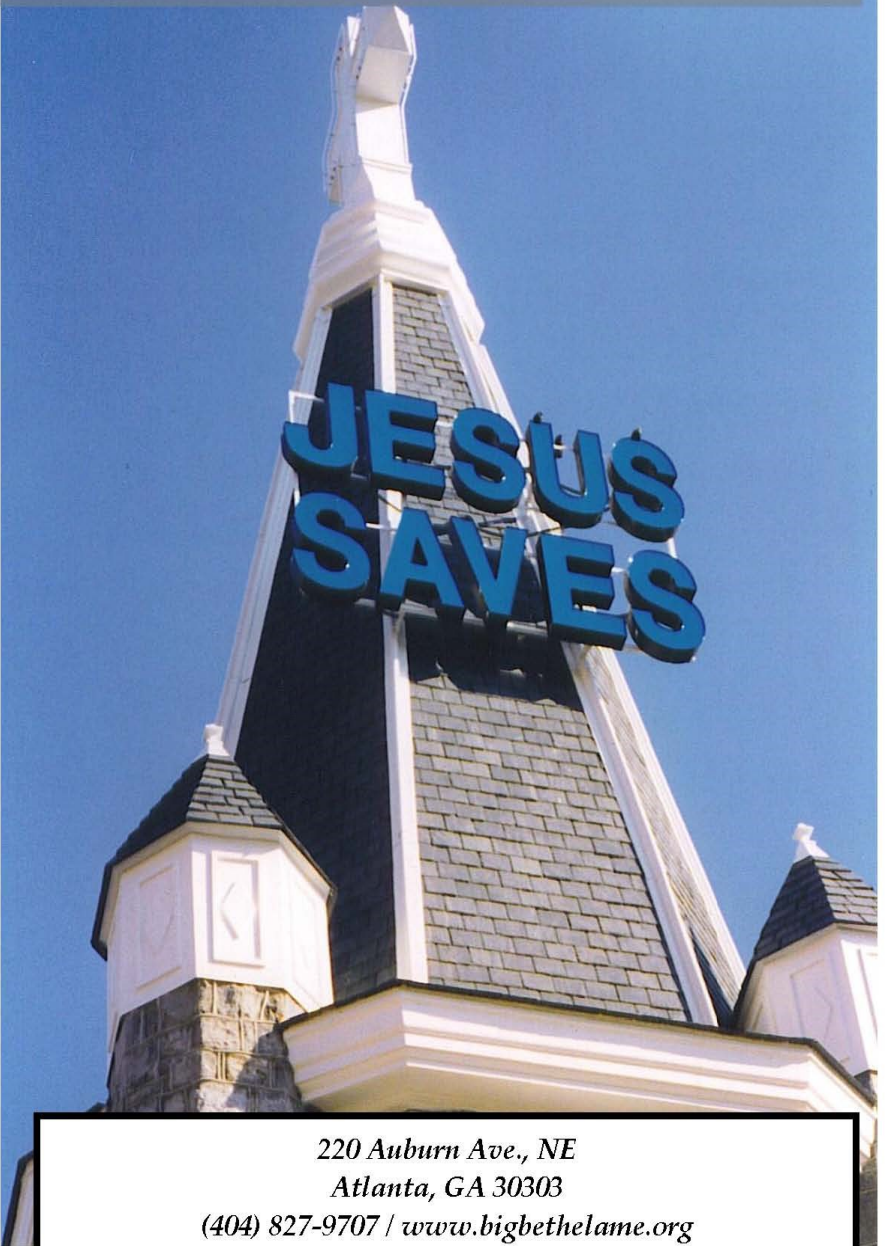


Big Bethel A.M.E. Church
“One of Atlanta’s Historic Landmarks”



220 Auburn Ave., NE
Atlanta, GA 30303
(404) 827-9707 / www.bigbethelame.org



Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church

Vision Statement

A spirit-filled fellowship engaging in fervent worship, Bible-based teaching and preaching, and compassionate missions driven to be the miracle in downtown Atlanta.

Mission Statement I

The mission of Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ; and to communicate to the world through preaching, teaching, evangelizing, worshipping, and stewardship, that "Jesus Saves!"

