

Winter weather impacts North Mississippi churches

North Mississippi churches concluded a busy week of last-minute schedule changes in the aftermath of widespread ice and snow.

Monday, Jan. 15, the forecasted line of frozen precipitation began to fall along the majority of North Mississippi. The greatest precipitation amounts were recorded North of Grenada, though many communities in central Mississippi (including the Metro Jackson area) also experienced frozen precipitation. The Memphis National Weather Service recorded over 3 inches of snow in Desoto County along with over an inch in many Mississippi counties.

The real story quickly became the result of ice mixed with historic prolonged freezing temperatures.

The precipitation did not melt given the temperatures stayed below the freezing point for the whole week. Many cities set a record low temperature in the single digits on the Jan. 16 and 17.

Homes, schools, businesses, and churches all had to adjust their schedule or cancel.

Many churches made the decision to cancel Wednesday night services, but the hard decision was deciding on Sunday services after nearly a week of ice.

“People began asking me about Sunday services on Thursday,” said David Haynes, pastor of Trinity Church, Fulton. “Friday morning I texted with the three deacons on our deacon leadership team about planning for Sunday.

“At that time, our parking lots were totally covered with ice.

We decided that we would have virtual services Sunday unless something changed.”

Many church leaders took to social media to help update their congregations about schedule changes including Rob Armstrong, pastor at Harrisburg Church, Tupelo.

“Black ice is a real issue,” Armstrong said in a selfie video Friday morning from the church’s partially cleared parking lot. “Many of the main roads are clear this morning. The less traveled roads in neighborhoods and county roads are still an issue.”

The decisions for Sunday services were varied across the region. Some decided to move to all online and some condensed their schedule to one gathering.

“We made the call on Thursday that we would go to one service,” said Wade Stevens, pastor of Longview Point Church, Hernando. “Things were still pretty icy and slick. You get the rhythms of the last few days. You get the thaw in the day that lasts till the sunsets, but then things slick over again at night.”

“Most of the churches in the county (north, west sides for sure) canceled in person services, said Brian Tillman, Lee County Associational Mission Strategist. “A lot of these did Facebook services and the pastors had memories of preaching during the first part of Covid!”

First Church, Tupelo, made the call to go all online and stream two services as well as a small group session. Pastor Matt Powell began the stream on Sunday by saying, “Due to precaution, we are not meeting in person today. We are meeting online. And I know there are people all over this county that are tuning in to worship with us.”

Even though temperatures finally increased above the freezing mark on Monday, Jan. 22, smaller roads from Batesville through

Northeast Mississippi were still covered in ice.

According to the National Weather Service, temperatures will be warmer in Mississippi this week, but the main concern is flooding. Some areas could see 4-8 inches of rain.