

13A

RELIGION

Take
time to
studySunday
School LessonDevotional Reading: Luke
1:24-56.

Lesson Scripture: Luke 1:26-56.

Elisabeth, one of the two personalities mentioned in last week's lesson, is also a part of today's lesson. She was a relative of Mary, the primary focus of our Scripture text.

The lesson text is again from Luke 1. Luke was more than a physician. He was a careful historian who investigated "all things from the very first" (Luke 1:3). We, as well as Theophilus (to whom Luke directed his writing), can "know the certainty of those things, wherein [we have] been instructed" Luke 1:4).

This was the sixth month of the pregnancy of Elisabeth (see last week's lesson), but it was also much more than that. It was the beginning of that "fulness of the time" when God would send "his Son, made of a woman" (Galatians 4:4).

This "fulness of the time" was to impact a world that was on the verge of moral collapse. The Roman and Greek gods were recognized by many people for the false gods that they were. Religion had degenerated into observance of tradition, and spiritual apathy was the result. Roman oppression created a negative outlook on life. Slaves had no status, and women were often treated as chattel.

The "fulness of the time" also meant that the angel Gabriel had yet another mission. In the past he had been sent to Babylon to provide understanding for the prophet Daniel (Daniel 8:16; 9:21). He had appeared to Zechariah at the temple in Jerusalem, as we observed last week. Now he was sent from God one more time—not to a capital city, but to an obscure city of Galilee named Nazareth.

Galilee was in the northern third of Palestine. It was commonly held that nothing "good" would ever "come out of Nazareth" (John 1:46). That was about to change!

Gabriel's assignment was to a specific individual—a virgin whose name was Mary. The "fulness of the time" demanded that the Messiah be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14). The fact that Luke, a physician, gives such unequivocal testimony about Mary's virginity is especially valuable.

Mary was a frequent name then, as it is now. In the "fulness of the time" she became espoused (engaged) to Joseph, of the house of David. That Mary was also a descendant of David is seen from the genealogy found in Luke 3:23-38, which is generally considered to be that of Mary (Matthew 1:1-17 records Joseph's). It was necessary that an actual descendant of David be the Messiah and occupy David's throne (see 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 132:11; Matthew 1:1; 9:27; 22:41, 42).

Gabriel appeared to Mary directly as he had to Zechariah. This was not a dream or a vision. In both instances, however, the angel's manifestations were in private, not in public.

The statement that was made by the angel included a descriptive phrase about Mary: she was highly favored. This expression was much more than just a courteous greeting or a congratulatory word about her engagement to Joseph. Mary had been chosen to give birth to the Messiah and to raise and nurture Him during His early years.

Mecklenburg AME marks milestone

Event Sunday will bring Bishop to Greater Bethel

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

For more than 200 years, the African Methodist Episcopal Church has been an integral part of the African American faith community.

Founded in 1787 in Philadelphia by Richard Allen, the denomination boasts more than 6,000 congregations and 2.2 million members.

"Like all African American denominations, it was born of necessity," says Bishop Vinton Anderson, who heads the Second Episcopal District, which includes North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland.

According to Anderson, a small group of African Americans headed by Allen, grew dissatisfied with the treatment they received at predominantly white St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. They broke away to form their own faith, one in which they could worship freely and as equals. The former slaves were forced to sit at the back of the church and not allowed to hold office.

The church, now headquartered in Washington, D.C., consecrated Allen its first bishop.

The faith found its way to Charlotte 110 years later, brought by A.J. Mitchell. The South Carolina native was lured from his small rural town as were thousands of other African Americans, by the promise of jobs and a better life in the north.

Mitchell never made it. Instead, he stopped in Charlotte, bringing with him the 100-year-old faith.

Mitchell's legacy can be felt all over Charlotte. The Winnsboro, S.C., native found heavily Baptist Mecklenburg County lacking an outlet for his Methodist faith.

An ordained minister, Mitchell grew up AME. Along with 13 other Winnsboro natives, he formed Bethel AME church.

The church has grown much



PHOTO/SUE ANN JOHNSON

Greater Bethel kicks off a yearlong centennial celebration with a visit by Bishop Vinton Anderson and a special concert by the West Charlotte High School Gospel Choir. This marks Anderson's first official since he assumed the post in July.

over the years.

Originally located at 906 First St., the church has moved several times, spurred by fire, the urban renewal that decimated much of black Charlotte and, of course, growth.

From First Street, the small congregation moved to Good Samaritan Hall on South Caldwell near the heart of Dilworth. Fire destroyed the hall near the turn of the century and the congregation moved to another building until Good Samaritan could be rebuilt.

In 1901, the congregation purchased land on South Brevard Street. With a loan of \$550 from church co-founder Samuel T. Moore, the congregation erected a Sunday school building and later a sanctuary.

The church was a fixture on Brevard for almost 70 years. It was forced to relocate in 1969 at the height of urban renewal downtown.

Bethel shared the old Gillespie United Methodist Church and finally, in 1970, the congregation began work on a new sanctuary and adopted the name Greater Bethel.

Greater Bethel kicks off a year of events that marks not only the centennial of the AME Church in Charlotte, but the 100th anniversary of Greater Bethel Sunday at 11 a.m. Anderson will be the keynote speaker.

