



The Episcopal Diocese of Rochester
Celebration of the Life & Work of

BLESSED ABSALOM JONES

First African American Priest of the Episcopal Church

February 19, 2022
11:00 am

The Episcopal Church of
St. Luke & St. Simon Cyrene
17 S. Fitzhugh St. | Rochester, NY

About the Cover:

CHRISTOPHER M. TAYLOR A.K.A. ALPHACMT is an illustrator currently based in Virginia. With a background in comics, character, and graphic design, he's pivoted towards commercial, contemporary, and pop-art paintings. His primary themes of inspiration are Afrofuturism, Afrocentric, and multi-cultural iconography, and social activism. He has provided the illustrations for *Absalom Jones: America's First Black Priest* authored by Mark Francisco Bozzuti-Jones and published by Church Publications (2021).

About Absalom Jones

Absalom Jones was born a house slave in 1746 in Delaware. He taught himself to read out of the New Testament, among other books. When sixteen, he was sold to a store owner in Philadelphia. There he attended a night school for Blacks, operated by Quakers. At twenty, he married another slave, and purchased her freedom with his earnings. Jones bought his own freedom in 1784. At St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church, he served as lay minister for its Black membership. The active evangelism of Jones and that of his friend, Richard Allen, greatly increased Black membership at St. George's. The alarmed vestry decided to segregate Blacks into an upstairs gallery, without notifying them. During a Sunday service when ushers attempted to remove them, the Blacks indignantly walked out in a body.

In 1787, Black Christians organized the Free African Society, the first organized Afro-American society, and Absalom Jones and Richard Allen were elected overseers. Members of the Society paid monthly dues for the benefit of those in need. The Society established communication with similar Black groups in other cities. In 1792, the Society began to build a church, which was dedicated on July 17, 1794.

The African Church applied for membership in the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania on the following conditions: 1, that they be received as an organized body; 2, that they have control over their local affairs; 3, that Absalom Jones be licensed as layreader, and, if qualified, be ordained as minister. In October 1794 it was admitted as St. Thomas African Episcopal Church. Bishop White ordained Jones as deacon in 1795 and as priest on September 21, 1802.

Jones was an earnest preacher. He denounced slavery, and warned the oppressors to "clean their hands of slaves." To him, God was the Father, who always acted on "behalf of the oppressed and distressed." But it was his constant visiting and mild manner that made him beloved by his own flock and by the community. St. Thomas Church grew to over 500 members during its first year. Known as "the Black Bishop of the Episcopal Church," Jones was an example of persistent faith in God and in the Church as God's instrument.

[from Holy Women, Holy Men]

A Service of Holy Eucharist Celebrating the Feast of Absalom Jones

Prelude Buffalo City Guards Parade March Francis Johnson (1792-1844)

Centennial Dirge, performed at the tomb of Washington -

Francis Johnson may be the first published African American composer, and among the first to perform in racially integrated concerts. A specialist in marching band music of the Antebellum period, Johnson was internationally famous – he performed at the White House and across Europe for royalty and for prominent composers. Nevertheless, there are records of crowds throwing rocks at his marching band of Black musicians.

In what little scholarship exists on Johnson, there is mention of his performing sacred music frequently in Philadelphia, and he was related to Ann Appo, the organist for Absalom Jones at St. Thomas' Church. There is a suggestion that Appo adapted a hymn text to the melody of the "Centennial Dirge." Perhaps, then, we begin today's celebration with music that Absalom Jones heard and loved in his own church.

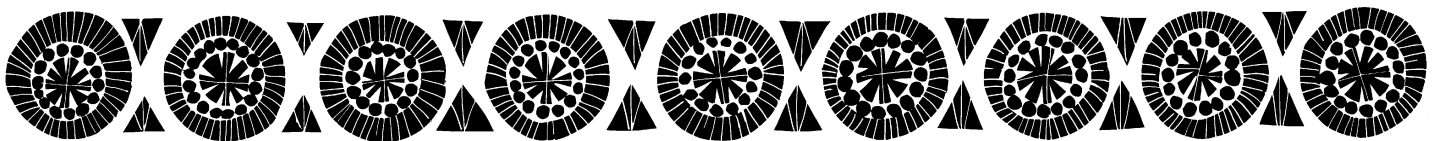
Adagio Cantabile, from "Cinnamon Grove" R. Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943)

The genius of Dett is being rediscovered with special vitality here in Rochester. Perhaps the first African American to earn a degree at Eastman, Dett was music director St. Simon's Church (before it combined with St. Luke's) while he worked on his master's degree in composition. Several of Dett's arrangements of Spirituals are included in the "Lift Every Voice and Sing" hymnal. There is so much that is remarkable about this composer, his music, and his contributions, one is strongly encouraged to research him. A good place to start is a recent article in the City Newspaper by friend of Two Saints, Mona Seghatoleslami (WXXI).

