



Watchnight Worship

December 31, 2022

This is a service of African American congregations that began as people anticipated “watching out” the last year of slavery. The service of watching and waiting continues. Watch night worship is a time for reflection, testimonies, and songs of God’s grace. It is the period when we voice our determination for the gift of a year to come. Usually an intergenerational service, both youth and seasoned saints can play an important part. History meets the future. Tradition faces hopes. The God of the years is constant. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Call to Worship

Rev. Matthews: Why do we gather on this night?

Cynthia: We gather to remember our enslaved past.

Rev. Matthews: Why do we gather this night?

Cynthia: We gather to celebrate God’s keeping powers.

Rev. Matthews: Why do we gather this night?

Cynthia: We gather to recall God’s mercies in the midst of oppression.

Rev. Matthews: Why do we gather this night?

Cynthia: We gather to celebrate our God who journeys with us, year by year. Thanks be unto the ever faithful and true God.

Hymn of Praise — “Never Could Have Made It” *(featuring Marvin Sapp)*

Evening Prayer

Scripture #1 — Ecclesiastes 3:1–13

- 3 There’s a season for everything
and a time for every matter under the heavens:
- 2 a time for giving birth and a time for dying,
a time for planting and a time for uprooting what was planted,
- 3 a time for killing and a time for healing,
a time for tearing down and a time for building up,
- 4 a time for crying and a time for laughing,
a time for mourning and a time for dancing,
- 5 a time for throwing stones and a time for gathering stones,

a time for embracing and a time for avoiding embraces,
⁶ a time for searching and a time for losing,
a time for keeping and a time for throwing away,
⁷ a time for tearing and a time for repairing,
a time for keeping silent and a time for speaking,
⁸ a time for loving and a time for hating,
a time for war and a time for peace.

⁹ What do workers gain from all their hard work? ¹⁰ I have observed the task that God has given human beings. ¹¹ God has made everything fitting in its time, but has also placed eternity in their hearts, without enabling them to discover what God has done from beginning to end.

¹² I know that there's nothing better for them but to enjoy themselves and do what's good while they live. ¹³ Moreover, this is the gift of God: that all people should eat, drink, and enjoy the results of their hard work.

Scripture #2 — Revelation 21:1–6a

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ I heard a loud voice from the throne say, "Look! God's dwelling is here with humankind. He will dwell with them, and they will be his peoples. God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. There will be no mourning, crying, or pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ⁵ Then the one seated on the throne said, "Look! I'm making all things new." He also said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ Then he said to me, "All is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

Scripture #3 — Matthew 25:31–46

³¹ "Now when the Human One comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them from each other, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left.

³⁴ "Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. ³⁵ I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.'

³⁷ "Then those who are righteous will reply to him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? ³⁸ When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

⁴⁰ “Then the king will reply to them, ‘I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Get away from me, you who will receive terrible things. Go into the unending fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² I was hungry and you didn’t give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you didn’t give me anything to drink. ⁴³ I was a stranger and you didn’t welcome me. I was naked and you didn’t give me clothes to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’

⁴⁴ “Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and didn’t do anything to help you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer, ‘I assure you that when you haven’t done it for one of the least of these, you haven’t done it for me.’ ⁴⁶ And they will go away into eternal punishment. But the righteous ones will go into eternal life.”

Offertory Invitation (*The Giving of Ourselves*)

Rev. Matthews: Through the year God Has been faithful. Our generous response through our sharing is how we say “Thanks!!”

Cynthia: **Beneficent and Gracious Savior, we cannot pay for one second of the year you have brought us through. Yet, we offer these tokens in humble appreciation that as others watch and wait in the coming years, these doors will be open to receive their grateful hearts. In the name of Love we pray, Amen.**

Prayers and Testimony Time

Watch Night Litany

Rev. Matthews: O God, as was a customary of our parents and ancestors, we come to this Watch Night vigil to be with you, in your house, as we usher out the old year and welcome the dawning of a new year.

Cynthia: **We come, thanking you for your guidance and direction, go before us, O God, and draw us into the future where you are.**

Rev. Matthews: Our slave ancestors watched that night long ago for the signing of the Emancipation proclamation. Lord, keep us awake and alert as we follow in the light of your word, searching for the good news of the gospel, and the comforting signs of your love in this world.

Cynthia: **We thank you for watching over us and caring for us through the old year, as we walked in the light of your love. We thank you for your promises of peace, healing and justice.**

Rev. Matthews: We give you praise, O God, for your goodness and mercy; for life health and friends, and for the many blessings you always send. Above all, we thank you for Jesus Christ, who lifts our hopes, guides us in the way, in this new year, and in the years to come.

Cynthia: All praise, honor, glory, and thanks to you, our God, through Jesus Christ and risen Savior and Lord.

Selection — “I Know Who Holds Tomorrow”

(featuring Albertina Walker and the Caravans)

Watch Night Message Rev. Eugene W. Matthews

“It’s About Time”

*“There’s a season for everything and
a time for every matter under the heavens”*

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Selection — Deliver Me (This Is My Exodus)

(featuring Donald Lawrence, The Tri-City Singers, Le’Andria Johnson)

Call to Prayer for the New Year

This year is almost over. Our elders taught us to bow on our knees before the Almighty. Kneeling conveys our humble attitude before God. Kneeling is a symbol of our grateful hearts before the throne of Grace. Let us now prepare to kneel in prayer as we watch for the New Year. Let us praise God together on our knees.

Benediction..... Rev. Matthews / Cynthia

Rev. Matthews: The old year has passed, and the New Year has arrived.

Cynthia: We have a new beginning.

Rev. Matthews: The Lord of fresh starts has given us a brand-new slate.

Cynthia: We leave to write a new history with our Amazing God.

Rev. Matthews: Go in the peace and power of the God who holds yesterday, today and every tomorrow. Remember, you are blessed signs of God’s renewing promises as you go your way rejoicing!

Cynthia: AMEN! AMEN! AMEN!\

Ten Good Suggestions for the New Year

1. Stay out of trouble.
2. Aim for greater heights.
3. Stay focused on your job.
4. Exercise to maintain good health.
5. Practice teamwork.
6. Rely on your trusted partner to watch your back, take time trusting others.
7. Save for a rainy day, it will come.
8. Rest and relax.
9. Always take time to smile.
10. Realize that nothing is impossible with God.

