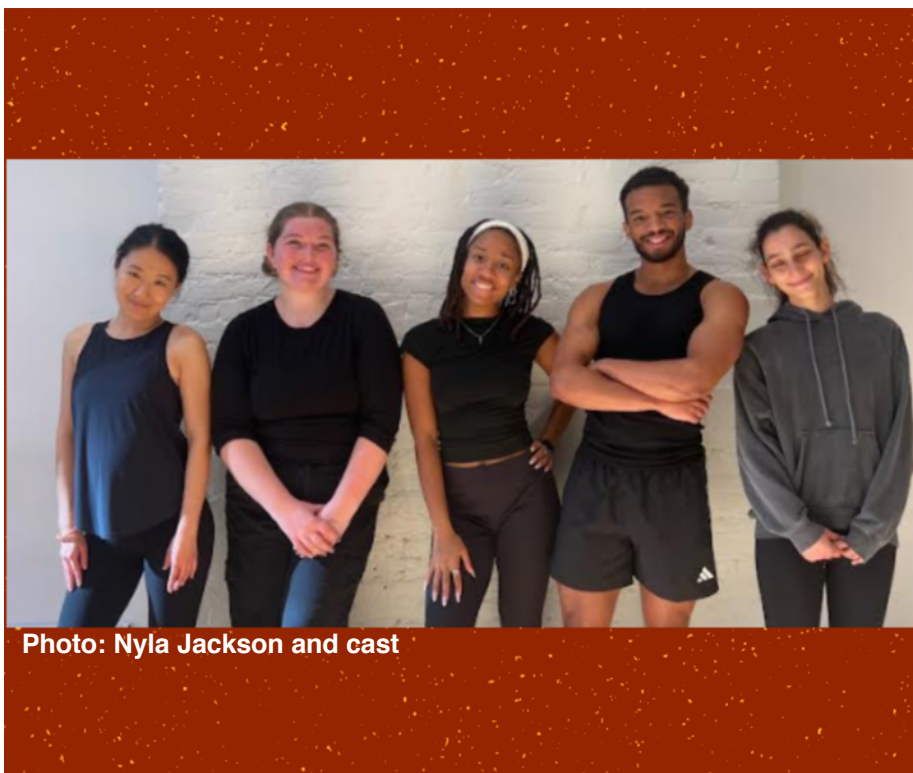


Photo: Nyla Jackson and cast

MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS . . .

Bishop Anthony G Maclin— Published Author

by Carlette Jameson



It is with great joy that we celebrate a beautiful milestone in the life of our Pastor, **Bishop Anthony G. Maclin**. For years, Pastor Maclin has faithfully poured into this congregation—guiding, teaching, encouraging, and praying us through every season. I am certain that he has touched your life personally in many ways. His leadership has touched countless lives, and his heart for God continues to shine brightly in all he does.

Today, we celebrate and honor a new exciting chapter in his journey as a published author. This accomplishment is more than just a book—it is an extension of his ministry, his wisdom, and the anointing God has placed on his life. We are blessed to witness this moment and honored to support him as his voice reaches even farther than the walls at The Sanctuary At Kingdom Square.

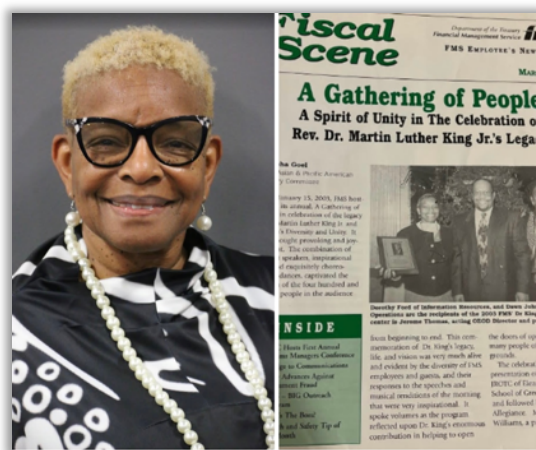
I invite you to join in celebrating our Pastor's achievement. Please take a moment to explore the link below and consider supporting his work. Let us continue to lift him up in prayer as God uses him in greater ways. (A year of Greater Grace, Greater Favor, and Greater Things!)

Amazon Link:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0G5DPS5L3>

A Little (Un) Known Black Fact of Rev. Dorothy Ford

(as told by Rev. Ford)



It's always quite amazing when we learn new information about people we have known for years. **Rev. Dorothy Ford** shared this with me.

