

**“WELCOME TO THE MOTHER CHURCH”**  
**“Enter His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise.**  
**Give thanks unto Him and bless His name”**  
**Psalm 100:4**

Grace and Peace to you from God on this **Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost and Homecoming Sunday.**

On behalf of the Clergy, Wardens, Vestry and People of God, welcome to the historic African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, founded in 1792 as the first Black Episcopal Church in the USA, and proudly a part of the world-wide Anglican Communion. The first rector of this historic parish, The Rev. Fr. Absalom Jones was also the first Black Episcopal priest in the nation.

Our parish boldly proclaims the reconciling Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are an active, mission-minded and growing church family. Whoever you are and wherever you may find yourself on your spiritual journey of faith, you are always welcomed at St. Thomas Church, where we are joyfully and enthusiastically committed to Jesus' message of love, hope, prayer and faith. Today, as you worship in this place, may you experience and feel the presence of the Lord, and may you leave feeling renewed, refreshed and revived. Again, welcome!

Faithfully,  
The Very Rev. Canon Martini Shaw  
17th Rector and  
Dean of the Schuylkill Deanery



**Please use the QR Code or Text “AECST” to 73256 to contribute to the church ministries.**

**The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Homecoming Sunday  
September 13, 2026**

**The Celebrant and Homilist:** The Very Rev. Canon Martini Shaw

**Vergers:** Eugene Golson and Karen Ragland

**Music Ministry:** St. Thomas Chancel Choir and St. Thomas Gospel Choir

**Dance Ministry:** St. Thomas Angels in Motion

**Livestream/Sound Ministry:** Quentin Heyward and Terri Tillman

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**Order of Service**

**The Opening Mediation**

Verger Eugene Golson

**The Prelude**

St. Thomas Music Ministry

**The Opening Hymn- "Sweet, Sweet Spirit"**

**Lift Every Voice and Sing (LEVAS) #120**

**1) There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place,  
And I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord.  
There are sweet expressions on each face,  
And I know they feel the presence of the Lord.**

**Refrain:**

**Sweet Holy Spirit, Sweet Heavenly Dove,  
Stay right here with us, filling us with Your love.  
And for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise;  
Without a doubt we'll know that we have been revived,  
When we shall leave this place.**

**2) There are blessings you cannot receive  
Till you know Him in His fullness and believe.  
You're the one to profit when you say,  
"I am going to walk with Jesus all the way." [Refrain]**

**3) If you say He saved you from your sin,  
Now you're weak, you're bound, and cannot enter in,  
you can make it right if you will yield;  
You'll enjoy the Holy Spirit that we feel.[Refrain]**

**A Word of Welcome**

The Celebrant

**The Opening Salutation**

**Book of Common Prayer (BCP) Pg. 355**

**The Celebrant:** Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**The People:** And blessed be God's kingdom, now and forever. Amen.

**The Collect for Purity**

**BCP Pg. 355**

**The Celebrant:** Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid:  
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and  
worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**The Song of Praise**

St. Thomas Chancel Choir

## The Proclamation of the Word

### The Collect of the Day

**The Celebrant:** The Lord be with you.

**The People:** And also with you.

**The Celebrant:** Let us pray:

O God, because without you we are not able to please you, mercifully grant that your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

### The First Reading: Exodus 14:19-31

Dr. Ingrid Nembhard

#### A Reading from the Book of Exodus.

The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, "Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

**The Reader:** The Word of the Lord.

**The People:** Thanks be to God.

### Psalm 114

Zachariah Ingram

Hallelujah!

When Israel came out of Egypt, \*

**the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech,**

Judah became God's sanctuary \*

**and Israel his dominion.**

The sea beheld it and fled; \*

**Jordan turned and went back.**

The mountains skipped like rams, \*

**and the little hills like young sheep.**

What ailed you, O sea, that you fled? \*  
**O Jordan, that you turned back?**

You mountains, that you skipped like rams? \*  
**you little hills like young sheep?**

Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, \*  
**at the presence of the God of Jacob,**

Who turned the hard rock into a pool of water \*  
**and flint-stone into a flowing spring.**

**The Second Reading: Romans 14:1-12**

Ryan Chatman

**A Reading from Paul's letter to the Church in Rome.**

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

**The Reader:** The Word of the Lord.

**The People:** Thanks be to God.

**The Gradual Hymn— "Lift Him Up"**

**LEVAS # 159 (vv. 1-2)**

**1) How to reach the masses, those of every birth,  
For an answer Jesus gave the key;  
"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth,  
Will draw all men unto Me."**

**"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth,  
will draw all men unto Me."**

**Chorus: Lift Him up. Lift Him up.  
Still He speaks from eternity**

**2) Oh! The world is hungry for the living bread,  
Lift the Savior up for them to see,  
Trust Him And do not doubt the words that He  
said, "I'll draw all men unto Me." [Chorus]**

**The Holy Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35**

**The Priest:** The Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.

**The People:** Glory to you, Lord Christ.

Peter came and said to Jesus, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but I tell you, seventy-seven times.

“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

**The Priest:** The Gospel of the Lord.

**The People:** Praise to you, Lord Christ.

**The Homily Hymn – “Lift Him Up”**

**LEVAS # 159 (vv. 3-4 )**

**3) Don’t exalt the preacher, don’t exalt the pew,  
Preach the gospel simple, full and free.  
Prove Him and you will find that promise is  
true, “I’ll draw all men unto Me”.**

**“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth,  
will draw all men unto Me.”**

**4) Lift Him up by living as a Christian ought.  
Let the world in you the Savior see;  
Then all will gladly follow Him who once taught,  
“I’ll draw all men unto Me.”**

**Chorus: Lift Him up. Lift Him up.  
Still He speaks from eternity**

**The Homily**

**The Rector**

**The Call to Christian Discipleship**

**The Nicene Creed**

**We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father.**

**Through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven:  
by the power of the Holy Spirit  
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.  
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified.  
He has spoken through the Prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

### **The Prayers of the People**

Verger Karen Ragland

Let us pray for the Church and for the world.

