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**Addison, 'the prettiest angel,' laid to rest in Gaston County; Mourners receive purple ribbons, release pink balloons to honor child.**

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## GASTONIA

More than 200 people filled the Ragan Wesleyan Church in Gastonia on Saturday to mourn the death of a 2-year-old girl described as "the prettiest angel."

Addison Grace Lanham died July 21 at Gaston Memorial Hospital. Police say the autopsy report shows the little girl succumbed to sepsis, an infection of the blood. Addison also had a broken leg and had not received medical care, police say.

Addison's mother, Shanna Lanham, 32, and Lanham's boyfriend, Jason Wells, 33, were charged last week with involuntary manslaughter, felony child abuse and contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Lanham and Wells are being held at the Gaston County Jail on bonds in excess of \$1 million.

Lanham pleaded with the judge Wednesday to let her attend her daughter's funeral. She was not at the services.

In the church, a large photo of Lanham holding Addison and a half-dozen pink flower arrangements surrounded the rose-colored casket. Friends and family brought toys and stuffed animals to rest beside the little girl in the casket.

The service, which was officiated by the Rev. Don Jewell and lasted about 45 minutes, began with a slideshow of photos of Addison, accompanied by pianist Dolores Chadler. In many of the pictures, Addison sported a wide grin and oversized sunglasses.

Aleta Bridges, Addison's aunt, talked about the little girl's affection and joy during the service.

"When you would walk into a room, she would just be so happy to see you," Bridges said. "She would squeeze you so tight, sometimes you would have to take a second breath. There's not a doubt in my mind that Addison is the prettiest angel up there right now."

In his message, Jewell encouraged those in mourning to remember that Addison is in a better place.

"The days of aches and pains for Addison are forever over," he said.

Addison was buried at Westview Gardens in Bessemer City after the funeral service.

The family buried Addison in a lacy pink dress and handed out purple ribbons to honor her two favorite colors, said Scott Greene, owner and funeral director of Greene's Funeral Services in Gastonia.

Greene, who is Lanham's step-cousin, provided the funeral and cemetery services, including the casket, vault and burial space.

At the end of the service at the cemetery, mourners released more than 200 bright pink balloons into the sky. Greene called Addison "a real girly-girl" and said she would have appreciated the balloons.

Family friend Suzanne Dale, 29, said the large turnout reflected how Addison touched the lives of many in the Gaston County community in two short years.

Nearly 30 members of the Gastonia chapter of the Guardians of the Children, an organization of motorcyclists who educate the public about child abuse, attended the funeral services to support Addison.

GOC President Phil Middleton, 47, said he received dozens of phone calls from people upset about Addison's fate.

Neighbor Harley Leatherman, 21, was one of them.

"I just wish we could get some answers," Leatherman said. "This baby deserves justice and we're going to do what it takes to get it."

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