

CHURCH CHAT

Butner Presbyterian Church

Pastors: Brian Stratton, Dewey Cassell

JANUARY 2026



A Message From Dewey

2026. Just writing it gives me pause. I can still remember the near panic 27 years ago as the world was about to cross the millennium mark. Some people genuinely thought everything that used computers – which was virtually everything - would grind to a halt. Others thought it might be the end of the world. But the ball dropped in Times Square at midnight and the world kept right on turning into the twenty-first century. And in what seems like the blink of an eye, here we are starting 2026.

But it's not just the start of the new calendar year, it's also the start of our new church year. Okay, technically, the church year starts with Advent, but much of that is, by definition, prelude. The birth of Christ is the focal point which drives us to the Epiphany on January 6.

Epiphany celebrates the arrival of the Magi to see the Christ child. It has also come to represent the revelation of God incarnate to the Gentiles. The story is recounted in the second chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Although Pentecost is considered the birth of the church, its conception lies here.

I believe there is a lesson we can learn from this story as we begin a new year. The Magi were looking forward to the birth of Christ. They were anticipating it, watching the night skies for evidence of it, eagerly awaiting it. I'm not sure we could be said to have the same outlook regarding the new year. On the one hand, I think many of us will be glad to say goodbye to 2025, but who knows what new challenges 2026 may bring. One might feel reluctant to be hopeful.

But hopeful is exactly what the Magi were. They traveled a great distance to see the child who was destined to be King of the Jews. Scripture says that when they saw the star over the place where the child was, "they were overjoyed." And they bowed down and worshipped him.

King Herod was afraid of him. Others passed him by without giving him a second thought. But the Magi recognized Jesus for who he was, even as he lay in his mother's arms. They paid him homage as they put their faith and hope in him.

In many ways, the world seems no less uncertain – and perhaps even more so – than it was over 2000 years ago. But perhaps our mistake has been in trying to endure it on our own. Perhaps we need to look to the Magi for inspiration, and put our faith and hope for the coming year in the Messiah, with whom all things are possible.

There is a tendency, especially when it doesn't fall on a Sunday, to allow the Epiphany to slip by us unnoticed. I encourage you to take a few minutes to read through the twelve verses from Matthew and consider anew what the Epiphany means to our faith, and how the example of the Magi might influence our outlook – and actions - in the coming year.

Wishing you all a new year filled with the blessings of God.

Dewey



JANUARY Calendar

THURSDAY, 1/1

HAPPY
New Year

SUNDAY, 1/4

11:00 am Communion Worship Service

Brian Stratton, Michael McFadden

Take down decorations after church

Pizza lunch is provided

ACIM Ministry

TUESDAY, 1/6



SATURDAY, 1/10

9:00 am Session Retreat

at Trinity Presbyterian Church, Durham

SUNDAY, 1/11

11:00 am Worship Service

Brian Stratton, Michelle Osborne

2:00 pm Butner Church Council Meeting

@ Community Methodist Church

WEDNESDAY, 1/14

CHURCH
Clean-up
DAY



SUNDAY, 1/18

11:00 am Worship Service

Brian Stratton, Erma Hudgins

SUNDAY, 1/25

11:00 am Worship Service

Dewey Cassell, Michael McFadden

New Year

Let the new year be about love. Let it be about joy.

Let be about hope, faith, trust, and about self control.

Let it be about people you love. Let it be about gratefulness.



Romping with the Pre-K

On Friday, December 19th, the Pre-K had their annual Christmas Program. It was standing room only as the students sang and performed for the audience. The photographer, Cecil Hudgins, was also running sound and could not get a photo of the little performers.

Afterwards, there was a reception with milk and cookies in the fellowship hall.



It was a packed house of family and friends of the Pre-K.

Pre-K teachers enthusiastically leading the children in their performances.



Church News

PIANO DONATION

Ricky Dixon, who attended this church as a child, has reached out and offered to donate a baby grand piano to our church. He is moving to a smaller home and has no room for it. We have graciously accepted his donation. It will be placed in the sanctuary and the piano currently in the sanctuary will be moved into the fellowship hall replacing that piano.