Grant, Almighty God, that all who confess your Name may be united in your truth, live together in your love, and reveal your glory in the world.

*Silence*

Lord, in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

Guide the people of this land, and of all the nations, in the ways of justice and peace; that we may honor one another and serve the common good.

*Silence*

Lord, in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

Give us all a reverence for the earth as your own creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor and glory.

*Silence*

Lord, in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

Bless all whose lives are closely linked with ours, and grant that we may serve Christ in them, and love one another as he loves us.

*Silence*

Lord, in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit; give them courage and hope in their troubles and bring them the joy of your salvation.

*Silence*

Lord, in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

We commend to your mercy all who have died, that your will for them may be fulfilled; and we pray that we may share with all your saints in your eternal kingdom.

*Silence*

Lord, in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

As our nation has marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the attacks of September 11, 2001, we remember before God all who lost their lives in New York City, at the Pentagon, and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania; those who later died from illnesses related to that day; and all whose lives were forever changed.

*Silence*

Lord, in your mercy

**Hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for firefighters, police officers, emergency workers, chaplains, members of the Armed Forces, and ordinary citizens whose courage and self-sacrifice revealed light in the midst of darkness.

Comfort all who continue to grieve; heal the wounds that remain among us; protect all who serve the common good; and deliver our nation and our world from terrorism, hatred, prejudice, violence, and fear.

Make us instruments of reconciliation and peace and teach the nations of the earth to walk together in the ways of justice, mercy, and love.

*Silence*

Lord, in your mercy.

**Hear our prayer**

Let us pray for our own needs and those of others.

### **The Concluding Collect**

The Celebrant

Almighty and everlasting God, whose providence has sustained your people throughout every generation: Receive these prayers we offer with thankful hearts, and grant that, trusting in your mercy and guided by your Spirit, we may continue to serve you faithfully; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **The Confession**

**The Celebrant:** If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Let us kneel and confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

(Silence is kept)

### **The Celebrant and the People**

**Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.**

### **The Absolution**

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. **Amen.**

### **The Peace**

**The Celebrant:** The peace of the Lord be always with you.

**The People:** And also with you.

**The Holy Eucharist**

**The Offertory Sentence and Offering**

The Celebrant

**Offer your gift now via text: Text “AECST” to 73256**

**Or use the QR Code on page 1**

**The Musical Offertory Selection**

St. Thomas Gospel Choir

**The Great Thanksgiving**

**BCP Pg. 361**

**The Celebrant:** The Lord be with you.

**The People:** And also with you.

**The Celebrant:** Lift up your hearts.

**The People:** We lift them to the Lord.

**The Celebrant:** Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**The People:** It is right to give God thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

For you are the source of light and life; you made us in your image and called us to new life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who forever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

**The Sanctus**

**The Celebrant and the People (Sung)**

**Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

**The Celebrant:** Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself, and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all. He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself, in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, “Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.”

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, “Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me.”

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

**The Memorial Acclamation**  
**The Celebrant and the People**  
**Christ has died.**  
**Christ is risen.**  
**Christ will come again.**

**The Celebrant:** We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts.

Sanctify them by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him. Sanctify us also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ: By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. **Amen.**

**The Lord's Prayer (Sung)**  
**And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to pray,**  
**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

**The Breaking of the Bread**  
**The Celebrant:** Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;  
**The People:** Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.

**The Agnus Dei**  
**The Celebrant:** Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.  
**The People:** Have mercy upon us.  
**The Celebrant:** Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.  
**The People:** Have mercy upon us.  
**The Celebrant:** Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.  
**The People:** Grant us thy peace.

**The Prayer of Humble Access**  
**Let us pray:** We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table. But thou art the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy; Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body, and our souls washed through his most precious blood, and that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.

**The Celebrant:** The Gifts of God for the People of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

#### **The Distribution of Communion**

All baptized persons who accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, are invited to receive the Holy Sacrament. If you only wish to receive a blessing, please cross your arms on your chest.

**The Communion Selections**

St. Thomas Music Ministry

**The Celebrant and the People:**

**Eternal God, heavenly Father, you have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart; through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**Sending Forth of the Lay Eucharistic Visitors**

**The Celebrant:** In the healing name of Jesus and with the compassionate embrace of this parish family, I send you forth bearing these Holy Gifts to those to whom you go today, so that they may share with us in the Communion of Christ's Body and Blood.

**The People:** We who are many are one body, and we all share one bread and one cup.

**The Announcements**

Richard Jones, Rector's Warden

**The Installation and Blessing of Tree of Life Prison Ministry**

**The Commissioning and Blessing of new Verger (Dr. Naomi Johnson Booker)**

**The Recognition of Visitors and Guests**

**The Blessing of Birthdays, Anniversaries and Travel**

**The Final Blessing**

The Celebrant

**The Closing Hymn – "What a Fellowship"**

LEVAS #

**1) What a fellowship, what a joy divine,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms;  
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.**

**2) O how sweet to walk, in this pilgrim way,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.  
O how bright the path grows from day to day,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.**

**Chorus: Leaning, leaning, safe and  
secure from all alarms;  
Leaning, leaning,  
leaning on the everlasting arms.**

**3) What have I to dread, what have I to fear,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.  
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.**

**The Dismissal**

**The Postlude**

St. Thomas Music Ministry