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THE LIVING CHURCH

The Story of Christmas

From the papers of Carl Murphy

For many years the AFRO has published the story of the birth of Christ as it is told in the second chapters of St. Matthews and St. Luke's gospels.

But the gospels say nothing as to the day of Christ's birth and the early church did not celebrate it.

In time, however, the Christians of Egypt came to regard Jan. 6, as the date of the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles and the custom of celebrating the coming of the Saviour on that day gradually spread until by the Fourth Century, it was universally established in the East.

By the end of the Third Century, the Western church, which had never recognized the 6th of January as the date of the Nativity, adopted the 25th of December as the true date and in time its decision was accepted also by the Eastern church.

How Church Started

What led the church to institute the festival of Christmas? It is told by one writer that Egyptian and Syrian custom dictated celebration of December 25 as the birthday of the Sun, at which time lights were kindled in token of festivity.

In these celebrations, Christians also took part.

Paganism and Christianity were rivals but eventually, as Christianity began to predominate, the Christian fathers took counsel and chose to celebrate the birthday of Jesus on December 25 in order to transfer the devotion of the heathen from the Sun to Him who was called the Son of Righteousness.

Astrate, the Egyptian Goddess who conceived and bore a son on that day, for us became the Virgin Mary.

Jesus Great Teacher

The issue of authenticity of this story has hung long is the balance, but it is indisputable even in these times that Jesus was a great teacher.

So it seems appropriate this year to emphasize not so much the manner and time of Christ's birth, but the manner of man he was.

The Christ Child was humbly born, even by the standards of the poor people of nearly two thousand years ago.

He grew to manhood in a carpenter's home, and eventually went about the country preaching and teaching the simple doctrine that people should live peacefully together, deal fairly with each other and respect one another.

He had the answer to fears such as grip many nations and many people in these times. Fears that there shall not be enough oil, or gas, or food, or shelter.

Said He, God feeds the sparrows and the ravens, He clothes the lily. He numbers the hairs on your head, how much more will He protect and keep you.

Had Answer for Prejudice

He had the answer to race prejudice (St. Luke 6:22, 23): "Blessed are ye when men shall hate you and when they shall separate you from their company and shall reproach you and cast out your name as evil...

"Rejoice.... leap for joy... your reward is great in heaven...for in like manner did their fathers unto the prophets."

He counseled that a good rule to follow in order to insure happiness and contentment, was to do only those things unto others that you would most desire they do unto you.

He picked twelve associates from the ranks and by the power of his personal conviction transformed them into an organization which has carried on victoriously for nineteen centuries.

While he preached nonviolence, he was no coward. He condemned evil and hypocrisy, whipped money changers out of the temple, defied the majority when it was wrong, and did not cringe or beg for mercy when those who called him a radical hanged him to a cross.

Yet, even as He died, He found the inner peace that He preached. He forgave his enemies, who, He said did not understand Hlim.

This is the simple and beautiful story that will be told all over the Christian world next week.

It is to the world's discredit that all men will not heed it. For men still believe that peace comes by conquering others instead of themselves.

They have not heard the Christmas message that there shall be peace for men of good will. That it is more blessed to give than to get; to stand firmly for principles than to compromise; to hate evil rather than be evildoers.

End All Injustices

The world prays for peace. But in many places, there is none because most nations, including our own, regard the teaching of Jesus as an ideal rather than a practical way of life.

In this Yuletide season, when the spirit of goodwill and friendliness is at its peak, we might well say to our nations: End all the injustices that beset the people of this earth who can be identified in the national conscience by reflected parading legions.

Jesus would say: Do away with it, because it is just and will lead to peace on earth.

If there were any other way, the Greatest Teacher of all times would have told us. There is none.

Nevertheless, our way is clear. We can pray that the blessed benediction of peace will come upon America, and we can work and fight until free people can walk gracefully and gratefully in the lasting faith His life has taught us.

AFRO photo by Mark Gail

35 YEARS — The Rev. Donald O. Wilson, pastor of St. James Episcopal Church, Lafayette and Arlington Ave., celebrated his 35th anniversary in the ministry on Dec. 11. He is shown with his wife, Mrs. Theda Wilson. Rev. Wilson has been pastor of St. James for 16 years. More than 100 friends and members of Rev. Wilson spent an evening with the honoree at the Warren room for the anniversary celebration.

Rev. Ben Chavis speaks on role of the church

By Sue Williams
AFRO Staff Writer

The Rev. Ben Chavis, the political activist of the 60s who was the last member of the celebrated "Wilmington 10" to be released from prison, said last week that if the church in Baltimore would take up the plight of the poor and the oppressed there would be a marked change in conditions here.