Values Statement:

We are a God centered, people-oriented Christian community operating in an environment of excellence and love. All that we do is undergirded by prayer.

Welcome to Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, the “Old Landmark” and mother church of African Methodism in Atlanta, Georgia.

Big Bethel is considered to be one of the vital urban churches in Atlanta. We are constantly seeking to minister to God’s people in doing the work of the Lord. If you want to grow spiritually, looking for a church home, just moved to town, a college student, or even just visiting Atlanta, we invite you to fellowship with us.

Vision Statement

Big Bethel is a spirit-filled fellowship engaging in fervent worship, Bible-based teaching and preaching, and compassionate missions driven to be the miracle in downtown Atlanta.

Mission Statement

The mission of Big Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ; and to communicate to the world through preaching, teaching, evangelizing, worshipping, and stewardship, that “Jesus Saves.”

Value Statement

We are a God-centered, people-oriented Christian community operating in an environment of excellence and love. All that we do is undergirded by prayer.

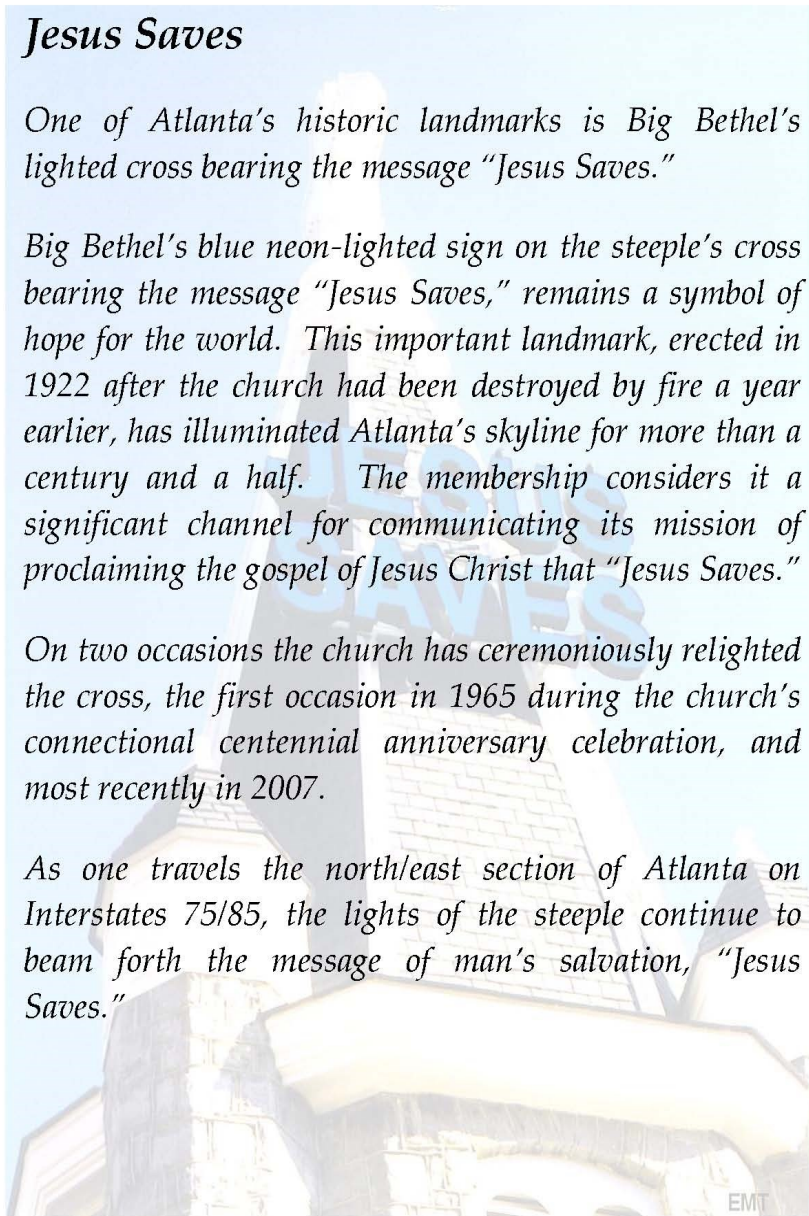
Jesus Saves

One of Atlanta's historic landmarks is Big Bethel's lighted cross bearing the message "Jesus Saves."

