

A Blessed History

From 1870 to the Present

146 Years of Heritage



In 1870, the Bethlehem Baptist Church was organized by Rev. Green Medlin. The services were conducted in various homes. This method of worshipping proved to be quite challenging. A "Brush Arbor" was constructed and the members worshipped there for an unspecified amount of time. The Rev. Medlin remained as pastor for 22 years. In 1892, Rev. J. P. Phillips was called and he conducted services in the old school house located at what is now 1188 West Broad.

There was still a need for a church facility. Arrangements were made to purchase a lot by Deacons Ben Wyatt, Link Briscoe, and Jerry Bush. Later, Mr. J. H. Wright deeded an acre of land to the church. More land was purchased from Mr. Herman Lawson. The land is located on what is now East Broad Street. In 1896, a church building and a parsonage were erected on East Broad. How happy the members were to have a place to worship God! There was an "Amen Corner", a "potbellied" stove, and a post in the center of the building to support the structure.

Rev. Phillips remained with the church until 1914 (22 years.). Rev. Upshaw came and presided for a short time and, from 1915 to 1917, Rev. H. T. Wise was the pastor. In 1917, Rev. W. A. Washington came and made a brief stay. He was followed by Rev. Spocks in 1918-1919 and Rev. Banner from 1919-1920. During the period of 1920-1924, it is not clear who led the flock. In 1925, Rev. James Weaver accepted the pastorate of the church. He remained with the congregation until 1930. Rev. Flowers came and stayed until 1931. Rev. E. L. Pullum came in 1931 and stayed until 1932. He was instrumental in starting a choir. In 1932, Rev. C. C. Carson came and the flock increased. Under his guidance, progress was made. The church joined Zion Rest District Association and later the Elm Grove District Association. Rev. Carson remained for nine years and the congregation began to meet every Sunday.

In 1941-1943, Rev. C. C. McNeil served as pastor and Rev. N. R. Washington stayed six months. Rev. I. L. Smith served from 1943-1945, as did Rev. T. P. Thomas in 1945-1946. In 1946, Rev. L. E. Billingslea accepted the pastorate. Under his guidance, the physical plant was remodeled several times; the church was now located on West Broad at what is now McClendon park. He is credited for leading the initial effort of the development of homes on West Broad, which was an unincorporated area called "Harmony Hill" by some. Also under his leadership, there came vibrant church growth and several sons in the ministry. Rev. Billingslea served the church faithfully for 26 years until ill health beset him and he was called home in February of 1972.

In May of 1972, Rev. O. V. Hall became the pastor and remained until June of 1975. Under his leadership there came three sons to the ministry. In that year, all liens against the church were cleared. In December 1975, Rev. C. D. Sammons took the helm of the Old Ship of Zion and directed a safe and progressive voyage. With his deep convictions and spiritual fervor, he aided the members in achieving the aspirations of the late Rev. L. E. Billingslea. During his pastorate, the Willie Earl Brown Elementary School was purchased at 1188 W. Broad St. and is now our present worship site.

Rev. Sammons served as pastor of this flock until called to pastor the Zion Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas in April 1991. Under his leadership, there came one son to the ministry. He also led the church through several renovation projects.

In May 1991, with a unanimous vote, Reverend Michael A. Evans was called to pastor the Bethlehem Church family. At 24 years of age, he was the youngest pastor ever called to serve at Bethlehem Baptist Church. Since his time of service as Senior Pastor, the church has been incorporated and we presently offer oversight to BBC Educational Enrichment, Inc., a non-profit organization designed to enhance area children's ability to study and achieve educational goals. The church has spawned the creation of the "Historic West Mansfield Community Development Corporation", a non-profit corporation dedicated to the on-going economic and community development of the western sector of the city. Also throughout Dr. Evans' pastorate, liens against the church have

been cleared on several occasions. Pastor Evans has made it clear that “as you work for the up-building of God’s kingdom, it doesn’t matter who gets the credit because GOD IS THE MAIN ATTRACTION at the Bethlehem Baptist Church.”