But because the church and the state, he said, are closely aligned and in many cases are synonymous, many people suffer.

"For too long," he said, "the church has been aligned with the state. Citing the support of evangelist Billy Graham in the campaign and administration of former President Richard Nixon, Chavis suggested that with theclose association between politics and religion, it was unrealistic to expect that the church could carry out what he feels are its obligations to people in need.

"Our churches are racist because our society is racist," he said, "and while I don't make a race analysis in everything...in cases where it (race) is clearly an issue, I have a responsibility to speak out.

Chavis made his remarks to a group of students last week at the University of Baltimore at Maryland. His appearance in the city came one day after the landmark decision of the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals to reverse the convictions of the Wilmington 10.

Up until the reversal of the conviction, Chavis had been free on parole. He was released from prison just last year, and vowed, upon his release, to continue the civil rights struggle.

One of the reasons the struggle went down in the 70s is because black leaders did not step forth and tell people, or let people know what to do," he said. He said, the dilemma of the Wilmington 10 and "other political prisoners" makes it imperative for the struggle to continue.

"We were not put in prison because of what we did," he said, matter-of-factly. "We were put in prison to scare other black Americans into abandoning the fight. It worked; people did not speak out because they were afraid of being thrown in jail."

But, Chavis contended his experiences have only reaffirmed his conviction to the struggle for freedom of black Americans.

"People are ready to struggle in Baltimore," he said. "They just don't know how."

Chavis, who said that he believed in the nonviolent principles of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said that the struggle that will evolve in this generation will be broader than that of the Sixties.

"I don't believe in violence," he said. "The oppressed must always make sure that their tactics do not take on the character of the oppressor."

But, he said he feels that the capitalistic economy of the United States has caused a few strangephenomena.

"Somehow, God has become a capitalist God," he said.

"I do not believe that one can be a Christian and be a capitalist, but I do believe that one can be a Christian and be a socialist."

His beliefs, he said, are based on the fact that the very precepts that are necessary to make capitalism work, are antithetical to Christianity.

"In a capitalistic society, the idea is to get as much as you can at the expense of others," he said.

"That is not what Jesus taught. He taught us to share what we have. And he taught us to love. There is no room for those elements in a capitalistic society."

When asked if he believed that Socialism was a cure for black Americans, Chavis responded that he did not believe in a Utopian government.

"I am not under any illusion that there is a Utopian government," he said. "If I had my way, we would have a government based on the Christian precepts of love and respect.

"All I m asking at this point is...which form of government will make blacks suffer more?"

The black population of this country, he believes has the power to solve its own problems, but the trends of the country, exacerbated by the recent election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency, makes it imperative that blacks, aided by the church organize to effect change.

"I believe that the church can play a big part in the deinstitutionalization of racism," he said.

Speaks of justice

Chavis does not view the decision of the courts to overturn the conviction of the Wilmington 10 as a victory for the Justice Department.

"It's been 8 long years," he said slowly, "and this is the first time we've gotten the courts to admit that there are political prisoners.

"The decision of the court was not a whim...it was substantive. In it, it was revealed that the state witnesses perjured themselves...and that the state knew it at the time.

"The witnesses recanted their testimonies in 1976," he said, pausing. "1976. It this had been a normal case, we would have been free a long time ago.

"But, Chavis believes, " the incarceration of the Wilmington 10 was necessary for what the American system wanted to do.

"Now I ask you," he said, leaning forward, "is that justice?

"The decision was not a victory for the Justice Department...in my opinion, North Carolina lost. Those who mistreated the Wilmington 10 learned a lesson...though it took a long time.

"The victory, he said, went to the people who continued to fight for the release and the exposure of the truth surrounding the case.

"Terrence Johnson is also a political prisoner," Chavis said, explaining that much of his time and energy will be devoted toward the release of the now 17-year-old youth who was convicted two years ago of murdering two Prince Georges County police officers.

"Johnson is a political prisoner because of the circumstances. He shot a policeman while trying to defend himself . . . the policeman was trying to shoot him."

Chavis, contending that the situation provoked Johnson to shoot the officer in self-defense, says that Johnson "did not commit any crime."

"You can bet your life that if the situation were reversed...if that had been a white kid shooting a black policeman who had been trying to shoot him . . . that kid would be walking the streets today."

(Continued on Page 18)

AFRO Photo by Mark Gail

DEDICATION SERVICES were held Dec. 14 at Trinity Baptist Church that was recently renovated. Shown seated is the Rev. William C. Calhoun Sr., pastor of Trinity and his son, William Calhoun Jr. Shown standing from left are ministers and friends who participated in the service: the Rev. William C. Bailey, assistant minister; Mrs. Philathia Calhoun, the Rev. Alfred C. D. Vaughn, Mrs. Emmit Burns, the Rev. Emmit Burns and the Rev. C. J. Malloy Jr., general secretary of Progressive National Baptist Convention.

