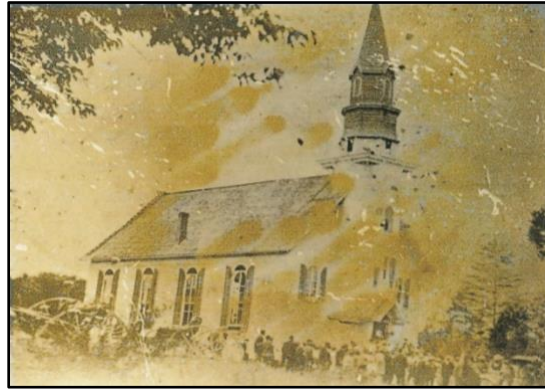


## ANGEL VISIT BAPTIST CHURCH HISTORY



Angel Visit Baptist Church, pre-1917

Angel Visit Baptist Church was founded in early 1866 by colored members of Ephesus Baptist Church, Dunnsville, Virginia. At the time of Angel Visit's establishment, there was only one other black church in Essex County and none south of the town of Tappahannock. Angel Visit founding members lived in communities from Tappahannock to Laneview, the southernmost portion of Essex County. In the winter, meetings were held in members' homes, and during the summer in brush arbors constructed for that purpose.

A deed dated July 12, 1867, notes the purchase of one and a half acres of land from W. C. Seward at a cost of \$45. The land was located on Route 17 just north of Ozeana. Trustees named in the deed were James Corbin, Carter Peterson, Isaac Pollard, Anderson Lindsey, Milton Taylor, Peter Garrett, Erastus Edwards, James Lewis, George Bird, Griffin Garley, and William Tunstall. Church records indicate that Robert Jacks was also a founding trustee. Shortly thereafter, the first church was built with Lewis Robinson, Thomas Moody, and John Moody hewing the sills. The founding pastor of Angel Visit was the Reverend Washington Holmes. The first deacons were Anderson Lindsey, Milton Taylor, John Moody, Erastus Edwards, Lawrence Fauntleroy, Frank Young, and Banks Bayton.

The Reverend Beverly Sparks was the second pastor of Angel Visit, serving from approximately 1869 to 1891. During his tenure at Angel Visit, the Reverend Sparks, a Gloucester County native and King and Queen County resident, was also the pastor of Zion Baptist Church at King and Queen Court House. The Reverend Augustus G. Bundy served as the third pastor of Angel Visit. During his tenure (1891 to c.1908), a larger church was built to replace the original one. In July of 1893, Angel Visit purchased another acre of land for \$30. This land was adjacent to the parcel previously purchased. Trustees named in the deed were Horace Jones, Carter Peterson, and Anderson Lindsey.

In the 19th century and in the early 20th century, burials took place in family cemeteries located at members' homes. However, around the turn of the 20th century a cemetery was established at the church. By the 1920s, most Angel Visit members were buried in the church cemetery.

The Reverend Grant Haynes was Angel Visit's fourth pastor, serving from about 1908 until 1911. He was followed in 1911 by the Reverend William Yates. The church was destroyed by fire in 1917, and in 1919 a new church was erected under the supervision of Charlie Wright, assisted by George Bayton, Robert Hill, and Willie Bowler. The Reverend Yates suffered a massive stroke in January of 1929. Because of the Reverend Yates' illness, the Reverend Lilbon Trigg White, who was pastor of Trinity Baptist Church at Center Cross, served as Angel Visit's acting pastor until the installation of the Reverend William Amos Young in January of 1930.



Angel Visit Baptist Church Baptism, Bowler's Wharf, circa 1910

From the beginning of its existence Angel Visit held baptisms in the Rappahannock River at Bowler's Wharf. Initially baptisms were solely Angel Visit's. However, as other African-American churches were formed, the several churches often held joint baptisms. A baptistery was built in the church early in the Reverend Young's tenure. Angel Visit made its baptistery available to other churches then and has continued to do so.

In December of 1937, Angel Visit purchased the adjoining Ozeana School property (one and a half acres) for \$300. Trustees named in the deed were Augustus Harris, James Cauthorne, George Hill, William Harris, and Jacob Louden. The church's parking lot is now located on the old school property.

Numerous improvements were made to the church during Dr. Young's 49-year pastorate. In the 1950s, a Hammond organ was purchased and a brick facade was added to the church. In the 1960s and 1970s, the sanctuary was remodeled and a new baptistery was added. Central air and heat were added and an annex was built. The annex contained classrooms, a pastor's study, a kitchen, and a dining room. During Reverend Young's pastorate, a number of ministries and auxiliaries were established at Angel Visit. These included the Deaconess Board, the Angel Visit Relief Club of Philadelphia, the Willing Workers' Club of Philadelphia, the Men's Club, the Young Adult Choir, and the Ladies' Auxiliary. The annual observances of Women's Day, Men's Day, and Youth Day began.

Many traditions have been established at Angel Visit over the years. The celebrations of homecoming and church anniversary are undoubtedly among the most significant. Homecoming provided a way for persons who had migrated north during the Great Migration to reconnect with family and southern roots. Vacations were often planned around the church calendar, and it was not unusual for persons to take off the entire week of homecoming so that they could attend Sunday services and stay for revival during the following week.



Angel Visit Baptist Church Homecoming, circa 1970

Angel Visit homecoming has been held on the second Sunday in August for as long as anyone can remember. Traditionally it consisted of a morning service and an afternoon service with a mid-day meal. The meal was served behind the church on a long table that had an A-frame covering. Each woman in the church would cook an entire meal which she would serve from her designated spot at the table. The day was popularly known as "all days meetin' with dinner on the grounds." A week of revival followed

homecoming. During the early days, revival services were held in the middle of the day with a full meal served each day.

In the early 20th century, church anniversary was also celebrated on the second Sunday in August. By the late 20th century the two celebrations were held on different times during the year. However, since 2011 homecoming and church anniversary have again been celebrated together.

The Reverend Dr. Leo Cordell Wagner, Jr. was the seventh pastor of Angel Visit, serving from 1979 to 1984. The Reverend Dr. Theron D. Williams, the eighth pastor, served from 1986 to 1987, followed by the Reverend Dr. Vernon C. Crump III, who served from 1988 to 2002. During his tenure, Gladys Cauthorne White became the first woman trustee and Helen Washington (now Washington-Randall) became the first woman deacon.

In October of 2003, the Reverend Dr. Carla E. Lightfoot was elected as the tenth pastor of Angel Visit, the first woman to hold that position. During Dr. Lightfoot's tenure, stained glass windows were installed in the sanctuary. During her pastorate, the following persons have been licensed to preach the Gospel: the Reverend Dr. Griselda Amy Bayton, the Reverend Helen Washington-Randall, and Minister Tony Shelton. These persons were ordained as deacons: Irene Harcum, Katherine Ruffin Yates, Yvonne Burrell, James Gressie Segar, Katherine Bayton, Michael Bowler, Jacqueline Segar Reynolds, and Mary Edna Holmes Skinner. The Deaconess Board became a part of the Deacon Ministry; persons serving as deaconesses were ordained as deacons or were given the title of Deaconess Emerita. During Dr. Lightfoot's pastorate a History Ministry, Praise Dance Ministry, Leadership Ministry, Bereavement Ministry, Policies and Procedures Ministry, Constitution Ministry, and Hospitality Ministry were created. Dr. Lightfoot thanks God for the wisdom and direction that He has given her to lead His people. She says that she is ever mindful that she is on assignment to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.