"For almost 42 years I worked for one of the Treasury Department bureaus in multiple buildings in DC and Maryland. For approximately 4 years before I retired, I served as the Agency's Community Liaison for Northwestern Senior High School (Hyattsville) and Hyattsville Middle School. From within the Agency, I was responsible for the annual school supply drive and the fall/winter coat drives for the students. Donations were provided by the employees from three different DC/Maryland office buildings. God also let me serve as Agency Liaison to the St. Vincent Pallotti HS (Laurel). Each month I coordinated the collection and delivery of empty ink cartridges to that school so they could redeem and purchase more computer supplies. Bishop, these are God's blessings. They can also be called "little known black history facts."

We have a new Writer/Editor who has joined the TSAKS Newsletter Ministry

by JC McCreary

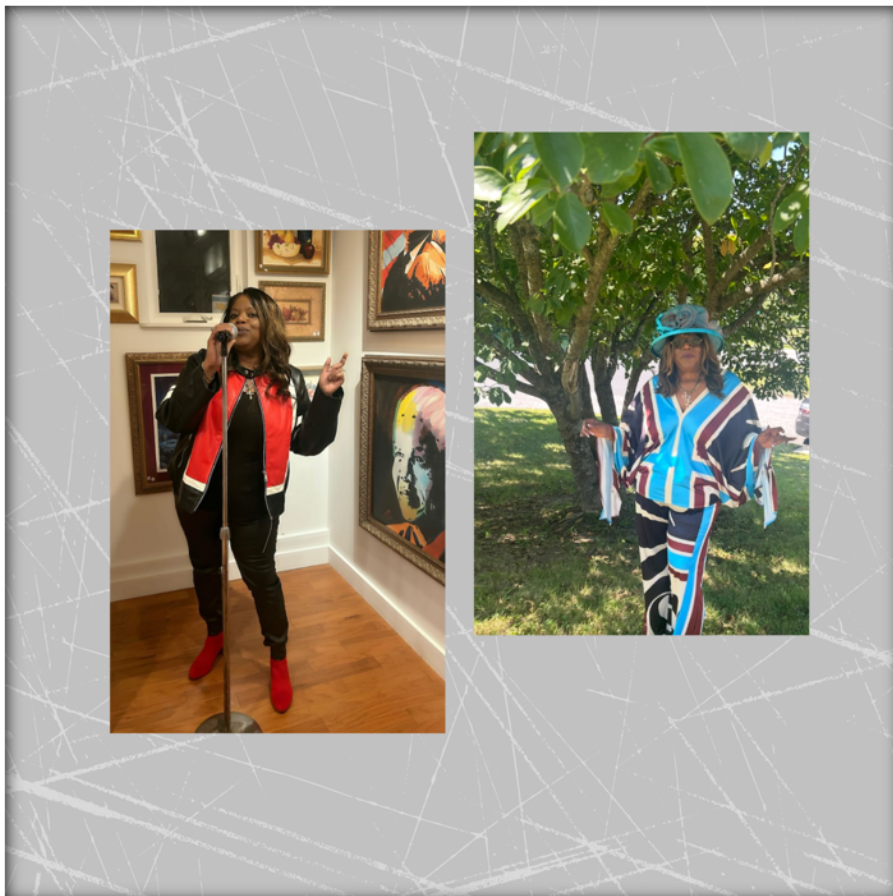
By now you may have seen me buzzing around the church, I'm **JC McCreary** and I have been a member since July 2025. In October I was given the honor of being one of the Writer/Copy Editors with the TSAKS Newsletter Ministry!

I call myself a native Washingtonian because I have been here since I was 3 months old. I grew up on Capitol Hill just a block away from the H St corridor (where the riots happened late '60s) and 1/2 mile from the US Capitol building. I was educated, for the most part, in DC area schools.

I think I have always loved to write. The writing however was brought on from my love of reading! I became fascinated with fiction and when I was 10, I started to put some order to all the stories that were already dancing around in my head begging to be put to print. That brought on the dream of becoming a Published Author.

It's funny now to look back and see that I was always writing or called to be the "writer" no matter the position I held. Before God granted me a career with the Federal Government, I worked as a shampoo girl in a salon and as a customer service rep for the Washington Post. I remember being hired by an apartment complex as a cleaner, however, within a couple weeks they put me on the front desk as receptionist!

Two years ago, I was contracted to write on a sitcom geared for television. A comedy called Union and an Urban Drama called Good Hope. I have written drug policy, HR processing procedures, and computer systems operations. I have also written how-to procedures, developed



training manuals, and created slides.

