

Lift Every Voice & Sing

Words by James Weldon Johnson

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Lift every voice and sing, till earth and Heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise, high as the listening 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.

Stony the road we trod, bitter the chastening 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 a way 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.

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.



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Commemoration referenced from **Holy Women, Holy Men: Celebrating the Saints**
and The Book of Common Prayer

Absalom Jones



**Celebrating the ministry and legacy of the
Reverend Absalom Jones
the first American priest of African descent
in the Episcopal Church.**

Almighty and everlasting God, around Whose throne are gathered the faithful of every race and nation, set us free 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 forever. **Amen**

Lessons Isaiah 11:1–5
 Galatians 5:1–5
 John 15:12–15

Psalms 137: 1–6

Almighty God, you have surrounded us with a great cloud of witnesses. Grant that we, encouraged by the good example of your servant Absalom Jones, may persevere in running the race that is set before us, until at last we may with him attain to your eternal joy; through Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. **Amen.**



Absalom Jones served as an example of Godly love and prophetic witness in the history of the Episcopal Church. In 1973, the 64th General Convention of the Episcopal Church added his name to the list of "common saints" and appointed an optional feast day in Church calendar to be celebrated on February 13th.

The Reverend Absalom Jones

1746 - 1818



Born into slavery in Sussex County, Delaware on November 6, 1746, Absalom Jones taught himself to read out of the New Testament. When Absalom was 16, his owner took him to Philadelphia, PA., where he worked as a clerk and handyman in a retail store and attended a Quaker school at night. In 1770, Absalom married Mary King, another slave. Not long after his marriage, while still a slave himself, Absalom purchased his wife's freedom with earnings he made working multiple odd jobs. Incredibly determined and industrious, by the time Jones was 38 years old, he had not only purchased both

their freedoms, but also bought a house and later built two more which he used for rental income.

Originally, a devout Methodist, Absalom Jones worshiped at St. George's Methodist Church, one of a few churches in Philadelphia that opened its door to Black people. During this period Absalom met Richard Allen. The two became lifelong friends and lay preachers to the Black congregants at St. George's. Their efforts met with great success and the congregation multiplied tenfold. As the number and involvement of St. George's black members increased, their presence was no longer welcomed. One Sunday morning, while Absalom was kneeling in prayer at the altar rail, a trustee demanded that he and the other Black congregants remove themselves from the main sanctuary and go to a segregated gallery upstairs; relegating them to a "slave gallery" in the church they had helped to build. When Absalom Jones refused to interrupt his prayers, the trustee attempted to forcibly remove him from his place at the altar rail. For this gross indignity, the entire company of Blacks congregants walked out of St. George's, vowing never to return.

In 1787, Absalom Jones and Richard Allen established the Free African Society (FAS) of Philadelphia, the first benevolent society for Africans in the America. Its purpose was to provide assistance for the economic, educational, social, and spiritual needs of the Black community. It operated as non-denominational, mutual aid organization helping widows and orphans; assisting in sick, relief and burial expenses, and the assimilation of newly freedmen into urban life.

In 1792, recognizing the need for a formal church, the "First African Church" was organized in direct response to the FAS membership. After the racial tension and altercation at St. George's Methodist church, the membership desired to affiliate with a religious denomination that would not be hostile to their presence and would receive them as an organized worshipping community. When they voted to conform to the polity and worship of the Episcopal Church, Richard Allen, who continued to be an advocate for the Methodist, withdrew from the African Society and later created a new denomination known as African Methodist Episcopal. Absalom Jones remained as sole leader and led the Church's efforts to become Episcopalian.

In addition to his pastoral care, Absalom Jones served Christ in the civic affairs of the city of Philadelphia. During the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1793, Jones helped rally the Black community to serve as nurses, attendants and undertakers. Angels of mercy, they worked courageously to aid the sick and bury the dead at risk of their own of peril.

On October 17, 1794, the African Church was formally received into the Diocese of Pennsylvania as the **African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas**, with the rights and privileges of other parochial churches. On August 16, 1795, at the age of 49, Absalom Jones was ordained into the diaconate by the Rt. Rev. William White, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania; thereby making him not only the first Methodist lay preacher, but also the first Episcopal deacon of African descent in the United States. In 1802, Absalom Jones, was finally ordained, thus becoming the **first priest in America of African descent, formerly a slave**. St. Thomas started with a congregation of 250 and within one year grew to more than 500 registered congregants making it the second largest congregation in the diocese of Pennsylvania. Lovingly referred to by his congregation as the "Black Bishop", Absalom Jones faithfully served the people of St. Thomas as prophet, priest and pastor for more than 20 years.

During his ministry, the Reverend Jones upheld a deep conviction that religious and social action go hand in hand. Fr. Absalom loved to quote [Galatians 5:1](#) "**Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.**" For Absalom Jones, the church was not only for worship and religious instruction but also for education, mutual aid, and protest. Well-known for his oratory skills and rich command of religious and rhetorical language, the Rev. Jones spearheaded many protests denouncing slavery, warning oppressors to 'clean their hands'. He helped established the tradition of anti-slavery sermons on New Year's Day.

In 1797, Absalom Jones co-founded the African Masonic Lodge of Philadelphia and was installed as First Worshipful Master. In 1815, he was unanimously elected as the First Grand Master of the First African Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania.

Devout clergyman, abolitionist and civic leader, the Reverend Jones co-founded a day school, the Female Benevolent Society and the African Friendly Society at St. Thomas. In 1799, he led the his community in petitioning the Pennsylvania State Legislature for the abolition of slavery and co-authored a similar petition to the United States Congress in 1800 condemning the brutality of the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act; calling for the abolition of the slave trade and the gradual emancipation of existing slaves.

Revered as a man of unwavering moral conviction, Fr. Absalom co-founded the Society for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality in 1809. In 1817, Jones reunited with friend Richard Allen to condemn the newly formed American Colonization Society, which encouraged freed slaves to return to Africa. One year later, Jones died at his home on February 13, 1818.

**** Reverend Jones's prominent role in early Philadelphia history is confirmed by the existence of the formal portrait of him (seen above), which now hangs in the Delaware Art Museum, depicting him in an honored status, seated in ecclesiastical robes and holding a bible. This was unheard of for any Black person no less a former slave.**