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High Falls church grieves loss of drowned boy

BY LAURA CORLEY

UPDATED OCTOBER 12, 2017 7:27 PM

Boy who drowned at High Falls 'lived life to the fullest'

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MONROE COUNTY

More than 100 orange balloons drifted off into a pink-streaked sunset Wednesday evening as heavy hearts stayed grounded below.

Most everybody at First Baptist Church in High Falls knew Christian Burdette, the gregarious middle school boy who enjoyed chasing the bus with his dirt bike after school. Their shirts matched the balloons — orange, his favorite color.

“He packed more life in the little time he was here than some people who get to be 100 do,” Warren Burdette said at the balloon release in memory of his 12-year-old son. “I am in such pain right now I can hardly breathe.”

Christian drowned Tuesday at High Falls State Park, less than a mile down the road from the church. He was walking across the park’s tallest waterfall with his brother, 17-year-old James Burdette, when the two slipped and fell. James survived and had to be rescued by helicopter.

“The Lord was not surprised by what happened this week,” interim church Pastor Glen McCall said. “He was preparing us and we didn’t even know it.”

Christian had been baptized Aug. 6 after being moved by a service about salvation on the lake in late July.



Christian Burdette Special to The Telegraph

He had been “adamant and persistent about being baptized,” church youth leader Jordan Harmon said.

Youngsters signed a white cross topped with Christian’s motocross helmet in the church parking lot.

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“If they’ve got a motocross track in heaven, I guarantee he’s on it,” James said of his brother. “If they don’t, he’ll build them one.”

Helicopter pulls boy stranded on rocks at High Falls State Park



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A child stranded on the rocks at High Falls State Park Tuesday, Oct. 10, 2017, was pulled from the water by a helicopter. BY WOODY MARSHALL

High Falls Park Superintendent Josh Purdy said the boy’s death was devastating to the park’s staff, who knew him well from his frequent visits, walking from his house nearby.

Christian was the second person to drown at that waterfall this year.

In May, 38-year-old Daniella Flanagan was walking on the rocks of the falls with her husband when she slipped and fell. Flanagan died from her injuries shortly after the fall.

Purdy said the deaths are prompting discussions about signage and how to make the park a safer place for visitors.

Other deaths at the falls include:

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August 1984: Lee Durane Wyse, 16, of Los Angeles, died while swimming at High Falls State Park during a family reunion.

June 1982: Willie Davis, 26, drowned at High Falls State Park after he escaped work detail on Interstate 75. Davis was an inmate at Metro Correctional Institute. Another man who escaped with him survived.

May 1974: Eusebio “Joe” Lopez, 34, of Warner Robins, and 17-year-old Michael Daniel McCormick, of Centerville, drowned after the pair waded out in a restricted area of High Falls State Park below the dam and became “sucked into holes between rocks.”

April 1974: Seprenna Gantt, 15, of Macon, drowned while visiting High Falls State Park with a church group. Gantt entered a part of the park that was closed and had been warned by park officials, according to Telegraph archives.

July 1973: Arthur Willis, a 28-year-old from Atlanta, drowned while swimming at High Falls State Park.

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November 1967: William Edward Lalte III slipped on a wet stone and was knocked unconscious. Lalte, a 12-year-old from Macon, drowned.

April 1964: Benjamin Murray Oden, 16, was playing in the water when “apparently, he struck his head on a rock and was sucked under by the strong current.”

Drowned boy 'knew Jesus,' teacher says



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Amanda Webb said she didn't realize at first that it was one of her neighbors, students and church members who drowned at High Falls State Park on Oct. 10, 2017. Christian Burdette was 12.

BY LAURA CORLEY

This story was originally published October 11, 2017, 8:44 PM.

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