Come Down Angels Spiritual, arr. Undine Smith Moore (1904-1989)

Yvonne Trobe, soprano

Undine Smith Moore is considered the "Dean of Black Women Composers." Her settings of Spirituals and art songs show mastery of her art, and her teaching was deeply revered, as she considered "teaching itself as an art."



Processional Hymn

Blessed Absalom

1. Born in bond-age, born in shack - les, Born stripped of all dig - ni - ty,
 2. Seek - ing to ex - pand hor - i - zons, Bi - ble, pri - mer he did find;
 3. When in Phi - la - del - phia set - tled, He sought per - sons in great need,
 4. One fine morn - ing, while at wor - ship, Wrested from his knees in pray - er;

1. Abs'-lom Jones was bound, de - ter - mined, That he would one day be free.
 2. To each word he was at - ten - tive, Learn - ing, lest he fall be - hind.
 3. Ded - i - ca - ted to em - pow'r - ment, His own peo - ple did he lead.
 4. He, his friends, were thus e - vic - ted: "You no more may praise God here."

1. Bless - ed Abs'-lom, leads us, guides us, In the bonds of u - ni - ty.
 2. Bless - ed Abs'-lom, lib - er - ates us From the pri - son of our mind.
 3. Bless - ed Abs'-lom, pray that we from All in - diff' - rence may be freed.
 4. Bless - ed Abs'-lom, pray that we may Stand stead - fast and per - se - vere.

Words: Harold T. Lewis (b. 1947)
 Music: Lauda Anima, John Goss (1800-1800)

THE WORD OF GOD

Celebrant Blessed be the one, holy, and living God.

People **Glory to God for ever and ever.**

Libation Ceremony

Webster's Dictionary describes Libation as, "The act of pouring out a liquid as a religious offering." A Libation is simply honoring the ancestors, those who came before you, those who laid the foundation. Libation ceremonies play a large role in African societies, especially the Yoruba and Igbo cultures. Ancestors are an important part of these societies and are invited to participate in all public functions. Libation ceremonies are a call for Gods and ancestors to attend these events. A Libation is offered today to honor our ancestor in faith, Blessed Absalom Jones, and the countless numbers of ancestors in the faith known and unknown.

Leader 1 We gather at this moment believing in God who is Love, believing in his son Jesus who is love incarnate, who walked the earth as a human being and demonstrated a life of compassion and care even for those who are our enemies. We gather believing in the Holy Spirit, the comforter and the holy presence of God with us and within us.

We gather at this moment remembering the prayer of unity that Jesus prayed. God in Jesus; Jesus in God; we in Jesus and God (*John 17:21*) We are sanctified in God's truth. God's word is truth. (*John 17:17*)

Leader 2 We gather at this moment understanding that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed by faith our ancestors received approval. (*Hebrews 11: 1-2*)

Leader 3 We gather at this moment mindful of the seven principles of African communal life: Umoja - unity); Kujichagulia - self-determination, Ujima - collective work and responsibility; Ujamaa - cooperative economics; Nia - purpose; Kuumba - creativity; and Imani - faith.

Leader 1 We pour these libations in gratitude to God for our ancestors who built civilizations, survived the horrors of the Middle Passage, who stayed faithful to God through slavery, who maintained their dignity in the face of physical and psychic violence, who lived, laughed, loved and who gave us life. In the name of Jesus.

(water is poured out)

Leader 2 We ask forgiveness for the things we have done that hurt or disappointed our

ancestors. In the name of Jesus.

(water is poured out)

Leader 3 We forgive our ancestors for the things they did that hurt or that disappointed us. In the name of Jesus.

