

# Saint John AME Church, Downtown Birmingham

Season of Lent



**February 14, 2024, at 6:00 PM**



**The Reverend Dr. Ronald D. Sterling, Pastor**

The Reverend Dwight E. Dillard, Sr., Presiding Elder  
The Right Reverend Harry L. Seawright, Presiding Prelate  
The Reverend Sherita M. Seawright, Episcopal Supervisor

708 Fifteen Street, North | Birmingham, Alabama 35203  
205.251.3764 office | 205.251.5755 fax  
Email: [sjamec@bellsouth.net](mailto:sjamec@bellsouth.net) | Website: [stjohnbirmingham.com](http://stjohnbirmingham.com)

## THE LENTEN SEASON

The early Christians observed the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection with great devotion, and it became the custom of the church to observe 40 days of spiritual preparation leading up to Easter. This was a time when people who have been separated from the community of faith because of their sins were reconciled through penitence and forgiveness and restored through the life of the church.

In this way, the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. And we ought to know the need of renewing our Christian faith. I invite you then, in the name of Jesus Christ, to observe a Holy Lent through the spiritual disciplines of, self-examination, prayer, fasting, self-denial, and by reading and meditating on God's Holy Scripture.

Scott Waalkes writes in *The Fullness of Time in a Flat World* that “Observing Lent can help us enter the fullness of God. In the broadest sense, Lent re-enacts Jesus’ turn toward Jerusalem and his turn toward the suffering that culminates on the cross. It is a season of preparation for Holy Week and Easter, and in the early church, it was a time to prepare catechumens [convert to Christianity] before their baptism on Easter.”<sup>1</sup>

### Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent. Putting ashes on our heads as a form of penitence is a practice inherited from Jewish tradition. Ashes, for Jews and Christians alike, are a sign of repentance, sorrow, and mourning. The King of Nineveh believed the prophecy of Jonah and fasted for forty days wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes to save the city, and ordered the people to do so, too (Jonah 3:4-10). Jeremiah calls Israel to “wallow in ashes” of repentance (Jeremiah 6:26). Abraham speaks of being unworthy to speak with God because he is “but dust and ashes” (Genesis 2:7). Jesus also refers to this symbol in Matthew 11:21.

We cannot appreciate God’s infinite mercy if we do not realize we need mercy. We cannot understand salvation apart from our recognition of our need to be saved, rescued, from our sin, which otherwise separates us forever from God. Ashes remind us of this need. When we wear the ashes on our heads, we also acknowledge the sacrifice of Christ, who forever substituted His own death for the “burnt offerings” made by Old Testament priests to atone for the sins of the people.

The ashes imposed on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday remind us of our unworthiness and sinfulness—sinfulness that corrupts and stains us and leads to death (we return to the dust from when we came.) Ashes remind us of our original sin and our need for redemption—our need to be cleansed of sin and made worthy of Salvation.

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<sup>1</sup>Scott Waalkes, *The Fullness of Time in a Flat World: Globalization and the Liturgical Year* (2010)

# *Order of Worship*

## The Choral Call to Worship

### "We Have Come Into This House"

By Bruce Ballinger

*We have come into His house And gathered in His name to worship Him, We have come into His house  
And gathered in His name to worship Him, We have come into His house And gathered in His name to  
worship Him Worship Him, Christ, the Lord.*

*So, forget about yourself And concentrate on Him and worship Him So, forget about yourself And  
concentrate on Him and worship Him So, forget about yourself And concentrate on Him and worship  
Him Worship Him, Christ, the Lord.*

*Let us lift up holy hands And magnify His Name and worship Him Let us lift up holy hands And magnify  
His Name and worship Him Let us lift up holy hands And magnify His Name and worship Him Worship  
Him, Christ, the Lord.*

### **The Silent Meditation**

If you have sinned, do not lose hope because of your error. Pray instead.

On the other hand, if you have done something good, never presume too much on account of  
your goodness. Never congratulate yourself excessively.

Never look down on someone else for sinning, and remember that when the wayward soul  
prays and repents of doing wrong, the Lord will raise that person up, as he did Lazarus.

*Aelfric of Eynsham (c.955 – c. 1010)*

### **The Doxology**

### **The Call to Worship**

**Minister:** O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee in a dry and  
thirsty land, where no water is.

**People:** **To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.**

**Minister:** Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.

**People:** **Thus, will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.**

**ALL:** I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. Praise  
ye the Lord!

**The Hymn of Preparation** .....Hymn #272  
"Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior"

Pass me not, O gentle Savior, Hear my humble cry;  
While on others Thou art calling,  
Do not pass me by.

Refrain: *Savior, Savior, Hear my humble cry,  
While on others Thou art calling, Do not pass me by.*

Let me at Thy throne of mercy; Find a sweet relief;  
Kneeling there in deep contrition, Help my unbelief.

Trusting only in Thy merit, Would I seek Thy face;  
Heal my wounded, broken spirit, Save me by Thy grace.

Thou the spring of all my comfort, More than life to me,  
Whom have I on earth beside Thee, Whom in Heav'n but Thee.

**The Corporate Prayer of Confession (Unison)**

Lord, we confess our sins before you. We confess that we have fallen short of your glory and your intent for our lives. Open our eyes that we may see ourselves with clarity and truthfulness, that we may have eyes to see all of that within us that is not pleasing to you.

**The Prayer** ..... Pastor Ronald C. Wright, Jr.  
*THE STAR, Pell City, Alabama*

**The Prayer Response**..... "I Give Myself Away"

*I give myself away I give myself away So You can use me  
I give myself away I give myself away So You can use me Here I am  
Here I stand Lord; my life is in your hands Lord, I'm longing to see  
Your desires revealed in me I give myself away*

**The Worship Thru Music**.....The Choir

**The Scripture Readings**

Old Testament..... Sister Kate Tinney Albright

**Joel 2:12-18**

"Yet even now," declares the LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments." Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber. Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep and

say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

New Testament..... Rev. Xavier Beasley

**II Corinthians 5:20 - 6:2**

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. <sup>2</sup> For he says, "In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation

Gospel..... Sis. Kim C. Sterling

**Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18**

"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**The Decalogue (Summary)**

Hear what Christ our Savior saith, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment, and the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,  
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.*

**The Imposition of Ashes**

(Instrumentalists are to play softly)

And the minister shall say, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust, you shall return."

**Offertory**

**The Worship through Music** ..... The Choir

**The Message**..... Rev. Dr. Jermaine Gadson

## **The Invitation to Christian Discipleship**

### **The Passing of the Peace**

Leader: Since we are reconciled to God and accepted into his household, we have his peace as brothers and sisters in Christ. Offer the Peace of Christ to one another as brothers and sisters.

The peace of Christ be with you all.

People: And also with you.

### **Benediction**

## *Guest Preacher*



Rev. Dr. Jermaine Gadson is a native of Birmingham, AL. He has earned a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Religion with a concentration in Congregational Studies and a minor in Classics, a Master of Divinity, and a Doctoral of Ministry from Samford University. He is currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in Biblical Christian Leadership.