



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

February 2022

Dear friends and supporters, brothers and sisters in Christ,

In this newsletter I want to share with you a wonderful experience that I had visiting the Holy Trinity Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, here in Kingston, Jamaica. The importance of Ethiopian Christianity for Jamaicans was made very clear to me last semester when I was teaching a course on the early church. One thing I have noticed in teaching church history for many years is that students will latch onto material that they find highly relevant for their own self-understanding, and my students last semester latched onto the history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

This church started in the early fourth century when two Christian Syrian boys were captured from a boat on the Red Sea and sold to the king of Ethiopia, in whose court they grew up along with the prince, Ezana. They were freed as adults and one of them, Frumentius, went to Egypt to request that the bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius, send a missionary bishop to Ethiopia; Athanasius sent Frumentius himself in 347. The church grew from the royal household out, and around 480 a group of nine Syrian monks arrived to establish a thriving network of monasteries throughout Ethiopia. The kings of Ethiopia became powerful and connected their dynasties with that of King Solomon from the Bible. The thirteenth-century King Lalibela built a series of enormous rock-hewn churches at Roha, representing pilgrimage sites in Jerusalem, thus making Ethiopia itself a "holy land". For many Jamaicans emerging from slavery in the late nineteenth century this African holy land became a powerful symbol of a free and royal past that would inspire the rise of Rastafarianism in the twentieth century. It was the Rastafarians who asked Emperor Haile Selassie I to authorize the establishment of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Jamaica, and he did so in 1970, after which the most famous Rastafarian, the reggae singer Bob Marley, converted to Christianity and was buried as a member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in 1981. The influence of this church extends to other Christian churches as well. For example, the fact that many rural Ethiopian churches are round



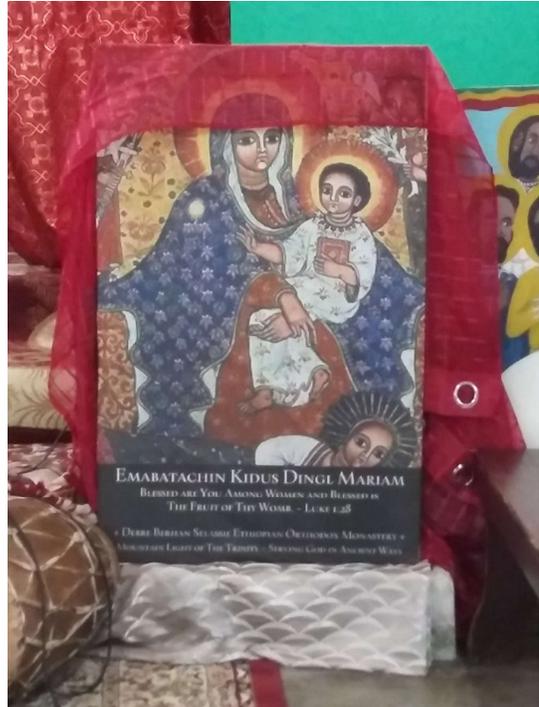
You can learn more about this congregation at their website: <https://www.eotcja.org/>.



inspired Mona Baptist Church, just down the street from the United Theological College of the West Indies, where I teach, to build a round church building for themselves in the Ethiopian style.

Photo from Mona Baptist Church Livestream at Youtube.com.

The day that I visited the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was really special because the (5-hour!) liturgy opened with the baptism of a baby girl named Garnette Mariam; her second name comes from Mary, Jesus' mother, depicted on an icon at the church (see photo on the right). The drum in the photo was played by one of the women during the worship service to accompany the hymns, which were otherwise chanted acapella. Among the scriptural texts that were read during the baptism was Acts 8:26-40, which is about an Ethiopian eunuch who is baptized by the apostle Philip. Just before the baptism, the whole congregation was asked to renounce the devil and all his works four times, once facing toward the east, once toward the west, once toward the north, and once toward the south. Then Garnette Mariam was lowered three times in the name of the Triune God into a large basin of water, after which the priest anointed her with oil on almost every part of her body as a seal of the Holy Spirit that cannot be broken. Then, rather than clapping in celebration, the congregation ululated joyfully.



As we say in the Lutheran Church, Garnette Mariam, “We welcome you into the body of Christ and into the mission we share: join us in giving thanks and praise to God and bearing God’s creative and redeeming word to all the world.”

Carolyn

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Garnette Mariam

P.S. In addition to prayer, here are ways to support me financially.

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