

CHURCH EVENTS AT A GLANCE

August

- 8 24th Annual Peach Festival
Fire Hall, 9:00 AM – 2:00 PM
- 30 Combine Blessing
EMT Building Yard, 2:00 PM

September

- 6 Bethesda Bible Adventures Resumes
Sunday School, 9:00 AM
- 21 Grocery Bingo
Fellowship Hall, 6:00 PM

October

- 19 Manic Monday Meal

November

- 8 Purse Bingo
Fire Hall, 12:30 PM

REGULAR MEETINGS

Official Board

Third Wednesday of each month
Fellowship Hall, 6:30 PM

I have commandeered Pastor Nate's monthly message so that I can address a subject near and dear to my heart: **sea serpents**. In our preparations for the Peach Festival on August 8, I fear we will forget to observe a very important date in the calendar: yes, my friends, Friday, August 7 is National Sea Serpent Day! In honor of such an auspicious holiday, we should perhaps reflect upon the significance of sea serpents in our religious tradition.



REFLECTIONS ON BETHESDA

Alas, Jesus never mentions serpentine denizens of the deep in the Gospels, nor did any such creatures nip at his heels as he strode across the Sea of Galilee. But we can be sure that he was well aware of sea serpents, and what had been said of them in the Old Testament. There, scribes and prophets spoke at length of the Leviathan, a water monster that terrorized the Israelites both literally and metaphorically. In Job 41, the Leviathan is described in great detail. Verses 33-34 note that "nothing on earth is its equal – a creature without fear. It looks down on all that are haughty; it is king over all that are proud." The monster appears also in the Psalms, where its existence is a symbol of God's creative work, and its destruction an illustration of God's wrath. Isaiah prophesies that in the day of Israel's deliverance, the Leviathan, a symbol of chaos and evil, will be slain – no match for God's punishing sword.

In our modern age, sea serpents have lost all of their threat, having been vivisected by the skeptical sword of science, or domesticated by the promise of tourism revenue. The fire-breathing Leviathan that once stood in for God's power and majesty, for the terrifying and unknowable enormity of creation, now exists as a curio. We allocate a little bit of amused and embarrassed attention to it just one day out of the year, and move on to another cute subject. Job asks, "Can you pull in Leviathan with a fishhook, or tie down its tongue with a rope?" We do it every year on August 7.

We think we have netted God in the same way. We lasso him, hoping he will do our bidding. We make light of him, pretending he won't bite. And we reduce him to dates on a calendar, hoping to manage him according to our schedules. In the end, God always escapes our baited hooks – but in the process we lose him. Like Leviathan, God appears to us on his own terms. *Apprehending* him is a different kettle of fish.



Preparing meals at the pork sandwich dinner in July.

OFFERING • JULY 2026

Service	Attendance		Weekly
<u>Date</u>	<u>9:00</u>	<u>11:00</u>	<u>Total</u>
7/5	15	29	\$1,218.00
7/12	Joint Service 54		\$1,016.00
7/19	8	38	\$2,396.00
7/26	4	26	\$1,280.00
Weekly required income:	Average weekly income:		
\$2,088.46	\$1,533.28		

Blessing of the Combines and Farm Equipment



August 30, 2026 • 2:00 PM

Choptank Road - behind the EMT Building

Peach Festival News



Saturday, August 8 will see Bethesda host its twenty-fourth annual Peach Festival at the Preston Fire Hall. As usual, we need all hands on deck to put on this event. We will be baking at the church on Thursday and Friday, August 6 and 7, and we need lots of help for this vital part of preparation for the festival. In the last few years we have baked over a hundred cobblers to sell – and every year we sell out! Baking will begin at 7:30 AM and will likely last through the afternoon on both days. If you can help in any way, at any time during those days, please let Kari Farnell know. Friday evening we will set up the firehall, and that process will include bringing the baked goods over from the church. If you can lend a hand, we could use you. Finally, please consider baking items for the Bake Table, as it is a huge earner for us. Peach-based items are preferred but not necessary. Brownies, cookies, and other small, individually wrapped items sell well, and are especially good for kids wanting a snack! Deliver them to the firehall Friday evening or during the festival on Saturday.

ANNUAL PRESTON SCHOOL SUPPLY DRIVE

SUPPLIES NEEDED - due in church by August 23

Glue Sticks
Pocket Folders with prongs
16-count Crayola crayons
Ticonderoga #2 pencils
1-subject spiral notebooks
Composition notebooks
3-inch sticky notes
Highlighters
Ziploc bags - any size
Tissues
Paper Towels
Clorox wipes

Skinny Expo dry erase markers - black
Pink erasers
Hand sanitizer
Zippered pencil bags
1-inch binders
Looseleaf paper
Colored pencils

Or...donate money to Kari or Pastor Nate and let them do the shopping!