In 2010, at the age of 48, I finally got my first work of fiction completed and became a Published Author! In 2014, I did it again with a sequel. I am currently working on my third book.

In addition to writing, I love to spend my time studying God's word, fishing, cooking, decorating, and gardening. I am humbled and I feel so blessed that God had this life waiting for me! Now I get to use the talent He gave me to serve His purpose and the needs of His people in whatever way that I can!

God has allowed me to see my generations. I have 3 grown daughters, 2 grands, and 4 little great grands! My prayer is to bring them all into The Sanctuary at Kingdom Square.

WHAT'S THE 411? KINGDOM AGENTS



Baily Bridges is one of TSAKS' seasoned youth from the Kingdom Agents! She has been a part of the Sanctuary Family since she was born. When asked what she loves about being a part of the Kingdom Agents, Baily shared that it gives her an opportunity to be closer to God.

Baily is an 8th grader at Gwynn Park Middle School in Prince George's County. She is 13

years old. She really enjoys going to school for the social aspect of it since she is an only child. She does realize that she is in school to learn, but having fun with her friends and getting to hang out with them is a bonus in her book. **She maintains a 4.0 GPA.** However, Baily does admit that sometimes she and her teachers don't admit that sometimes she and her teachers don't always see eye to eye.

Baily loves food. She considers herself a "foodie". She loves trying new and different types of foods. She also likes doing and styling her own hair and expressing her creativity through dance. Baily participates in ballet, jazz, and tap, but tap dancing is her true specialty.

Outside of school, Baily loves encouraging people and lifting them up when they're sad and feeling down. She enjoys going to church and spending time with God. One of her favorite daily traditions is praying with her mom before school.

If Baily could interview anyone, she'd choose Angel Reese. She would ask her how and why she started playing basketball. She would specifically ask her, "Was playing basketball your heart's desire or did you play to satisfy everyone around you because you are tall?"

Baily's positive energy, faith, and love for others make her a true light in the Kingdom Agents. She reminds us that being yourself and staying close to God can make a big difference in the world around you.

Fun Facts about Baily...

- If she could go anywhere in the world, she would go to Singapore for months because everything there is so clean and beautiful. "It's different and I like to go to different places."
- FOOD makes her happy!





Cameron Montague is one of TSAKS' seasoned youth from the Kingdom Agents! He has been a part of the Sanctuary Family since he was 4 years

young. When asked what he loves about being a part of the Kingdom Agents, he said he enjoys how everyone is engaged in the ministry. He also said, "I love seeing the kids look up to me."

Cameron just started 9th grade at Bowie High School in Bowie, MD. He actually enjoys school and loves being able to socialize. However, Cameron has shared that he definitely does not like walking through the metal detectors every day at school.

When Cameron is not in school, he loves to make music and play basketball. He also enjoys writing poetry in his free time.

As a child of God, Cameron lives his life by being kind to others and understanding where they stand and come from, and how they operate with people. He says prayer is important to him because it strengthens his heart and soul. His relationship with God is strengthened daily by reading the word and making sure he attends church regularly.

When asked who he would like to interview, Cameron said he would want to interview himself as a kid. He would want to encourage his young self and tell him to "keep going and doing what you're doing kid."

Cameron's journey reminds us that growth begins with faith, and leadership starts with example. We can't wait to see how God continues to use him in the years to come.

Fun Facts about Cameron...

- If he could go anywhere in the world, he would go to Los Angeles for 3 months, because he wants to travel the world and go to places that he has never gone to before.
- Living makes him happy!



AROUND THE WORLD ON CHRISTMAS

by JC McCreary

Christmas is an annual tradition to commemorate and recognize the birth of Jesus Christ, as the Son of the Living God. It is celebrated throughout the world on or around December 25th.

Here are just a few places and their traditions . . .

First up – **MEXICO**

“Feliz Navidad” means Merry Christmas and in Mexico they celebrate the birth of Christ primarily on Christmas Eve, “Noche Buena” which means “the good night”. They gather with family at church and then home for a huge meal and fellowship. However the celebration is not held to one night as it is here in America.

The Christmas season begins with “Posadas” (which means inn, hostel or hotel) and is a festival held from December 16th to the 24th and reenacts Mary and Joseph’s journey to find a place to stay for Jesus’ birth. It often involves a procession with singing and the breaking of pinatas. The people are welcomed into individual homes for food, drink and prayer.