Under his leadership, the church has grown both spiritually and numerically. In 2000, the people believed together and completed the construction of the Community Education Center, an incubator for educational enhancement for residents of Southeast Tarrant County. In that same year, the church provided space for the City of Fort Worth’s Community Resource Center, providing basic essentials for the well-being of people who have fallen victim to harsh economic times.

In 2005, the church began the planning and development process for the erection of the T. M. Moody Gymnasium, named after Deacon T. M. Moody who served as the Chairman of Deacons under the pastoral leadership of Rev. C. C. Carson, Pastor L. E. Billingslea, Rev. O. V. Hall and, for a time, under Rev. C. D. Sammons. Deacon Moody was known as a local trailblazer who led in the fight to desegregate the schools in Mansfield on August 1955. He was a leader and one of the founders of the Fort Worth Citywide Brotherhood. The facility has served as the temporary worship venue and permanent recreation and gathering place for church and community members.

Pastor Evans has been entrusted with a vision to advance the West Broad community beyond its rural heritage to include residential facilities for the “Seasoned Saints” of our community. His goal is to construct a multi-care facility for senior adults to include independent living, assisted living, and memory care services. Immediate short-term goals include the retirement of the debt on the T. M. Moody facility with the hope of constructing a 1,200 seat worship facility at the corner of Morgan and West Broad in the near future.

Under the present administration, thousands of dollars have been awarded to worthy high school graduates aspiring to attend college and post-secondary training. Our church has expanded the concept of Baptist Training Union to Discipleship Training; an educational program for our children, youth, and adult members that has helped to equip people for ministry beyond the walls of the sanctuary. The program has proven to be a source of spiritual strength for our church and community.

The Bethlehem Baptist Church is swiftly moving to become a church that is known for her missions and ministry endeavors geared toward meeting the calling of the great commission of our Lord in accordance to Acts 1:8.

Since 2000, we have sent missionaries to West Africa, South Africa, Spain, Japan and Australia. Locally, we have partnered in the construction of the “Caring Place” Free Clinic. We developed the Hope House Community Service Network, helping hundreds of people rebuild their lives physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually through our Christian Women’s Job Corp. Health Care Ministry. We also partner with the local homeless and women’s shelter organizations. We serve together with the Common Ground Community Service Network.

In addition, we serve our future leaders through our T. M. Moody “After School Program” and through the Bethlehem Children’s Academy. Through our combined efforts, God awarded BBC with the privilege to restore dignity to the “Old Colored Cemetery”, now known as the “Mansfield Community Cemetery.”

On April 16, 2014, a new era in children’s ministry was celebrated with the dedication of our new “Kidz Zone” facility. The grand opening with a ribbon cutting was held on April 27, 2014. The Kidz Zone provides a location for the children to worship, conduct weekly activities, and houses The Bethlehem Academy, where children have a great time learning. This extraordinary facility offers children a place to explore the life God offers through His amazing love. We are excited to see where God is taking our children’s ministry.

It is with much humility and recognition of the guiding hand of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, that our future as a fellowship of baptized believers is brighter. In November of 2015, Harvest Sunday, we secured, through purchase, the 5.5 acres of land located immediately across the street. We are striving to develop this property into what will be the Pioneer Place Independent Senior Living Facility.

Together we realize that the road will be tough and the battle will be hard fought, but with God, “We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.” As a unified church body, bound by the Father, challenged by the Holy Spirit, and encouraged by Jesus the Christ, we look forward to tomorrow with great promise.

During the span of 146 years, the Bethlehem Baptist Church that had its beginnings with only a few members continues to serve the Lord. According to the information given by various persons to the best of their knowledge, the church has been under the leadership of nineteen pastors, including the present administration. May God bless Bethlehem Baptist Church and may God bless you!