



1921 YEARS 2021
Mt. Zion Baptist Church

Dr. Addis Moore, Pastor

Black History and the Black Church

Galatians 3:26-29, Acts 10:34-35, Matthew 23:23, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Amos 5:24

It is impossible to talk about black history without talking about the part that the Black Church has played in it. Unknown and unappreciated by many is the role that the organized members of the household of faith played in changing the social landscape of America. The Black Church arises as a byproduct of the reality of racism in America. Prevented from worship with our white counterparts, we worshipped God with one another. And from there, the Black Church has always been significant.

The historical context for the Watch Night services that are currently held around the country on New Year's Eve is found in the beginnings of the Black Church. In the 1800's, slaves and freeman were gathered in churches on New Year's Eve praying together while awaiting the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

The Montgomery Improvement Association that later started the Montgomery bus boycott back in 1955 was not the brainchild of an elected official or government agency, but rather the product of community churches coming together and organizing strategic ways to mobilize people and speak out against racial injustice in the Jim Crow south.

In the 50's & 60's, the Black Church was not only a place for praise and worship but also a bulletin board for the African-American community; a center of political activism. Not only Martin Luther King Jr, but also Ralph Abernathy, CT Vivian, Fred Shuttlesworth, Bernard Lee, Otis Moss Jr., Andrew Young, Joseph Lowery, Gardner C. Taylor and a host of others find the beginnings of their national influence in the black churches they preached in on Sunday morning.

Vision: A Vibrant Community Living by Faith

Mission: Empowering People to Transform Themselves and the Community

2020-2021 Theme: "On Display for Christ: Living" 2 Corinthians 2:14 | 2021 Focus: "Living Out Our Faith," James 2:20

The Black Church has always represented the spiritual and moral foundation for the United States; allowing the Love of God that overflowed in their churches to spill over in our communities. So as we celebrate another Black History month, crediting those brightest among our people, we must be certain to give credit to that which has always been the backbone of our community & the conscience of our country, the Black Church. The Black Church is literally founded fighting for freedom. Seeking to establish our spiritual and social identity. And in times such as these, where many work to make a minimum wage lower than the living wage in our country...where brothers & sisters are still violently victimized because of the color of their skin...where many in power are more concerned with economics than ethics.

It is impossible to talk about Black History without talking about the Black Church. And this month, we ought to take time to celebrate her and all God has done for our people through her. But, as we celebrate her, we must also see this time as a call to arms; a reminder of whom we are accountable to. We are accountable to the God we serve and of all of His children who we are charged to introduce Christ to. Knowing what legacy was left to us, this month, we must ask ourselves: what is the legacy will we leave behind?

Black people in America also supported the autonomy of their congregation to make decisions independent of larger church body. Other early Black Church milestones included the Baptist and Episcopal denominations. The First African Baptist Church of Savannah, Georgia began in 1777. This is said to be the oldest Black church in North America. Originally called the First Colored Church the pastoral life of George Leile's preaching is tied to its beginning.

In the Southern states beginning in the 1770s, increasing numbers of slaves converted to evangelical religions such as the Methodist and Baptist faiths. Many clergy within these denominations actively promoted the idea that all Christians were equal in the sight of God, a message that provided hope and sustenance to the slaves. They also encouraged worship in ways that many Africans found to be similar, or at least adaptable, to African worship patterns, with enthusiastic singing, clapping, dancing, and even spirit-possession. Still, many white owners and clergy preached a message of strict obedience, and insisted on slave

attendance at white-controlled churches, since they were fearful that if slaves were allowed to worship independently they would ultimately plot rebellion against their owners. It is clear that many blacks saw these white churches, in which ministers promoted obedience to one's master as the highest religious ideal, as a mockery of the "true" Christian message of equality and liberation as they knew it.

In the slave quarters, however, African Americans organized their own "invisible institution." Through signals, passwords, and messages not discernible to whites, they called believers to "hush harbors" where they freely mixed African rhythms, singing, and beliefs with evangelical Christianity. We have little remaining written record of these religious gatherings. But it was here that the spirituals, with their double meanings of religious salvation and freedom from slavery, developed and flourished; and here, too, that black preachers, those who believed that God had called them to speak his Word, polished their "chanted sermons," or rhythmic, intoned style of extemporaneous preaching. Part church, part psychological refuge, and part organizing point for occasional acts of outright rebellion (Nat Turner, whose armed insurrection in Virginia in 1831 resulted in the deaths of scores of white men, women, and children, was a self-styled Baptist preacher), these meetings provided one of the few ways for enslaved African Americans to express and enact their hopes for a better future.