(water is poured out)

Leader 1 We accept our responsibility and rededicate ourselves to lives that are a praise to the glory of God, that honors our ancestors, and that will create a better world for those who are not yet born. In the name of Jesus.

(water is poured out)

People Amen.

Celebrant God be with you.

People And also with you.

Celebrant Let us pray.

Collect for the Day

Set us free, heavenly Father, from every bond of prejudice and fear; that, honoring the steadfast courage of your servant Absalom Jones, we may show forth in our lives the reconciling love and true freedom of the children of God, which you have given us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

The First Reading

Isaiah 11:1-5

A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse; a branch will sprout from his roots. The Lord's spirit will rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of planning and strength, a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord. He will delight in fearing the Lord. He won't judge by appearances, nor decide by hearsay. He will judge the needy with righteousness, and decide with equity for those who suffer in the land. He will strike the violent with the rod of his mouth; by the breath of his lips he will kill the wicked. Righteousness will be the belt around his hips, and faithfulness the belt around his waist.

Reader Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

People Thanks be to God.

Psalm 137: 1-6 *read responsively* [Order of St. Helena Version]

- 1 By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept *
when we remembered you, O Zion.
- 2 As for our harps, we hung them up *
on the trees in the midst of that land.
- 3 For those who led us away captive asked us for a song,
and our oppressors called for mirth: *
“Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”
- 4 How shall we sing God’s holy song *
upon a foreign soil?
- 5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, *
let my right hand forget its skill.
- 6 Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth
if I do not remember you, *
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

The Second Reading

Galatians 11:1-5

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law. You who want to be justified by the law have cut yourselves off from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

Reader Hear what the Spirit is saying to God’s people.
People Thanks be to God.



1. When Is - rael was in E - gypt's land, let my peo - ple go;
 2. The Lord told Mo - ses what to do, let my peo - ple go;
 3. They jour - neyed on at his com - mand, let my peo - ple go;
 4. Oh, let us all from bond - age flee, let my peo - ple go;

1. op - pressed so hard they — could not stand, let my peo - ple go.
 2. to lead the chil - dren of Is - rael through, let my peo - ple go.
 3. and come at length to — Ca - naan's land, let my peo - ple go.
 4. and let us all in — Christ be free, let my peo - ple go.

Go down, — Mo - ses, way down in E - gypt's land; —

tell old Pha - raoh to let my peo - ple go.

Words: Traditional

Music: Negro Spiritual; arr. Horace Clarence Boyer (b. 1935)

Deacon The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ according to John
People **Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

This is my commandment: love each other just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to give up one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I don't call you servants any longer, because servants don't know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because everything I heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Deacon The Gospel of the Lord
People **Praise to you, Lord Christ.**

The Sermon

The Rev. Andrea Stridiron
Deacon, St. Thomas' Episcopal Church, Rochester

Musical Meditation after the Sermon

Nobody Knows the Trouble I See, Lord ... Spiritual, arr. Dett
(Please see notes on R. Nathaniel Dett under prelude music.)

This is a harmonization of the lesser-known melody of this Spiritual. It is included in the LEVAS hymnal (172), but due to the sophisticated writing, is shared here as a meditation.

The Prayers of the People A Litany of Thanksgiving for Blessed Absalom Jones

Nicole Hercules
Co-Chair, Episcopal Diocese of Rochester
Racial Reconciliation, Healing and Justice Committee

Written by the Reverend Jemonde Taylor, Rector of St. Ambrose Episcopal Church and based on "A Thanksgiving Sermon" given by Absalom Jones on January 1, 1808.

Celebrant: O God of freedom and justice: we celebrate this day your servant Absalom Jones, the first person of African Ancestry ordained in the Episcopal Church. Empower us to build a world where righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne as we pray: Glory to God for your precious record of power and goodness; let all the nations of the earth praise you.

Leader Let your Church continue the ministries of reconciliation and peace. Help us to grow Absalom Jones' ministry of racial justice. Glory to God for your precious record of power and goodness;

People Let all the nations of the earth praise you.

Leader God who hears, you put the tears of our forebearers into your bottle, recording them in your book: help the nations of the world hear their citizen's concerns by responding to injustice, war, and slavery with actions that lead to peace. Glory to God for your precious record of power and goodness;

People Let all the nations of the earth praise you.

