

## Bethlehem Baptist Church of Columbia, Inc. To Celebrate Centennial

Written by Staff Writer

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Columbia, SC - In 1913 when Bethlehem Baptist Church on Lyon Street in Columbia was founded, Woodrow Wilson was President, women were protesting in Washington, D.C. for the right to vote, and African Americans were celebrating just 50 years of freedom.

It was in that backdrop that a courageous woman-- Rev. Sarah H. Smith, an ordained minister, came to Columbia after accepting the call of Christ in Savannah, Georgia and conducted several revival meetings throughout Richland County. One revival meeting at Sidney C.M.E. Church on House Street in Columbia was so soul-stirring that thirty seven converts followed her. On May 4, 1913 Reverend Smith and her followers organized and founded Bethlehem Baptist Church of Columbia, Inc.

Like most African American churches of the day, Bethlehem was a hub for community activity for disenfranchised Blacks who were excluded from the mainstream and denied access to opportunities afforded to their White counterparts.

Bethlehem Baptist Church of Columbia, Inc. will celebrate 100 years of evangelism, service and citizenship May 15-19, 2013. The Centennial Banquet is slated for Friday, May 17 at 7 pm at the Bethlehem Conference and Event Center 1216 Lyon Street. Featured speaker is Reverend Dr. Charles Jackson, Senior Pastor of Brookland Baptist Church in West Columbia. The Centennial Sermon will be delivered Sunday May 19th at the 11am Service by the church's Pastor Reverend Dr. Charles A. DeLaughter.

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In recent years, the church has used its presence in the Liberty Hill community of Columbia to foster economic development, encourage safer neighborhoods and promote good citizenship. "We believe our evangelism should not be limited to the walls of the church," says Dr. DeLaughter who has pastored the church since 1986. "Within our church community there were a few blighted areas that seemed to breed criminal activity. When the people in those areas refused to be evangelized, we just bought the property and created more safe, peaceful environments."

In fact, City of Columbia officials applaud Dr. DeLaughter and the congregation for helping to curb crime and foster good citizenship in the area. "Institutions like Bethlehem Baptist Church of Columbia Inc. are important to the community fabric of our city," says Columbia Mayor Steve Benjamin. "Their efforts improve the quality of life of people in the immediate area and have an exponential impact throughout the city. We congratulate them on this milestone," concludes Benjamin.