TAKE DOWN DECORATIONS AND ACIM

After worship on Sunday, January 4th, we will take down all the decorations and have a pizza fellowship lunch. Once done, we will go to ACIM to pack food boxes.

FELLOWSHIPS

The church gathered after worship on December 21st for the annual Christmas fellowship and white elephant gift exchange. The meal was catered by Q-Shack.

Our next fellowship will be on January 4th before taking down decorations. Pizza will be served.

If anyone has any fun ideas for future fellowships, please let Michelle know. We are always open to suggestions as well as help organizing.

CHURCH CLEANING

Our next church cleaning date is Wednesday, January 14th at 6pm. Remember, "Many hands make light work."

SESSION MEMBERS AND RETREAT

At the December 28th congregational meeting, Erma Hudgins and Nancy Wilkins were voted in to serve another three-year term. Our session currently consists of Cecil Hudgins, Erma Hudgins, Michael McFadden, Michelle Osborne, and Nancy Wilkins. Dewey Cassell is the moderator.

There will be a retreat for session members on Saturday, January 10th at 9:00 am at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Durham. The retreat will be moderated by Dewey Cassell.

See next month's Church Chat for a report on what we are planning!

One is Christlike

Genocide is biblical.

Loving your enemy is biblical.

But only one is Christlike.

Slavery is biblical.

Chain breaking is biblical.

But only one is Christlike.

Patriarchy is biblical.

Counter-cultural elevation of women is biblical.

But only one is Christlike.

Retributive violence is biblical.

Grace-filled restoration is biblical.

But only one is Christlike.

Segregation is biblical.

Unity is biblical.

But only one is Christlike.

Jordan Harrell offers this in her blog (jordanharrellwriter.com)

From the Editor

Reflections



I used to always make a list of New Year's resolutions and like most people, I soon got busy, fell into my normal routines, and forgot my goals. I still think it's good for me to have goals as long as I'm not too hard on myself when I am not successful right away. Incidentally, I did manage to achieve my goal to increase my exercise in 2025, and both Cecil and I are now noticing the wonderful physical results. That encourages me to continue.

As I go into this new year, I am setting only a couple of goals. Instead, I am becoming more reflective of the past. I've spent my entire adult life living in faith and serving God through church. I am always in church unless out of town or very sick. I am forever hungry for the Word. Through all that, my faith has grown and I have grown. I've always known that God is with me even when I'm being a little idiot. Hebrews 13:5 tells me that God will never leave me nor forsake me.

We know that God always hears our prayers and He works for the good of those who love Him. He works in His own time, which is hard because patience for me is hard. Especially during trials of my life, which I am currently experiencing. But this is how He tests our faith – through trials. This is where patience produces perseverance. Perseverance is also hard for me, but I am learning that it is worth it in the long run (just like all that exercise this year!).

As I grow older, I now think back to situations in my life and can see where God has done a great work either in me or for me. Situations that I couldn't see while in the throes of a trial. I have heartbreakingly lost much in my life in which I still talk to God

about. But I have also gained much, for which I am so very thankful. I constantly pray, "Thank you, thank you, thank you, Lord, for all you have given me".

I am so grateful that I have God and my salvation. I am grateful for my wonderful husband, Cecil and his family, my family, and for my friends and what they mean to me. I am especially grateful for my little church family who mean the world to me. I am thankful for the wonderful gifts of Brian Stratton and Dewey Cassell.

To the whole Butner Presbyterian Church family, thank you for your friendship, your patience, and your love. May we all together have the happiest 2026.

Peace,
Erma

New Year's Reflections

I was regretting the past and fearing the future. Suddenly my Lord was speaking: "My name is **I Am.**"

He paused. I waited. He continued, "When you live in the past, with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. I am not there.

My name is not **I Was.**

When you live in the future with its problems and fears, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not **I Will Be.**

When you live in this moment, it is not hard. I am here. My name is **I Am.**"

-Anonymous

Tickling the Grandparents' Funny Bones

I was in the bathroom, putting on my makeup under the watchful eyes of my young granddaughter. After applying my lipstick and starting to leave, the little one said, "But Gramma, you forgot to kiss the toilet paper good-bye!" I'll probably never put lipstick on again without thinking about kissing the toilet paper good-bye.

