

May God Bless You With
A Safe and Prosperous



Mount Carmel Baptist Church

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*Let your light
so shine before men,
that they may see
your good works,
and glorify your
Father
which is in heaven.*

Matthew 5:16 (KJV)

Sunday, December 31, 2023
6:00pm
Baptism and Watch Night Service

Order of Service

Baptism

Music and Meditation

Call to Worship/Invocation

Musical Selection(s)

Scripture Reading: **Philippians 3:12-14 (NIV)**

Musical Selection(s)

Sermon

“I’m Done With That”

Invitational Hymn

Testimonies

Watch Night Prayer

Benediction

Watch Night

The origin of Watch Night church services

Many of you who live or grew up in Black communities in the United States have probably heard of “Watch Night Services,” the gathering of the faithful in church on New Year’s Eve. The service usually begins anywhere from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. and ends at midnight with the entrance of the New Year. Some folks come to church first, before going out to celebrate. For others, church is the only New Year’s Eve event.

Like many others, I always assumed that Watch Night was a fairly standard Christian religious service — made a bit more Afro centric because that’s what happens when elements of Christianity become linked with the Black Church. Still, it seemed that predominately White Christian churches did not include Watch Night services on their calendars, but focused instead on Christmas Eve programs. In fact, there were instances where clergy in mainline denominations wondered aloud about the propriety of linking religious services with a secular holiday like New Year’s Eve.

However, there is a reason for the importance of New Year’s Eve services in African American congregations.

The Watch Night Services in Black communities that we celebrate today can be traced back to gatherings on December 31, 1862, also known as “Freedom’s Eve.” On that night, Blacks came together in churches and private homes all across the nation, anxiously awaiting news that the Emancipation Proclamation actually had become law. Then, at the stroke of midnight, it was January 1, 1863, and all slaves in the Confederate States were declared legally free. When the news was received, there were prayers, shouts and songs of joy as people fell to their knees and thanked God.

Black folks have gathered in churches annually on New Year’s Eve ever since, praising God for bringing us safely through another year.

It’s been 141 years since that first Freedom’s Eve and many of us were never taught the African American history of Watch Night, but tradition still brings us together at this time every year to celebrate “how we got over”.