Big Bethel's blue neon-lighted sign on the steeple's cross bearing the message "Jesus Saves," remains a symbol of hope for the world. This important landmark, erected in 1922 after the church had been destroyed by fire a year earlier, has illuminated Atlanta's skyline for more than a century and a half. The membership considers it a significant channel for communicating its mission of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ that "Jesus Saves."

On two occasions the church has ceremoniously relighted the cross, the first occasion in 1965 during the church's connectional centennial anniversary celebration, and most recently in 2007.

As one travels the north/east section of Atlanta on Interstates 75/85, the lights of the steeple continue to beam forth the message of man's salvation, "Jesus Saves."



Stained Glass Windows

Bethel's beautiful stained glass windows memorialize its stalwart leaders. Upon entering the sanctuary of the church and looking toward the balcony, one cannot escape the magnificent, colorful portraits in the stained glass windows.

The question arises: who are these revered saints and why were they selected to be memorialized? No one knows the answer; however,



Bishop Henry McNeal Turner

records of their outstanding legacies indicate each one's achievements in the church and community which are worthy of emulation.

Bishop Henry McNeal Turner's meritorious contributions are numerous. He was the first Black Chaplain appointed by Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War and was the first Bishop in the AME Church to ordain women as Deacons. He helped to found the Republican Party and held several positions in the organization.

Richard Allen is the founding father of the AME church -- the first fully independent black denomination in the U.S. Allen's March 26th Feast Day recognition on the Episcopal Church's Liturgical Calendar is a testament to the breadth of his greatness. A tireless minister, abolitionist, and reformer, Allen influenced nearly every black leader of the nineteenth century, from Fredrick Douglass to W. E. B. Du Bois.



Bishop Richard Allen

The Great Moller Organ

The Big Bethel AME Church organ was installed in 1924 by the M.P. Moller Organ Company of Hagerstown, Maryland. The sixteen rank, three manual and pedal pipe organ reflected the finest craftsmanship. Many renowned musicians, including Dr. Charles Sheldon, the City of Atlanta organist, performed the dedication recital in 1924.



Major repair was done on the instrument in 1964 when it was partially rebuilt and the Great Organ's Sewell Division reinforced. The organ's latest restoration and expansion were completed in 1987 by the Pipe Organ Services Sales, Inc., in Lithonia, Georgia. The three manual and pedal pipe organ were increased to 33 ranks.

Big Bethel congregants continue to experience the abundance of worship and musical richness that the pipe organ provides. The current organist, Phillip V. Skerrett, continues the tradition of effective accompaniment and inspiration.

Allen made history as the first black to coauthor and copyright an anti-slavery pamphlet in 1794. Nearly 40 years later, Allen became the first free black leader to write an autobiography of his struggle for justice.

Bishop Joseph Simeon Flipper, a former pastor, was an astute financier and capable administrator. In addition to serving as a church leader, he also was appointed president of several AME colleges and president of Atlanta's Citizens & Trust Bank.



Bishop Joseph Simeon

Rev. Dr. R. H. Singleton, only a "servant of God" with his stature, drive, ability and vision could have led the membership through the crises following his appointment to Bethel. The church was completely destroyed by fire in 1920 after the insurance on the church had expired. He led the congregation in the rebuilding the church by 1922. The lighted cross on the steeple bearing the message "Jesus Saves" remains as a historic shrine on Auburn Avenue.



Rev. Dr. R. H. Singleton

Reverend Joseph Woods, the first pastor of Bethel, is credited with uniting Bethel Tabernacle with the AME Connection in 1865. He was chosen Senior Warden of the Prince Hall Free and Accepted Masonic Order of which Richard Allen was co-founder when the Georgia Chapter was formed.



Rev. Joseph Woods

An Historical Snapshot of Big Bethel AME Church

First and foremost, Big Bethel AME Church, the oldest African American congregation in the city of Atlanta, has been a house of worship and refuge for believers in our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Throughout its 165 years plus history, Big Bethel has been an important community institution that has served as leader, innovator, advocate and convener.

