

Understanding AME Worship



The True Meaning of AME Worship

The Morning Worship Service

The AME worship finds its primary grounding in the tradition of John Wesley and Richard Allen.

The Prelude

During this part of the service, the choirs and clergy are assembled in the back of the sanctuary. This serves as a means of focusing the assembly's attention on the purpose of its gathering. As we all stand, we face the altar-table, which is the "main architectural symbol of Christ's abiding presence among his people".

The Processional

After the Introit, the choirs and the clergy process toward the altar, the pulpit, and the choir lofts. During this part of the service, the choir sings. This symbolizes the purpose for which the assembly has gathered. The Processional hymn, serves as the means of affirming the purpose of the assembly in marshaling. As the choir proclaims, there is peace, joy and other benefits that arise from coming into God's house. The congregation is uplifted during this period, and people are transported from their mundane existence to a spiritual existence in God's house.

The Doxology

This function also directs the congregation's focus, and officially invites the congregants to worship. It is an exchange between the minister and the congregation on portions of the Psalms. This litany builds upon the Introit and the processional hymn. The minister proclaims:

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the House of the Lord" Our feet have been standing within your gates O Jerusalem—**Psalm 122:1-2**

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. —**Psalm 84:10**

For the sake of the House of the Lord our God, I will seek your good. —**Psalm 122:9**

They are planted in the House of the Lord, they flourish in the courts of our God. **Psalm 92:13**

O Lord, I have loved the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells. **Psalm 26:8**

But the Lord is in his Holy Temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him—**Habakkuk 2:20**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. **Psalm 19:14**

O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things! Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth, sing praises. **Psalm 98: 1&4**

The Hymn of Praise

This part of the worship emphasizes the idea of grace. The hymn usually defines who God is as master of the world.

The Invocation

The Invocation is the first prayer uttered within the context of the worship service. Before, this, upon entering the pulpit, the ministers kneel at their seats and pray, but the invocation is the first corporate prayer offered. It is a call for the Holy Spirit to be present in the worship.

The Anthem

This is usually a formal song offered by the choir. It will move the congregation. Its place in the service has been controversial. Some AME churches substitute spirituals for anthems while some sing hymns.

The Scripture

The minister chooses an appropriate Scripture for the service. There are very few occasions in the AME Church where the Scripture is chosen in advance, although sometimes a Scripture lesson is chosen for its usefulness in connection with a holiday or other special event in the life of the church. Generally, the Scripture lesson is read from a version familiar to the assembly.

The Decalogue

The Decalogue (i.e. the Ten Commandments) is recited in its entirety on Communion Sundays, Ordination and Annual Conferences. The minister begins by instructing the congregation to rise. He then moves them in singing, **"From all that dwell below the skies, let the Creator's praise arise, let the Redeemer's name be sung, through every land, by every tongue."** Between the recitation of the commandments, the congregation sings a modified form of **"Lord have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law."** Between the sixth and seventh commandment, the congregation sings a traditional Methodist song that emphasizes the possibility of falling from grace. (Article of religion 12). After the last commandment the congregation sings, "Nearer my God, to thee!". Then follows Christ's pronouncement of the two commandments that summarize the law, after which the congregation sings the Gloria Patri.

The Summary of the Decalogue: Hear what Christ our Savior saith, You shall love the Lord thy God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment, and the second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.

Ministry of Music

The Gospel choir sings here; this choir sings a song that is more contemporary than the anthem sung earlier. It is important to note that this is seen as a ministry. That is, whatever gifts one can bring to the Lord's service is part of that individual's ministry.

The Receiving of Tithes/Offering & Announcements

General agreement seems to be that there is no good place to put either of these parts in worship service. After monies are collected, the church rises and sings, **"All things come from Thee, O Lord. And of Thine own have we given Thee. Amen."**

The Sermon & Invitation to Christian Discipleship

African Methodists see the sermon as the proclamation of the Word of God made by God's chosen vessel. It is in this portion of the service that the assembly is instructed on how to carry out the commands of Christ, what the grace of God means, and how to reconcile radical evil with the purpose of God. Throughout the service, the assembly has experienced the Word of God through prayer, through song, and through fellowship. Nevertheless, the sermon informs all other aspects of the worship experience.

The Invitation to Christian discipleship is extended to all those who are outside the Church, or are looking for a church home. This is a catchall invitation, encompassing converts, backsliders, and members transferring from other churches or denominations. The invitation is extended even at functions where there are no sermons.

The Affirmation of Faith

This part of the worship experience confirms our faith and the beliefs of Methodism. It is through the Apostles' Creed that we profess before God and one another our common faith.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. The third day he arose from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the church universal, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen.

Our Beliefs

In our tradition, there are several documents that help inform our distinctive understanding of the Christian faith. We rely on The Book of Doctrine and the Discipline of the AME Church; The AME Hymnal; The AME Book of Worship; Episcopal Salutation; Historical Statement; Articles of Religion; and The Life, Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen.

The AME Church recognizes and observes two holy sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. The modes of baptism in African Methodism are pouring, sprinkling and immersion. Regardless of the mode administered, baptism is a powerful symbol of regeneration and initiation into the community of faith-Christ church. Holy Communion serves as a memorial of the death and suffering of Christ and celebrates in the abundant life we have through him.

Our Name

“African” means that the church was organized by people of African descent and heritage.

“Methodist” refers to the church’s membership in the family of Methodist churches. Richard Allen, the founder and first active bishop, felt that the form and format of Methodism would best suit the needs of the African community.

“Episcopal” refers to the form of government under which the church operates. The Episcopal form of government means that the chief executive and administrative officers of our denomination are our bishops. Their authority is given them by the General Conference, elected representatives of the entire denomination. Their responsibilities are to oversee the spiritual and temporal affairs of the church, including presiding over annual conferences, making pastoral appointments, ordaining deacons and elders, organizing missions, and generally promoting the interest of the denomination.

Church refers to “Christian Church,” which is a community of people who believe in God and who have accepted Jesus Christ as the guiding example of their lives. We also believe in the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, who enables the believer to become a true and effective servant of God. Jesus Christ is the spiritual head of the Christian Church.

Notes

[illegible]