Contact Us : 410-673-7538
office@bethesdapreston.faith



Local peaches
Ice cream
Baked goods

Scrapple
sandwiches
Soft crab
sandwiches

Crafters
and
Vendors

24th Annual **PEACH FESTIVAL**

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 8
9AM - 2PM**

Preston Fire Hall
3680 Choptank Road
Preston, MD

Benefits Bethesda Methodist Church

SCENES FROM VACATION BIBL



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4:13, NRSV



Continued from last month's issue.

The Sorrows of Captain Webb

One of the primary founders of American Methodism, though largely forgotten today, was the soldier-preacher Thomas Webb, who found himself torn between conflicting loyalties during the maelstrom of the American Revolution.

Webb first came to America in 1758 as a British soldier during the French and Indian War, and lost an eye at the Battle of Montmorency in July 1759, during the Quebec campaign. He retired in 1764 and returned to England the next year. After suffering from a deep depression, he came to personal faith in Christ and joined the Methodists. Returning to America in 1766, Webb began preaching and forming societies along the eastern seaboard. A colorful and charismatic preacher, he attracted crowds by ascending the pulpit in his red regimental uniform, black patch over his right eye, and laying his sword dramatically across the Bible as he began his sermon. After hearing Webb preach in London in 1773, John Wesley wrote:

Captain Webb preached at the Foundery. I admire the wisdom of God in raising up various preachers according to the tastes of men. The Captain is all life and fire; therefore, although he is not deep or regular, yet many who would not hear a better preacher flock together to hear him. And many are convinced under his preaching; some justified; a few built up in love.

In 1767 Webb visited Philadelphia and organized a Methodist society which became St. George's, today regarded as one of the mother churches of American Methodism. As tensions with England intensified, Webb found himself in a dilemma; while his heart was with the congregations he had served in his itinerant travels, as a retired British army officer his allegiance was to England. Even after war erupted in April 1775, Webb continued his preaching ministry, including in the city of Philadelphia, while the Continental Congress was in session. After hearing Webb preach in the city John Adams wrote in his diary, "He is one of the most fluent, eloquent men I have ever heard."

But Webb's loyalty to the crown eventually brought him



Thomas Webb.

trouble. He actively assisted British forces during the campaigns leading up to and following the Battle of Trenton in December 1776. In May 1777, Webb was ar-

rested, and spent fifteen months as a prisoner of war, most of it in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where his family was also detained. A letter survives from his second wife, Grace Gilbert Webb, to George Washington, begging the general's "indulgence" to let her return to Philadelphia, and parole her husband, so that the family could be reunited. Eventually, the Webbs were permitted to return to England, setting sail in October 1778. He never returned, and died in Britain in 1796.

A curious side note: in 1759 Webb had published a book on military tactics, *A Military Treatise on the Appointments of the Army* – a copy of which George Washington obtained in Philadelphia as he prepared to take charge of the Continental Army.

A New Denomination

The political crisis of the Revolution led to a sacramental crisis among Methodists, hastening the creation of Methodism as a church. Methodists felt twice orphaned, first by Wesley's opposition, and then by the collapse of the Church of England in America, as most parish priests either left the country or were isolated by patriots. In addition, the regular Anglican clergy and the Methodists in many places were suspicious of one another, and by now non-cooperative. The upshot was that there were almost no clergy to administer the sacraments to the Methodists. The combination of a scarcity of clergy and an independent spirit led preachers to press for an independent Methodist organization, and to be ordained to administer the sacraments. Much of the pressure came from the South, where a big revival had occurred: in 1777, sixty-three percent of Methodists were in Virginia and North Carolina alone. At a conference held in Fluvanna, Virginia in 1779, the preachers elected a presbytery to ordain each other. By now, Francis Asbury had taken over leadership of the movement, but he was stuck in a safehouse in Delaware. Through his emissary, William Watters, he persuaded the Virginia preachers to delay their plans for a year. Negotiations dragged on and included input from John Wesley, who staunchly opposed laymen administering the sacraments. The connection held together, but the need among American Methodists for ordained clergy remained acute.

With the Treaty of Paris of 1783, the American Revolution was over; in its aftermath, the Church of England in America had collapsed, and was yet to be rebuilt as the Episcopal Church. With a shortage of ordained clergy, Asbury and others appealed to Wesley for help. In turn, Wesley appealed to the Bishop of London to ordain a Methodist preacher for America, but was refused. In the absence of any other options, Wesley took it upon himself to take the next step.

On September 1, 1784, Wesley and two other ministers ordained by the Church of England, Thomas Coke and James Creighton, formed a "primitive presbytery" ordaining



Thomas Coke.