Leader God of our Ancestors, Blessed Absalom reminded us that just as your chosen people acknowledged a Syrian, ready to perish, was their ancestor, we to must acknowledge that an enslaved African ready to perish, was our ancestor: Endue our elders and leaders with wisdom and vision to reach back with the purpose of moving forward. Glory to God for your precious record of power and goodness;

People Let all the nations of the earth praise you.

Leader God of our Ancestors, Blessed Absalom reminded us that just as your chosen people acknowledged a Syrian, ready to perish, was their ancestor, we to must acknowledge that an enslaved African ready to perish, was our ancestor: Endue our elders and leaders with wisdom and vision to reach back with the purpose of moving forward. Glory to God for your precious record of power and goodness;

People Let all the nations of the earth praise you.

Leader God who creates, Blessed Absalom reminded us that sacrifices must be accompanied with action: guide our feet to run the race without getting weary. Keep us focused on the fight for equality. Glory to God for your precious record of power and goodness;

People Let all the nations of the earth praise you.

Celebrant O Lord move us, who are assembled in your presence, to be always thankful for your mercies, and to act as is becoming a people who owe so much to your goodness. We ask all these blessings and mercies, only in the Name of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

Confession of Sin [Standing Commission on Liturgy & Music/Confession for Racial Reconciliation]

Celebrant Let us confess our sins against God and one another.

Minister and People

Almighty God, Source of all that is, Giver of every good gift:

You create all people in your image and call us to love one another as you love us.

**We confess that we have failed to honor you
in the great diversity of the human family.**

**We have desired to live in freedom,
while building walls between ourselves and others.**

**We have longed to be known and accepted for who we are,
while making judgements of others based on the color of skin,
or the shape of features, or the varieties of human experience.**

**We have tried to love our neighbors individually
while yet benefitting from systems that hold those same neighbors in oppression.**

Forgive us, Holy God.

Give us eyes to see you as you are revealed in all people.

Strengthen us for the work of reconciliation rooted in love.

**Restore us in your image, to be beloved community,
united in our diversity,**

even as you are one with Christ and the Spirit,

Holy and undivided Trinity, now and for ever. Amen.

Absolution

Almighty God have mercy on you, +forgive you all your sins through the grace of Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. **Amen.**

Celebrant The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People **And also with you.**

The Peace

Celebrant The Peace of the Lord be always with you.

People **And also with you.**

Please share a sign of this peace safely.

The Offertory

The offering this day is collected in support of Vorhees College and St. Augustine University, the remaining Episcopal Church affiliated institutions of higher learning that are Historically Black Colleges and Universities. The following electronic options are:

Use Venmo: @TwoSaints17

<https://onrealm.org/twosaints/-/form/give/now>

Use Apple Pay: twosaints17@gmail.com

Use Google Pay/G Pay: twosaints17@gmail.com

Text Giving - Text "TwoSaints1987" to 73256 to use your mobile device.

Offertory Anthem

Ndikhokhele Bawo ... traditional isiXhosa (South Africa), arr. Michael Barrett
Sung in the Xhosa language, this arrangement represents an integration of traditional, African call-and-response music with lush choral writing.

He paid for me, my Father (by dying on the cross)
He paid for me by representing me while on earth
Father, I thank you because you will always keep me safe.
I implore you to lead me during times of sorrow and strife.
You are always standing nearby.

THE HOLY COMMUNION

The Great Thanksgiving [Eucharistic Prayers by Samuel Wells and Abigail Kocher, Duke Divinity School]

Celebrant The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Celebrant Lift up your hearts.

People We lift them to the Lord

Celebrant Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Blessed be your name throughout the earth, Lord God, for you have created wonders and, from the beginning, have drawn every living thing into communion with you. In the bounty of your creation you fashioned land and sea, sun and stars, plants and animals, that we might know the constancy of your love for us. In covenant life you drew a people to yourself, to give and receive love in your name. In the fullness of time you drew near to us in your Son, to bind us to you in the promise of everlasting life. In every time and every place you offer us brothers and sisters with whom to live your ways of forgiveness and grace. In every age you surround us with a great company of saints that we might be bound to one another in this world that you so love. And so with the company of earth and heaven we praise your name and join the unending hymn.

