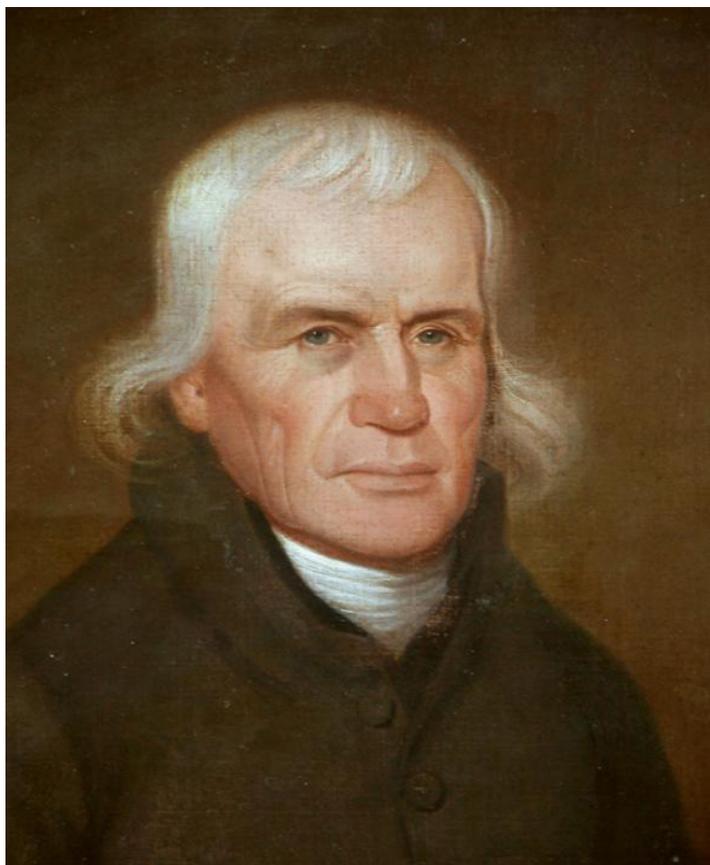


UNITED METHODIST ALMANAC

Words about people, places and things in our United Methodist and Christian heritage of special interest this week:

March 31 Francis Asbury (1816) *Pastor, Bishop*



The founding Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, Asbury was born in Hampstead, England, 1745, the only surviving child of Elizabeth and Joseph Asbury, a farmer. The family moved to Great Barr where young Asbury received his education and was apprenticed to a blacksmith. As a young man, he gave up attending his parish church for another whose rector was evangelical. In addition, he sometimes walked three miles to a Methodist Chapel where he heard Methodist leaders preach, including John Wesley.

At sixteen, Asbury experienced conversion. At eighteen he began to lead Methodist meetings and preach. At twenty-one he gave up his job and became one of Wesley's traveling preachers. At twenty-six, he volunteered to go to North America and wrote in his journal: "Whither am I going? To the New World. What to do? To gain honor? No, if I know my own heart. To get money? No, I am going to live to God and bring others to do so."

Asbury preached his first sermon in America here at St. George's in 1771. For the next forty-five years, true to his word, Asbury "lived to God and brought many to do so" in his adopted country. Alone among the British preachers, Asbury remained in America during the Revolutionary War,

when he was forced into hiding in Delaware because of colonial draft laws, refused take up arms in the Revolutionary War. After the war Asbury helped organize the Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore (1784). Elected and ordained deacon, elder and bishop at the Christmas Conference, he began ordaining preachers for the new church. In the years that followed, he led the preachers in a superb strategy of missionary expansion up and down the thirteen colonies and beyond the Appalachians. Estimates suggest he travelled 265,000 miles in this endeavor.

He summed up the Methodist message in his journal entry for September 27, 1807: "We live by faith in a prayer-meeting, soul-converting, soul-sanctifying, soul-restoring, soul-comforting God." Asbury died March 31, 1816 at age 71 in Virginia, while riding a circuit. He is buried in Mt. Olivet cemetery in Baltimore, Maryland. He was a primitive bishop, itinerant monk and holy man. He travelled until he died. He preached and prayed with people until they could hardly hear his voice. He spent himself in a way demanded of no one else. He was and is the very spirit of American Methodism.

A number of his possessions are housed in our museum, including a Bible, watch and straight razor. He called St. George's "the cathedral of Methodism" in America.