Christmas celebrations conclude with “Dia de los Reyes”. When translated it means “Three Kings Day.” It takes place on January 6th, (the 12th day of Christmas) and commemorates the arrival of the Three Wise Men. Children receive gifts brought by the Wise Men instead of Santa Claus.

The celebration meal may be a rich, flavorful oxtail soup or stew and for dessert, “Rosca de Reyes”, which is a sweet bread treat that has a figurine of the baby Jesus hidden inside!

Next – **FRANCE**

French traditions center on the main celebration, “Le Reveillon”, (Christmas Eve Dinner), which is a large, festive meal prepared on December 24th. It often includes seafood, turkey, and “foie gras” (the liver of a goose or a duck that has

been fattened through a process of force feeding or “gavage”, to make the organ bigger, richer and more buttery). Oh my!

Alsace, a city in France, is known for its elaborate and almost magical Christmas displays. Christmas trees are placed throughout the city along the streets. They are decorated with beautiful lights of all colors! And of course the celebration would not be complete without attending church services.

They do have a “Santa” of sorts whom they refer to as “Pe’re Noell” or Father Christmas.

Last, but certainly not least –

ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwean Christmas traditions start with church services. It is a special occasion so people typically dress up in new clothes or their Sunday best. The children believe that a “Santa Claus” brings them presents early on Christmas morning. They get the chance to show their friends at church and at the parties throughout the day what they received.

The day begins with worship. After that, they visit with family and friends, going house to house to fellowship with each other and of course there is a feast; a very large celebratory meal. This usually includes a dish with chicken, (which used to be very expensive in Zimbabwe), rice, and all kinds of vegetables. There is also dancing and singing of Christmas carols with traditional and modern music. Some homes are decorated with Christmas trees and other decorations throughout the house. Some households still decorate with various

plants and Ivy focusing just on the main living room. Presents are also exchanged.

Many Zimbabweans blend Christian practices with traditional beliefs including feasts to honor ancestors alongside Christian sermons. A lot of the people will put their stereo speakers in the window or outside of the house and play their favorite music real loud! It is not just Christmas music that can be heard but also the latest tunes and old African favorites fill the air.

Wow! What a trip, right? So what do you see that we all have in common? No matter where in the world, we celebrate the birth of God’s only begotten son.

Though the customs differ across countries, the heart of Christmas remains the same: Celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, bringing families and communities together, and sharing joy, love, and faith. As the Bible reminds us:

***“For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given; and
the government shall be
upon His shoulder: and His
name shall be called
Wonderful, Counselor, The
mighty God, The everlasting
Father, The Prince of
Peace.” - Isaiah 9:6***

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS . . .

YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE A BABY—The Real CHRISTmas

by Minister Robert Hines
TSAKS Minister to the Seniors



Firstborn children bring a lot of excitement to waiting parents. But if an angel were to tell you that you were going to give birth after being barren your whole life, and it would be a son in a culture where not having a son was disgraceful you would have reason to be speechless with unbridled joy. But what kind of emotions would you have if you were not yet married and an angel were to tell you that you were going to give birth to a son? And not just any boy, but the Son of God conceived by the Holy Spirit. This is not your typical birth announcement and may not be met with the greatest level of excitement, since sex outside marriage was a capital offense. This is not an entertaining soapbox drama, but the unfolding of God's eternal plan, surrounded by miracles and charged with emotion.

A FAVORED VIRGIN

Six months after telling Zechariah his prayer had been answered, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee (1:26), on another mission with another birth announcement. At the time, Israel was divided into three territories: Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. Nazareth was in Galilee, the northernmost of the territories. Nazareth did not have much going for it, except that two insignificant people lived there who would become very significant in the plan of God.

God is not limited to working within the same value systems we tend to elevate. Why Nazareth? Why Mary? Why Joseph? Because insignificant places and people are made significant when God shows up and leaves His fingerprints on them. Without His touch, those the world considers significant live in constant search for meaning and importance. Gabriel had another miracle to announce. It might have seemed miraculous that an elderly couple would have a baby, but it could be explained that strange things sometimes do happen. However, a virgin having a baby is impossible. Even angels should know that.

This time, the miracle was not the result of prolonged prayer. In fact, this miracle might not be viewed as a blessing. The birth announcement was delivered to a virgin, whose name was Mary (1:27). Being unmarried and pregnant would pose a very disgraceful, critical problem. If an unmarried woman became pregnant, the only conclusion would be that she was immoral and should be stoned to death as prescribed by Jewish law. If she were to claim her innocence by saying she was a virgin whose pregnancy was caused by the Holy Spirit, the charges of lying, insanity, and heresy could be added.