God of holy unity, you are perfectly three and perfectly one; from many, make your people one in you. Sanctify your church around the world and transform our fractures into fruitfulness. Send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and this cup, that they may be for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; who at supper with his disciples, took bread, gave you thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to them, saying, "Take, eat: this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup. Again he gave you thanks, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Drink this, all of you: this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Great is the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

God the one Father of us all, you gather us in one faith, one hope, one baptism. Draw near to your children when their lives are overshadowed by what divides. Where wars have not yet ceased, come quickly. Where hostility tears apart brothers and sisters, open your path of peace. Where the relationship between your people and your creation falters, renew our awe in the wonders you have made. Where your church's diversity fails to reflect the glorious kaleidoscope of your kingdom, lead us to greater love and wider mercy than we have ever before imagined. Hasten the day when we who share Christ's body will join him in perfect and holy communion, in the everlasting embrace of the Holy Spirit, as you draw all things to yourself, now and forever. **AMEN.**

Celebrant As our Savior Christ has taught us we now pray,

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your Name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

The Breaking of the Bread

Celebrant Alleluia. We break this bread to share in the Body of Christ.

People We who are many are one body, for we all share in the one bread. Alleluia.

Music During and after the Distribution of Communion

Benedictus, from *Communion Service in F*

Florence Price (1887-1953)

Florence Price is finally receiving the recognition she deserves as one of the greatest composers and figures in American Music. From her family fleeing the South due to lynching threats, to her identifying as Mexican (instead of African American) in order to have greater chance of acceptance to Conservatory, to being the first African American female to have a symphony premiered by a major orchestra (Chicago), she is remarkable.

Lament

Clarence Cameron White (1880-1960)

Benjamin Magruder, violin

Based upon the Spiritual, "I'm troubled in mind," this work represents Clarence Cameron's White output as a virtuoso, concert violinist. In the early 1900's, he was considered the foremost African American violinist. Jascha Heifetz performed and promoted his music. Ben Magruder is a violist in the RPO, but kindly takes on the violin to share the music of this important composer.

He's Got the Whole World in His Hand

arr. Margaret Bonds (1913-1972)

Jazmine Saunders, soprano

Ms. Saunders is the recipient of the William Warfield scholarship at the Eastman School of music, and kindly shares with us today the work of Margaret Bonds. Bonds was a student and colleague of Florence Price, and her art songs and Spirituals were celebrated by Leontyne Price. The Two Saints music director particularly admires the thoughtfulness of her compositions, namely how she can weave Jazz styles into traditional, classical idioms with such elegance and meaning.

Postcommunion Prayer

Celebrant Let us pray.

Loving God, we give you thanks for restoring us in your image and nourishing us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood. Now send us forth a people, forgiven, healed, renewed; that we may proclaim your love to the world and continue in the risen life of Christ our Savior. Amen.

The Blessing [Presiding Bishop Michael B. Curry]

Celebrant Now go forth into the world in peace, be strong and of good courage, hold fast to that which is good, render to no one evil for evil, love the Lord your God, love your neighbor and love yourself and may the blessing of God +who made us, who loves us, and who travels with us be with you now and with those whom you love for ever. **Amen.**

Final Hymn

Lift Every Voice and Sing

- 1 Lift ev'ry voice and sing,
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us;
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun
Of our new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.
- 2 Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chast'ning rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over away that with tears has been watered;
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered;
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.
- 3 God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by thy might,
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met thee;
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget thee,
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God, true to our native land.

Words: James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938)

Music: J. Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954)

The Dismissal

Deacon Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
People Thanks be to God.

Postlude Improvisation on “We Shall Overcome” Carl Haywood

Participants in this Service

Clergy	The Rev. Keith Patterson The Rev. Dahn Gandell
Homilist	The Rev. Andrea Stridiron
Lectors	The Rev. Saundra Cordingly, Jesse Allen
Libation Ceremony	The Rev. Dahn Gandell, Floyd Bayley, Alix Zanibbi
Gospeler	The Rev. Dahn Gandell
Director of Music	Dr. Christopher Petit
Musicians	The RIT Singers Yvonne Trobe, soprano Jazmine Saunders, soprano Abigail Hanna, soprano Benjamin Magruder, tenor, violin Peter Schoelkopf, bass
Ambassadors	Dr. Allan Cuseo Carol Evans Bruce Colburn
Altar Guild	Bruce Colburn
Recording Engineer	Alex Reynolds