The West Charlotte High School Gospel Choir sings from 10:30-10:55 a.m.

"What the local churches have done undergirds the work of the local churches and the local community," Anderson said. "This will be an exciting year."

Charlotte now boasts two other AME congregations, New Covenant and Adams Metropolitan. More than 800 Charlotteans worship in AME churches each Sunday.

"We do plan to host several special services this year," the Rev. Conrad Pridgen, pastor of Greater Bethel said. "We plan to have a special revival service, a Heritage Month during Black History Month. All of our services will take on a centennial theme this year."

For Anderson, a bishop for more than 20 years, the celebration is an opportunity to intro-

duce the nation's oldest black national organization to a larger audience. It will be his first official visit to the Queen City since being named to head the district in July.

His sermon will reflect that, he says.

"Magnificent intrusion is my theme," he said. "Angels broke into the otherwise prosaic life of shepherds in a field. The message was brought first to commoners. Wouldn't we all like to be intruded on by Angels with good news. Especially in a world so filled with hatred, racism and divisiveness."

Greater Bethel AME is located at 201 Grandin Road. For more information about Sunday's services, call 376-4440.

Divinity dean is ex-athlete, ex-writer

By Jeri Young
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The Rev. Clarence Newsome, Dean of the Howard University School of Divinity, has had a varied career.

The Ahoskie, N.C. native was twice named to the Atlantic Coast Conference All Academic Team during his undergraduate years at Duke University, where he lettered twice in football.

After completing his studies at Duke, in just three and a half years, he went on to serve the university as an assistant dean, director of minority affairs and professor.

He was a speech writer for former governor Terry Sanford and has contributed articles to numerous periodicals on the role of the African American

church in American society.

But it was his commencement address in 1972, the first presented by an African American in Duke's history, that cemented his commitment to religious academia.

His speech, "An African Concept of Time and Theme of Liberation in the World Community," prompted praise from national television news anchor Walter Cronkite, the keynote speaker for the commencement.

Charlotte will get a taste of Newsome's thoughts on religion Sunday afternoon at 3 p.m. when he speaks at First United Presbyterian Church, at the corner of 7th and College streets uptown. The appearance is part of the Museum of the New South's "Amazing Grace" exhibit. Sponsors say Newsome

promises to be interesting and thought provoking.

"The African American church has helped African Americans stake a claim in America," Newsome said. "Its role has been to call America to task for what it has espoused."

According to Newsome, the African American church not only represents the past, but the future.

"It has a vision that is inclusive," he said. "There is an openness to people who are different. It shows that we can embrace those who are different. The church always has had a role to help people communicate across differences. It holds out the position that the impossible can be realized."

The impossible for Newsome is an African American community in crisis that made some-

thing happen.

"The African American church is a clear instance of people making something happen," he said. "African Americans pose a challenge to American society to reach out across the deep racial problem in society. The African American church is our way of instituting that change."

The African American church was also born of the need of African Americans to worship without "the cruelties of the masters," he added.

"Slaves felt and knew that they would not be received as equals, not even in the house of the Lord," he said. "The black church was a way of worshipping without fear in our way."

Admission Sunday is \$5 to non-members of the church or the museum and \$2 for students and seniors.

Effingham moves into new building

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

EFFINGHAM, S.C. — Almost seven months after someone torched Effingham Baptist Church, the sound of worship once again is coming from its sanctuary.

Volunteers and thousands of dollars of donations helped rebuild the church with a predominantly black congregation, and recently it was rededicated. About 400 people sang and clapped in the church, which is designed for about 100.

"It was like I lost my home," church member Pamela Prince

said of the April 26 arson. "But we've got a new building, new paint, new bricks and new members."

Pastor Troy Shaw and his wife, Viola, stood outside before the ribboncutting and held a Bible and a cross draped in a white and purple cloth. The Bible and the cloth survived the fire.

"I hope this occasion will be one that spreads across the United States in answer to the evil we face," the minister said.

The \$175,000 church is almost complete. The pews are on order and should be installed some-

time early next month.

Effingham Baptist was one of the churches with predominantly black congregations that burned this year. There were national headlines and claims the fires showed the depth of racism in the country, along with a debate about whether black



churches were being set afire more frequently than those with predominantly white congrega-

tions.

Two former Ku Klux Klansmen have pleaded guilty to burning black churches in nearby Clarendon and Williamsburg counties, but no arrests have been made in the Effingham case.

In South Carolina, at least 17 black churches have been burned since 1991, according to the State Law Enforcement Division.

A&T's Clegg
pens Elijah
Muhammad
biography

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GREENSBORO — It's OK to have heroes, but they shouldn't be worshiped as if they were divine, says the author of a biography on Elijah Muhammad that has alienated some Nation of Islam followers.

People "need to believe in other people," says Claude Clegg, an assistant history professor at N.C. A&T State University. "But at the same time we have to be honest with ourselves. We shouldn't look for things in other people that we are incapable of ourselves. We shouldn't look for divinity in other people. We shouldn't look for flawlessness in other people."

Clegg's book, "An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad" is set for release by St. Martin's Press in February.

Muhammad has a place in history as the leader who turned an obscure religious sect into one of the richest and most influential black organizations in the country.

Until Clegg, however, no one had written a thorough biography of Muhammad's life, from his start as a poor

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