Thomas Vasey and Richard Whatcoat as deacons, then the next day as elders. They also consecrated Coke to be “superintendent” of the Methodists in America. Coke, Vasey, and Whatcoat then departed for America in order to act similarly as a presbytery to ordain American preachers, and to establish American Methodism as a

church in its own right. Along with his ordained emissaries, Wesley sent twenty-four Articles of Religion as doctrinal standards, and the Sunday Service (an adaptation of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer). He also sent a silver chalice, symbolic of their new sacramental life, which relic resides today at St. George’s Church.

On November 14, 1784, Coke finally met Asbury at Barratt’s Chapel, in Frederica, Delaware. After consulting, they summoned the Methodist ministers of America to a conference in Baltimore set for Christmas Day 1784. At this so-called “Christmas Conference,” which took place at Lovely Lane Chapel, a new denomination was born: the Methodist Episcopal Church. It is from this body that a number of American Methodist denominations are descended, including the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in 1816, the Wesleyan Church in 1843, the United Methodist Church in 1968, and the Global Methodist Church in 2022.

Francis Asbury

At the 1784 Baltimore Conference, Francis Asbury was successively ordained a deacon, an elder, and then consecrated “superintendent” – later, bishop. Coke and Asbury were the first superintendents. Coke, however would not play much role in the actual oversight of the work, as he shuttled between England, America, and elsewhere. Asbury soon embraced the title bishop, and established the authority of that office, setting the pattern for bishops who followed.

Asbury was the key shaper of American Methodism. Peripatetic and autocratic, he was the John Wesley of America,



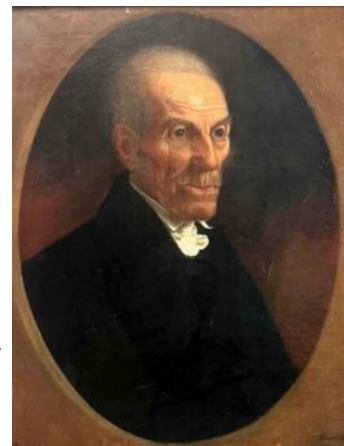
The Christmas Conference of 1784.

travelling an estimated 270,000 miles on horseback or carriage, preaching about 16,500 sermons (some of them at or near Bethesda), and or-

dainin more than 4,000 men. His was perhaps the most familiar face in colonial and early Federal America. It was said that a letter from Europe could simply be addressed, “Francis Asbury, America,” and the postal system would get it to him.

Born in Handsworth, England, Asbury came to faith in Jesus as a youth and joined the Methodist movement. He became an itinerant preacher in 1767, and during the 1771 Conference held in Bristol, he volunteered to go to America. He came to Philadelphia, where he preached his first sermon on October 28, 1771 in St. George’s. His journal and letters show an astonishing devotion and willingness to endure hardship. Like Wesley, Asbury was an autocrat and a strict disciplinarian, yet willing to make concessions to the democratic spirit of the age. In 1784, he was unwilling to accept Wesley’s appointment without a vote of the preachers to affirm that post. He was decisive, evangelical, and pastoral. Amid rapid growth over a large, dispersed area of expanding frontier, he gave the movement, then the church, direction and cohesion for 40 years. In 1776, there were 5,000 Methodists, in 1786, 18,000, and in 1816 (the year of his death) 214,000. And that’s only membership: in many areas attendance far exceeded membership. In America it was Asbury who made Methodism a true “connexion.”

As a preacher, Asbury was not dazzling or brilliant, but plain, practical, solid, and moving. Oddly, none of his sermons survive, only snippets and synopses in his journal, or descriptions by hearers. But he was clearly a charismatic man, with an “apostolic glow” who inspired huge numbers of young men to leave all and embrace the hardships of itinerant life. Henry Boehm, one of Asbury’s contemporaries, wrote of him, “He seemed born to sway others.” The George Washington of Methodism, Asbury set the tone and agenda that built the new denomination into one of the eminent American religious organizations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



Francis Asbury late in life.

Notes

1. W. Reginald Ward, and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds. *The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 22: Journal and Diaries V, 1765-1775* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 359.
2. John Adams Diary 22 (4 Sept.–9 Nov. 1774), in Adams Family Archives, online at the Massachusetts Historical Society, at https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/browse/date/all_1774.php; entry for Sunday, October 23, 1774.



BETHESDA METHODIST CHURCH

A Global Methodist Congregation

P.O. Box 147 • Preston, Maryland 21655

Celebrating Over 240 Years of Continuous Ministry

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Home Visitations: Fridays
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SERVICE & CLASS SCHEDULE

Sunday Services

Contemporary Worship
9:00 AM
Choptank Marina

Traditional Worship
11:00 AM
Sanctuary

Classes

**Bethesda Bible
Adventures**
On Hiatus for Summer

Romans Bible Study
Tuesdays, 6:30 PM

Contact Us : 410-673-7538
office@bethesdapreston.faith



Local peaches
Ice cream
Baked goods

Scrapple
sandwiches
Soft crab
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