

On Sunday August 16, our youth led worship with a “Montreat Sunday” theme sharing with the congregation about our week at the Montreat Youth Conference August 1-8, 2026. Our youth designed the worship service with liturgy and music from Montreat. They also wrote a sermon recounting each day of learning which is featured below.

Day 1: We Belong

Written by Gen Bellew, Sophie Coradi, and Ellie Baughman

In our first keynote, PJ (our speaker) shared what it was like being the only Asian child within two counties of South Alabama — excluded and mocked by other kids for how she looked. She explored what it means to feel belonging and reminded us that we truly belong in the kingdom of God. John 1:1–14, tells us that God came to join us in our wonder, coming into the world so that we would learn that we belong to God. We are God’s children and God loves us — and no matter how different we may seem, we all belong to Him, with Him, and with each other. Each of us received a bead as a reminder of that message.

During worship, Pastor Kate told a story from Camp Holston, where a girl once asked her to pray for her because she felt she was losing her faith. Kate told us that feeling this way is normal and isn’t a bad thing, it means our faith is growing and changing. She told us no matter what, God is holding onto us. She reminded us the Bible is not God, and our relationship isn’t meant to be solely with the Bible, but with who the Bible is about. There’s nothing we can do to make God love us more, or any less. We will always belong to Him.

The sermon on Monday night focused on the story of the Magi and how God calls us to seek Him, even when our faith feels uncertain or changes over time. The Magi were outsiders who followed a star to find Jesus, showing that God often works in unexpected ways and welcomes those who may feel like they do not belong. In contrast, the religious leaders Herod consulted knew the Scriptures and had the right answers but did not seek Jesus, reminding us that faith is about more than simply knowing the right things. Our preacher Kate emphasized that the Bible is not God itself, but is meant to lead us into a deeper relationship with God through Jesus. We were encouraged to remain curious, wonder, wander, and allow our faith to grow and change rather than becoming comfortable with simply having the “right” answers. No matter what season of faith we are in, God is faithful, loves us, delights in us, and holds onto us as we continue growing in our relationship with Him.

Day 2: We Are Blessed

Written by Kylie Simmington and Ellie Fisher

On the second day, we talked about how we are blessed. Our keynoter PJ told us she used to work near Temple University in North Philly, where students were warned not to leave campus because the surrounding neighborhoods were seen as “dirty” and “dangerous.” She then told us the story of Abram and Sarai — they carried labels with them too: old. barren. But to God, their identities were *more* than their labels. God called Abram to leave his home and identity behind, and gave them a new label: blessed. Labels are powerful, but they are not your identity. We are more than our labels, our true identity is that we are all blessed, beloved children of God, and that is who we are.

In worship on day two our preacher Kate told the story of Phillip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. She explained that God called Phillip to wander from Jerusalem to Gaza on a road with no direction. This is where he meets the Eunuch, The Eunuch was as outsider to all and was not permitted to worship God, but he was still curious about God. God sought him out, and through Phillip, he heard the word of God, was born again and was baptized. Kate explained that humans tend to build community through the exclusion of others, but our God is a God of inclusion. The world will push you to choose the easy route but if you listen, God will take you on a wild, often confusing and undefined adventure in the name of following the Lord. He will put you on a path of wandering and you may find yourself being the very person that helps someone meet God. She finished her sermon sharing that God is always with us no matter what and that God loves and cherishes each one of us equally. Everyone is blessed equally in the kingdom of God.

Day 3: We Matter

Written by Ryan Marshall, Teagan Bullock, and Garrick Bellew

The theme for day 3 was “we matter”. For keynote, we dove deep into Genesis 16 and the story of Hagar. God seeks Hagar out in her pain and calls her by name and gives her the same blessing He gave to Abram. Hagar names God- “el roi” meaning “God who Sees.” When one else thought she mattered, she mattered to God. We talked about how even if someone is a slave, or in a lower class of society, God will still spend time seeking them out and will still call *them* by name. They matter. If you have ever felt unseen or unheard, the truth is that to God, you are the whole world.

For worship, we learned that even though humans betrayed God and Jesus, we have been forgiven. We read the story of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and the difference between the peace of an empire and the peace of God’s kingdom. In an empire, blood has to be shed for there to be peace. Violence is always the problem. But God’s peace looks different. Jesus came to flip that problem of violence, and to put an end to all false prophets, injustice, and sin. Jesus came to build another world where the meek inherit the earth and the lowly will be lifted up. God’s peace will be for all.

Day 4: We are Favored

Written by Graham Hillier and Jack Simmington

We started Thursday’s keynote by reading Luke 21:26–38 silently, then did a “wonder and notice” exercise with a partner. Some of us shared our ideas— one teen said, “I wonder how to become favored, and why did God choose Mary and not anyone else.”

PJ shared a short story about a girl named Jayla, who had her first birthday party — her first cake — at fourteen years old. She realized, at that birthday, that she was favored by God, just like Mary. PJ left us with five things: Nothing is impossible with God. God is with me. God is within me. We are special, even if nobody told us or thought we were. I am favored — God chose you and me, like He chose Mary. We ended keynote with the “I’m favored” blessing.

In Thursday’s worship, we talked about how love can change the world, and how we are free to embark on a fresh start. Luke showed us that Jesus wasn’t the only reason for the season — Mary

was too. God chose a young teenage girl to bring God good news into the world. Mary's Magnificat is a song of mercy. She sings about what God is going to do in the world: lift up the lowly, and humble the proud. Our pastor reminded us never to shrink our faith down, because nothing is impossible with God.

Day 5: Remember

Written by Sarah Crill & Emily Marshall

Friday morning's keynote focused on the importance of remembering. PJ talked about how easy it is to remember the bad and forget all the good that God has provided for us. She encouraged us to take time to remember and reflect more often in our daily lives, explaining that when we don't, it's easy to skim over the important details — like the disciples in Luke 24, who didn't realize they'd been walking and talking with Jesus until after he broke the bread. We finished keynote by writing a letter to our future selves about what we want to remember from our week at Montreat about God and our lives.

Friday night's worship was the candlelight service. Kate spoke directly to us teenagers about the pressures we experience of needing to know what's next or having to have everything figured out. Kate also shared about how adolescence can be a period of “wilderness” -a necessary period of growth that can sometimes be hard to go through. She told us that even though it is hard, it is not a trap or punishment from God. Wilderness can also be a sacred place because it is where we discover we are on holy ground and God was with us all along. The hard things are holy. The joy is as holy as the pain. Kate invited us to live life as if everything would be okay, because everyone would be much happier and have a lot less stress in their lives this way. She reminded us that it's impossible to lose God's love and that we are right where we are meant to be.