

2019 Vacation Bible School

Athens: Paul's Dangerous Journey to Share the Truth



St. Matthew's Episcopal and Blue Ridge Trinity Lutheran churches put on another fantastic Vacation Bible School this summer. This year, we held VBS earlier in the summer - June 24th to 28th - and the weather was beautiful all week. Zella Forsythe was VBS Coordinator again this year. Our theme was Athens: Paul's Dangerous Journey to Share the Truth. A light supper was prepared for the children from 5:30 to 6:00. Thank you to Pat Whitmore for coordinating these suppers, and thank you to her team of helpers: Linda Batson, Mary Cease, Linda Hokenson and Jo Miller.

To better use the available time, the children started their small group activities toward the end of supper – the groups were called Oikos in keeping with the Greek theme – during which they listed God sightings on special “tiles” that were hung on our God Sightings board. Following dinner, the children joined Fr. Orin for fifteen minutes of celebration time, singing songs and dancing. Thank you, Father Orin! The kids LOVED this part of the program. Celebration time was followed by a short, five-minute skit featuring men and women of the time talking about their spiritual trials and tribulations. The children (visitors to Athens from a faraway land) then joined the Apostle Paul in his tent, where he shared stories of his adventures in Greece. Paul taught the following lessons:



- Day 1: God loves us all. Paul shared his reasons for coming to Athens – to share the good news of Jesus and that God loves us all. He introduced us to Dionysius, a local member of the council who tried to discourage Paul from being so vocal about his love of Jesus.
- Day 2: God loves us and takes care of us, no matter what. Paul shared the story of a little slave girl who could tell the future (because she was possessed by Satan) and whose masters exploited this ability to make money. She went about telling the people what was going to happen to them and to Paul. Paul cast the devil out of her, and she was no longer able to prophesy and make money for her masters. The masters harassed and berated Paul and had him and the other men he traveled with thrown in jail. Paul told how he and the men sang hymns and prayed, causing an earthquake. Their shackles dropped off and the jail cell doors sprang open! The jailer, who would get

in trouble for losing his prisoners contemplated suicide, but Paul convinced the jailer not to kill himself. He converted the jailer and his family to Christianity through his love and kindness and stories of Jesus. The Children were able to experience what it was like to have shackles on their wrists.

- Day 3: God loves us even when others don't. The children were told of the verbal abuse Paul endured, experiencing for themselves an angry mob of men and women who mocked Paul for his belief in and advocacy for Jesus and who told Paul to go back home. The kids had to hide with Paul! They lit candles (electric ones) to show how they could spread the light by spreading the Word of God.

- Day 4: God loves us so much that He sent His only Son to us. Paul recounted how he changed from a persecutor of Jesus' followers to a zealous advocate of Jesus after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Paul had each child write their name and a sin they had committed on a colored "hand" and stick it to the cross to show them how, if they would take their sins to Jesus, he would forgive them.



- Day 5: God loves us and wants us to share his love with everyone. On the last day of VBS, Paul had to pack up and move on to the next town to share the story of Jesus with others. As he packed, he chatted with the children and read a letter to them from Dionysius in which he told Paul how he had finally come to be a true believer in Jesus after an entire week of expressing his doubts and asking Paul to quiet down and lay low instead of claiming Paul's love of Jesus to anyone who would listen. Paul left each child with a special letter from Paul. They shared their light with each other by touching their lit candle with the next child's unlit candle, which then illuminated!