My young grandson called the other day to wish me happy birthday. He asked me how old I was, and I told him, 80. My grandson was quiet for a moment, and then he asked, "Did you start at 1?"

After putting her grandchildren to bed, a grandmother changed into old slacks and a droopy blouse and proceeded to wash her hair. As she heard the children getting more and more rambunctious, her patience grew thin. Finally, she threw a towel around her head and stormed into their room, putting them back to bed with stern warnings. As she left the room, she heard the three-year-old say with a trembling voice, "Who was THAT?"

A grandmother was telling her little granddaughter what her

own childhood was like. "We used to skate outside on a pond. I had a swing made from a tire; it hung from a tree in our front yard. We rode our pony. We picked wild raspberries in the woods." The little girl was wide-eyed, taking this all in. At last she said, "I sure wish I'd gotten to know you sooner!"

My grandson was visiting one day when he asked, "Grandma, do you know how you and God are alike?" I mentally polished my halo and I said, "No, how are we alike?" "You're both real old," he replied.

A little girl was diligently pounding away on her grandfather's word processor. She told him she was writing a story. "What's it about?" he asked. "I don't know," she replied. "I can't read."

I didn't know if my granddaughter had learned her colors yet, so I decided to test her. I would point out something and ask what color it was. She would tell me and she was always correct. It was fun for me, so I continued. At last, she headed for the door, saying, "Grandma, I think you should try figuring out some of this stuff for yourself!"

When my grandson Billy and I entered our vacation cabin, we kept the lights off until we were inside to keep from attracting pesky insects. Still, a few fireflies followed us in. Noticing them before I did, Billy whispered, "It's no use, Grandpa. Now the mosquitoes are coming after us with flashlights."

"Give me a sentence about a public servant," instructed the teacher during a lesson. One small boy wrote: "The fireman came down the ladder pregnant." The teacher took the lad aside to correct him. "Don't you know what pregnant means?" she asked.

"Sure," said the young boy confidently. "It means carrying a child."

A grandfather was with his grandchildren one day when a fire truck zoomed past. Sitting in the front seat of the fire truck was a Dalmatian dog. The children started discussing the dog's duties. "They use him to keep crowds back," offered one child. "No," said another, "he's just for good luck." A third child brought the argument to a close. "They use the dogs," she said firmly, "to find the fire hydrants."

BIBLE BOOK CLUB

NEW COLUMN!

Some of you may have considered starting the new year with a goal of bible reading but find it too overwhelming. It IS a lot - 66 books total and it's hard to read the whole bible in a year. So, don't make such a lofty goal. To help you on your journey, this new Church Chat column will help you start this journey of reading through the bible, bit by bit.

If you end up with a busy month and you didn't get your reading done, that's ok. Don't feel defeated and quit your journey. Just pick it up again the next month.

When reading for pleasure, always pick a version that is easy to read, like NSRV or NIV. Study bibles can really enhance your understanding of what you are reading. Devotional bibles can inspire you along the way. Whatever your preference, pull that dusty bible off the shelf, grab a cup of coffee, and let's start reading!

JANUARY'S READING CHALLENGE:

Old Testament: Genesis, chapters 1-25

Go from the beginning, to the story of Adam and Eve, Cain & Abel, Noah and family, Tower of Babel, and the whole drama around Abram/Abraham.

Psalms: Chapters 1-4

Consider these as little poems. Read one per week.

Proverbs: Chapter 1

This is basically part of an introduction to this book.

New Testament: Matthew Chapters 1-7

This covers genealogy (just skim through if you want), the Magi, Egypt & return to Nazareth, John the Baptist, and the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

HAPPY READING!



Heavenly Father,

Please make me better.

Change my attitude,
my approach, my mind,
and my reactions.

If I'm chasing the wrong
things, redirect me.

God, please bring me
closer to what's meant for
me.

Please make my days
useful, my nights restful,
my home peaceful and
my efforts fruitful.

I place my family in Your
loving hands in 2026.

Please care for us, protect
us, save us,
and bless us abundantly.

Amen