Historical records indicate that the congregation, variously Old Bethel, Bethel, the African Methodist Episcopal Tabernacle and finally Big Bethel, was formed prior to the incorporation of Atlanta on December 28, 1847. However, the roots of the congregation of Big Bethel emanated from the population of Terminus, GA that incorporated under the name of Marthasville in 1843. Thus, the first colored church in Marthasville was established, and it was Methodist. In 1847, the City officials determined that the township of Marthasville was destined to become the railroad center of the South; thus, the name Marthasville was changed to Atlanta.

After the Civil War, the congregation became associated with the AME Church -- the first independent denomination in the country. Bishop Payne sent Rev. James Lynch to organize the AME Church throughout the South. While passing through Atlanta, he met Brother Joseph Woods, a member of Bethel Tabernacle. One year later in 1866, Rev. Joseph Woods was appointed as the first pastor of Big Bethel AME Church.

Big Bethel rapidly grew to become a center of the community as well as a focal point for social action. In 1879, the Gate City Colored School, the

first public school for African Americans in the City, was founded in the basement of Big Bethel. It later moved to a building on Houston Street. In 1881, Morris Brown College, the only college in Georgia started solely by African Americans, held classes in the basement of Big Bethel before moving to its first campus. For years, the church was used for community gatherings because it was the largest meeting space in the African American community. Big Bethel was known as "Sweet Auburn's City Hall." In 1911, President William H. Taft spoke from the pulpit of Big Bethel. Heaven Bound, an internationally acclaimed and celebrated morality play, was first performed in 1930, and continues to open to packed houses after 80+ years. In 1990, Big Bethel again became part of history when Nelson Mandela spoke here. Big Bethel has been designated a historic landmark. The edifice itself is an architectural phenomenon. The existing building was rebuilt in 1922 after being destroyed by fire in 1920 and erected with a lighted cross in the steeple with the message, "Jesus Saves." All walls, except the west wall (the wall next to the organ) are original. The stained glass windows in the balcony feature the founders of the AME Church, Bishop Allen and other outstanding early church

The "Heaven Bound Choir," was featured at the premiere of "Gone with the Wind," and has garnered international fame since its first appearance in 1930.

leaders, Bishop Henry M. Turner and Bishop Joseph S. Flipper. Under the administration of a number of Bethel's former pastors, several renovation projects have been completed -- all of which have been essential for the upkeep and beautification of our magnificent structure.



For More Information About the AME Church and its History...

Bridges, Flora Wilson. *Resurrection Song: African-American Spirituality (The Bishop Henry McNeal Turner/Sojourner Truth Series in Black Religion)*, Mary Knoll: Orbis Books, 2000.

Coleman, Gregory D., *We're Heaven Bound!* Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1992.

Cone, James H., "God Our Father, Christ Our Redeemer, Man Our Brother: A Theological Interpretation of the AME Church," A.M.E. Church Review, Volume CVI, No. 341

Gregg, Howard D. *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church: The Black Church in Action*. Nashville, Tenn.: AMEC, 1980.

Hill, Kenneth H. *Drinking From Our Well: Foundations for the Ministry of Christian Education in the African Methodist Episcopal Church*. Nashville: A. M. E. Church, 1992.

McKenzie, Vashti M., *Not Without A Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry*. Cleveland: United Church Press, 1996.

McKenzie, Vashti M., *Journey to the Well*, New York, New York: Viking Press, 2002

Newman, Richard., *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers*. New York University Press, 2008

Official Website of the AME Church

www.ame-church.com/index.php

Connectional Women's Missionary Society of the AME Church

www.wms-amec.org



Big Bethel AME Church

"Where Jesus Saves"

The Reverend John Foster, Ph.D.,

Senior Pastor

Email: jesus.saves@bigbethelame.org

404-827-9707

www.bigbethelame.org

TWITTER: [#LiveatBigBethel](#) & [#jesussaves](#)

Like Us On FACEBOOK:
Bigbethelame

Follow Us On Instagram:
@Bigbethelthrives



Copyright 2012 by the Black History and Heritage Ministry
All rights reserved . No part of this publication may be reproduced without the expressed
permission from the publishers and Big Bethel AME Church.