

# Saint John & Saint Paul AME Church

Season of Lent



**March 5, 2025, at 6:00 PM**



**The Reverend Dr. Ronald D. Sterling, Pastor**  
**The Reverend Brian K. Blackwell, Pastor, Saint Paul AME Church, Smithfield**  
**and Executive Director of Retirement Services**  
**The African Methodist Episcopal Church**

The Reverend Dwight E. Dillard, Sr., Presiding Elder  
Bishop Julius H. McAllister, Jr, Presiding Prelate of the Ninth Episcopal District  
Mrs. Deana Young McAllister, Episcopal Supervisor

## THE LENTEN SEASON

The early Christians observed the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection with deep devotion, leading to the tradition of 40 days of spiritual preparation before Easter. During this period, individuals who had been estranged from the faith community due to their sins were reconciled through acts of penitence and forgiveness, thereby being restored to the life of the church.

This practice reminded the entire congregation of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ, highlighting the importance of renewing one's Christian faith. Therefore, I invite you, in the name of Jesus Christ, to observe a Holy Lent through the disciplines of self-examination, prayer, fasting, self-denial, and 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’s 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** .....Rev. Dr. Ronald D. Sterling  
*Pastor, Saint John AME Church, Birmingham*

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**..... Rev. Brian K. Blackwell  
*Pastor, St. Paul AME Church, Smithfield*  
*Executive Director of Retirement Services*  
*The African Methodist Episcopal Church*

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 #258

“Just As I Am, Without One Plea”

Just as I am, without one plea,  
But that thy blood was shed for me,  
And that thou bidd'st me come to thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, though tossed about  
With many a conflict, many a doubt,  
Fightings and fears within, without,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;  
Sight, riches, healing of the mind,  
Yea, all I need, in thee to find,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, thou wilt receive,  
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
Because thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am; thy love unknown  
Has broken ev'ry barrier down;  
Now to be thine, yea, thine alone,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

**The Corporate Prayer of Confession (Unison)** ..... Rev. Dr. Ronald D. Sterling

*Pastor, Saint John AME Church, Birmingham*

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** ..... Rev. Xavier Beasley

**The Prayer Response..... “Give Me A Clean Heart”**

Give me a clean heart  
So I may serve Thee.  
Lord, fix my heart  
So that I may be used by Thee.

For I’m not worthy  
Of all these blessings.  
Give me a clean heart,  
And I’ll follow Thee.

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

**The Scripture Readings**

Old Testament..... Brother Brandon Cleveland

**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..... Brother Shaun Barnes

**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..... Brother Mark Brooks

**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.

**Gloria Patri**

*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**..... The Reverend Dwight E. Dillard, Sr.  
*Presiding Elder of the Birmingham Florence Tuscaloosa District*

**The Invitation to Christian Discipleship**

**The Passing of the Peace**..... **Rev. Dr. Ronald D. Sterling**

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**