Metro Church Briefs

The Voices of Inspiration of Berean Baptist Church, 5200 Denmore Ave., will present Paul Pearson in concert on Dec. 28, 4 p.m. at 5200 Denmore Ave. The Rev. John A. Lunn is pastor.

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The Senior Choir of First Corinthian Baptist Church will present the Male Chorus of Norman Muldrow in recital on Dec. 21, 3:30 p.m. Mrs. Mildred Jefferson is president. Mrs. Beatrice Royster, vice president and the Rev. Henry J. Turner is pastor.

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The story of Christmas will be told by the Children's Ministry of the Ray of Hope Baptist Church, 3000 Parkside Dr. on Dec. 21, 5 p.m. The Rev. Charles M. Franklin is pastor.

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The Senior Choir of Union Baptist Church, 1219 Druid Hill Ave., will present Handel's Messiah and a candlelight service of carols on Dec. 21, 5 p.m. Mrs. Janice G. Forrest is minister of music and the Rev. Vernon N. Dobson is pastor.

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Joy Night services will be held at Morning Star Baptist Church, 1063 Fayette St. on Dec. 27, 7:30 p.m. featuring James Peterson and Company, Chancel Ensemble of Wayland Baptist, Voices of Payne from Payne Memorial AME, Jerry Ceasar and the Good News Gospel Singers, The Choralettes of Wayland and Charles Watson and Company. The Rev. Samuel Ray is pastor.

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Handel's Messiah will be presented Dec. 26, 7:30 p.m. at Union Baptist Church, 1219 Druid Hill Ave. The Rev. Vernon Dobson is pastor. James R. Peterson will conduct, assisted by members of Morgan State University's Choir and Brass Ensemble and local area singers. Hugh W. Carey, chairman of the performing arts division at Dunbar High School will be organist, along with special soloists.

Guyanese first lady to speak for 'Behold'

Mrs. Viola Burnham, first lady of Guyana, will be the keynote speaker at the "Behold the Woman" testimonial dinner, Jan. 17 at the Baltimore Convention Center.

"Behold the Woman" will be a three-day ecumencial conference held at the Baltimore Convention Center, Jan. 16, 17 and 18, and expects to draw women from all over the United States and the world.

The ultimate reason for the conference, is to raise funds for the construction of a cost-free center in the inner city which would offer medical, psychological, social and spiritual services to women in need.

Mrs. Burnham's husband, Forbes Burnham, was elected to the Guyanene presidency last week after a somewhat controversial political period in the country.

An educator as well as a stateswoman, Mrs. Burnham has won international acclaim and recognition.

City politicians, including City Councilman Kwesi Mfume and Del. Pete Rawlings, are giving their active support to "Behold" [illegible] support of other black politicans to welcome the South American first lady.

"She is no less an event . . . than the first lady of this country visiting another country," said Joan Louise Wharton, chairperson for "Behold." "People should understand the importance of her visit to this country."

Mrs. Cecelia Williams Bryant, wife of the Rev. John R. Bryant, pastor of Bethel AME Church, and supervisor of the church's missionary department, said that Mrs. Burnham's visit here for "Behold" marked the first time a prominent head of state had visited this country under other than official diplomatic conditions.

Ms. Wharton said that as the result of Behold committee members visiting area churches last week to seek registrants for the convention, more than 100 women actually registered, and at least two of the churches pledged their support in the form of scholarships for women to attend.

Rev. Vernon Dobson sponsored 10 full scholarships to women of his congregation to attend "Behold," Wharton said.

Wharton also said that 5 scholarships had been granted to Murphy Homes Organization by the Missionary Dept. of Bethel in honor of the late Margaret Finch, past president of the department.

Up to this point, there has been a concerted effort on the part of Behold committee members to include all women of all ages, economic levels, social, educational and religious backgrounds. So far, Wharton said, the efforts have been "extremely fruitful."

"We just don't want to have a closed affair. This is a communion...for all women. We don't want to fall into the bag of catering to one group, one level of woman. All of us have the same needs, the same concerns. And, in the case of older women, those problems have been lived through.

"We expect to be blessed by the fellowship of all these experiences, all these different ways of looking at the same process of being a woman," she said.

Earlier this month, the Behold committee announced that 25 scholarships would be given to elderly women in the city, and reports at this time indicate that similar scholarships may be given to young, high school women as well.