

Our Beginning, Our Ending
The Watch Night Homily
Presented by Rev. Dr. Gregory Young
On Friday, December 31, 2010

Homily:

I wish each of you and your families a blessed New Year. My prayer is that as we have been sustained and nurtured by God in the past, so for 2011 we will know the holy presence of the one we worship and praise this evening. This night we stand on the threshold of a new year remembering the lives of those who have given so much to make us who we are today. We also praise God that we can count ourselves among the living and ask for Divine guidance and sustenance for the years yet to come.

Watch Night, as celebrated in the African American Community, finds its meaning dating back to December 31, 1862 – the eve before the emancipation proclamation took effect on January 1, 1863. On that New Year's night thousands of black slaves gathered to praise God for the end of slavery and the beginning of freedom. The Watch Night service has its origin with the Moravians, a small Christian denomination that has its roots in the present day Czech Republic, and dates back to 1733. The founder of Methodism incorporated into the Moravian Watch Night service the opportunity for covenant renewal. The first Methodist Watch Night Covenant Renewal service in the USA was held on December 31, 1770 at the Old St. Georges Church in Philadelphia, PA.

As one year comes to an end and a new year begins it is fitting that Christian brothers and sisters gather to praise God. We pause this evening to thank God for the blessings of the year past and to pray for the blessings that God has in store for us in the year ahead. We pause to remember

those who once walked at our side; carried us in their arms; dried our tears of sadness; filled our hearts with joy and laughter; fed us with the bread of life; taught us of the God of creation and the savior of our souls – those who once journeyed through life with us but are here no more. We come to thank God for their lives and to rejoice with one another that while their life here has ended, their life in heaven has become a new beginning in their journey of life with God.

All that we are, all that we have become is a blessing from God given to us through grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters all whose lives have in some way have touched our lives. As one year ends and we give thanks for what has been, we also look ahead with eyes of faith and pray for what will be.