LUKE 1:26-28

Continued on next page—

The Real CHRISTmas... continued from previous page—

The angel said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you” (1:28). Why was Mary so highly favored? Why was the Lord with her in some special way? Why did God choose her to bear His only Son? Mary was certainly a remarkable young woman. There is no indication, however, that she was immaculately conceived herself, as some suggest, or that because of her role in God’s plan she should be the channel through which our prayers reach God. She was chosen by the sovereign decision of God, separated out from others to be God’s servant for a special task. God often works out His sovereign will by favoring common people like Mary and us to accomplish His purpose. The focus should never be on us but on the purpose of God that is being accomplished through us.

Mary was pledged to be married to a man named Joseph (1:27). Mary and Joseph were not yet married only pledged to each other. In that culture, pledging or betrothal lasted for a year and was as binding as marriage. It could only be dissolved by divorce, which is why it was said of Joseph that because he “was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly” (Matt. 1:19). Joseph was identified as being a descendant of David (Luke 1:27). Both of the genealogies of Jesus, recorded in Matthew and Luke, traced His lineage back through David, fulfilling the prophecy that the Messiah would be of the house of David.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE BIRTH OF THE SON OF GOD

Just as Gabriel had done with Zechariah and Elizabeth, he communicated God’s choice for the child’s name: “You are to give him the name Jesus” (1:31). It is in the name of Jesus that “every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the

Father” (Phil. 2:10–11). We must first know Him as Savior before we can know Him as Lord.

God’s divine plan of salvation would be accomplished through a never-to-be-repeated miracle. Gabriel told Mary that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her (Luke 1:35). This rather simple message contained complex realities that mystified Mary and around which we cannot fully wrap our understanding. The angel was telling Mary that the baby she would carry would be of divine origin. Her conception would not be the result of human action but of Holy Spirit action.

Mary’s response was, “How will this be?” (1:34). She would have every reason to question the validity of the message. Yet her question seems to be more for understanding the process than of accepting its truthfulness “Given what you say, how will it happen, since I am a virgin?” We may believe and accept the Word from God, but when viewed through the lens of our circumstances and our understanding of the laws of nature, the plan and promise of God can appear impossible.

The word given to Mary needs to be spoken into the life of every follower of Christ: “Nothing is impossible with God” (1:37). Our circumstances may make the transition difficult, but this Word needs to move from being intellectually believed to being the conviction of our hearts. We will face things in our lives that have no resolution, and we will see them as impossible. But when God is included in the equation, possibilities show up. Nothing is impossible with God!

Mary’s response to the plan of God was remarkable. Knowing the potential for personal embarrassment and disgrace, she said, “I am the Lord’s servant ... May it be to me as you have said” (1:38). Though Mary was favored by God, it did not insulate her from difficulty and hurt. In fact, obedience to the plan of God would lead her

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The Real CHRISTmas... continued from previous page—

into the potential of experiencing serious problems. But she viewed herself to be the Lord's servant, and servants serve their masters.

After delivering his message, the angel left her. Times of divine visitation are wonderful, but the moment comes when we are left alone. There are no angels. There is no further word from God. There is no one else with whom we can share our thoughts or questions. No doubt Mary would wake up tomorrow with a new set of questions, but who would answer them? Who would walk with her through the days of uncertainty that lay ahead? The words of the angel would become her assurance: "The Lord is with you." When we follow the plan of God, we experience the presence and receive the provisions of God.

Meanwhile, what must Joseph have been going through? He too was being asked to believe that God would accomplish His plan through him. Our commitment to pursue God's purpose for us will affect our relationships with others. God's plan for Mary needed to be accepted by Joseph as well. She could be pleased that in spite of big risks; he stood with her in her journey of faith. If your resolve to follow Christ is supported by spouse, family, and friends, you are a blessed person and should thank God that He is working in the lives of those around you while He is working in you.

Have a wonderful and blessed day in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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Source: William Barclay (Bible Commentary)

Luke 1:5-80 • Merry CHRISTmas!

GREATER SAINT JOHN CATHEDRAL

December
TO REMEMBER

MERRY CHRISTMAS JOINT SERVICE
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25TH @ 9 AM
IN-HOUSE | [YouTube icon] | 9:30AM

BISHOP KEVIN V. GRESHAM, SR.
BISHOP ANTHONY G. MACLIN

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