Thank you James Laney for being the best Paul ever! Jim displayed a natural talent for telling the story of Paul. His soft-spoken manner put the children at ease, and he was a favorite of everyone! Thank you Patti McGill for being the director of all the skits! Patti put together a team of actors and actresses that did an incredible job of role-playing. Thank you to all the actors and actresses, including Patti, Samantha Cummings,



Tish Arroyo, Marci Turlin, Zella Forsythe, Nathaniel Cummings, Madison Arroyo, Dominic Brooks,

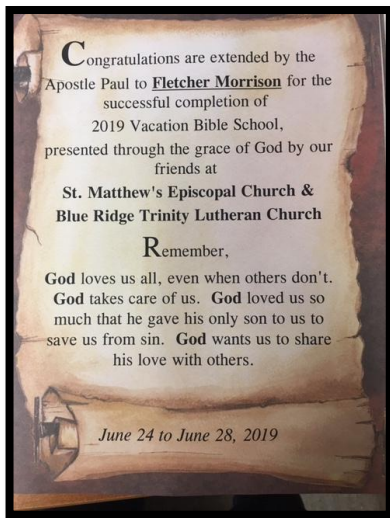
Christina Brooks and Barb Wegener. Of course, let's not forget the angry mob!! Thank you to Linda Batson, Joy Seese, Wanda Hirsch, Tish, Patti, Mary Cease, Judy Taylor, Christina Brooks, Linda Gerding, Carolyn Tyler, Chris Gannon, Pat Whitmore, Beth Cook, Darrell Cook and Linda Hokenson. Last but definitely not least, thank you to our Oikos Leaders Joy Seese, Wanda Hirsch and Madison Arroyo!



Following the lessons, the kids got to go outside for the Olympic games, where they did warm up exercises just like Greek athletes did before joining in team sports competitions. Games included a "javelin" throwing contest, three-legged races, bean-bag and ball tosses, hoop rolling, and a variety of other games. One competition involved one child leading another blindfolded child to a beanbag located somewhere in the yard. That was a hard one, and required one child to listen well and the other to be precise in their directions! Thursday night was our "get wet" night, where the children wore their swimsuits and cutoffs and got wet tossing water balloons and flinging themselves down the slip-n-slide. I think this was hands-down everyone's favorite game night! Thank you to the Olympic Games coordinators, Beth and Darrell Cook for all of your efforts putting together so many creative and fun games! A big "THANK YOU" to all the game helpers who made Beth and Darrell's job a little easier. Helpers included Wanda Hirsch, Joy Seese, Marci Turlin, Samantha Cummings, Judy Taylor, Patti McGill, Linda Gerding, Carl Turlin and Christina Brooks.



Following games, the children made Greek-themed crafts in the marketplace, including a lyre, a Trojan horse box, pottery, a necklace and a discus. They had to pay with one of three drachmas they were given each day. They also spent some of their currency at the food shop where they “purchased” cheese, grapes, dried fruits and other snacks. Thank you to Carolyn Tyler, marketplace crafts coordinator, and her helper Chris Gannon for all the fun activities! Thank you also to Samantha Cummings and Samuel Cummings for running the marketplace food shop! The children had fun making crafts and loved the variety of snacks.



The evenings wrapped up with another five minutes of Oikos time and ten minutes of singing and dancing. The kids went home well fed and probably a little sleepy after a full evening of food and fun! On our last night, the parents were invited in to watch their children sing and dance, receive special pictures, and be awarded a certificate of completion from the Apostle Paul himself.

THANK YOU to everyone from St. Matt's and BRT for their contributions of time, food, decorations, money and talent to make VBS 2019 a huge success!! Thank you also to the decorating team and the tear down team. The decorating team included Judy Taylor and Zella Forsythe (Athens), Linda Gerding (Paul's tent), and Fr. Orin, Samantha Cummings, Samuel Cummings and Nathaniel Cummings (marketplace shops). Tear down was led by Charles Cease with helpers Judy Roberts, Zella Forsythe, Mary Cease and Judy Taylor. Costume design was compliments of Beth Cook. Our photographer was the talented Linda Gerding. Registration was led by Linda Gerding with the assistance of Joy Seese. All around helpers were Wanda Hirsch, Joy Seese and Linda Hokenson. THANK YOU to these important contributors! We'll see you next year!



More pictures can be found on St. Matthew's website: stmatthewsraytown.org