

St. John Missionary Baptist Church
Annual Black History Celebration
Sunday, February 22, 2026

Theme: *Faith and Knowledge Working Together*

Scripture: “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.*” Proverbs 1:7

Good morning, St. John! “This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

To Pastor Jemison, First Lady Jacqueline Jemison, ministers of the Gospel, officers of the church, and this wonderful congregation — thank you for having us again. It is a privilege to stand before you on this Fourth Sunday of Black History Month.

Your theme today — “*Faith and Knowledge Working Together*” — is not only beautiful, it is deeply biblical. Scripture teaches that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge,” ♦ reminding us that reverence for God is where true understanding begins.

And Jesus commands us to love God with heart, soul, and mind, affirming that faith and intellect were never meant to be separated.

Before our ancestors learned to read books, they learned to believe. Before they sat in classrooms, they sat in the presence of God. Education opens the mind...but faith opens the heart. And when heart and mind work together, Scripture says God gives wisdom generously to all who ask.

Black history is a story held together by faith, strengthened by community, and lifted by knowledge. Long before we had access to universities...long before enrollment lists included our names...long before systems recognized the brilliance they benefitted from the Black church was our schoolhouse.

It was in the church that many learned to read — often from the Bible. It was in the church that we learned to speak — through testimony and prayer. It was in the church that leadership was modeled by deacons, mothers, and pastors. And it was in the church that we were told we are made in God’s image — even when the world said otherwise.

From the beginning, God charged us to teach our children diligently — to speak truth in our homes and along our way.

Sunday School became our first classroom.

Choir rehearsal became our first group project.

Ushers taught discipline.

Pastors taught courage.

And the congregation taught encouragement.

The church did not merely save souls — it shaped minds.

And St. John — before I go any further — I must thank our Langston University Concert Choir for blessing us in worship this morning. Their voices carry not only musical excellence, but the spirit of a university that was born in a church and built on faith, sacrifice, and the pursuit of knowledge. They remind us why the work we do matters and why nurturing minds, talent, and gifts is sacred work.

I also want to recognize the Langston University faculty, staff, and administrators who are joining me today. Their commitment, their service to our students is unmatched — ♦ they are the backbone of our mission.

And to all our students, our former students, and our graduates who are here this morning — You are the living testimony of faith and knowledge working together.

Historically Black colleges and universities, including Langston University, stand on this foundation: that God-given potential deserves God-honoring opportunity. And Scripture reminds us: wisdom is the principal thing — and with all our getting, we should get understanding.

Right here in Oklahoma City, we stand on a legacy of resilience and faith. This community knows what it means to endure... to rebuild... and to rise again.

As the prophet declares, “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.”

Churches like St. John have been anchors in this city — feeding families, mentoring children, standing in the gap, and speaking truth even when silence would have been easier.

But hear me clearly: the church cannot do this work alone. And education cannot do this work alone. Scripture teaches that two are better than one because together there is a greater reward for the labor. When the church and community walk together, transformation becomes possible.

As President of Langston University — Oklahoma's HBCU — I am always aware that we stand on the prayers, the courage, and the determination of those who came before us.

In fact, the story of Langston University begins not with buildings...not with large appropriations... not even with formal classrooms... It begins with a *church*.
And it begins with a *community* that believed faith and knowledge must work together.

When the town of Langston was founded, its citizens — everyday people with extraordinary vision — gathered in a humble church house to hold the university's very first classes.

They sacrificed what little they had.

And they raised money — dollar by dollar — to purchase the land on which Langston University now stands.

No guarantees. No assurances of success. Only a conviction that their children deserved an education — and a faith that God would honor their sacrifice.

That origin story matters because it shows that the partnership among community, church, and education is not new — it is *our legacy*.

And St. John — when I look at you:
your commitment to young people... to service... to faith...
I see the same spirit that birthed Langston University.

Our students need that spirit.

Our communities need that spirit.

We need that spirit.

Because when faith and knowledge work together, young people thrive in ways the world cannot explain. Scripture assures us that God grants knowledge and skill, and that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and understanding. Where faith meets education, brilliance is unlocked.

Proverbs teaches that reverence for God is the *beginning* of knowledge — not the end. Knowledge without humility becomes arrogance. Faith without understanding becomes fragile.

But when faith and knowledge work together:

- ◇ faith gives knowledge purpose.
- ◇ knowledge gives faith tools.
- ◇ faith reminds us who we are.
- ◇ knowledge prepares us for what we must do.

Scripture urges us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. It calls us to study diligently so we can handle truth rightly.

Our young people need spaces where they can ask questions without losing their values, and where their gifts can be nurtured without their identity being erased. That is why the partnership between the church and institutions like Langston University is not optional, is essential. We are living in unusual times.

Information everywhere...wisdom harder to find.

Technology increasing... human connection weakening.

Young people facing pressures unimaginable to previous generations.

Now — more than ever — the church, the university, the family, and the community must be connected not only in spirit, but in purpose.

Together we must provide:

- ◇ Faith that steadies them.
- ◇ Knowledge that equips them.
- ◇ Community that surrounds them.
- ◇ Hope that carries them.

Young people — listen. You do not have to choose between being faithful and being educated. God placed brilliance inside you on purpose. Paul told Timothy not to let anyone look down on his youth, but to set an example. And Proverbs teaches us to trust in the Lord with all our hearts — and He will direct our paths.

Your questions are not a threat to faith. Your curiosity is not a weakness. Your dreams are not too big. And Scripture declares that you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you.

To the elders — thank you. You believed in education when doors were closed. You prayed children through school when resources were limited. You kept faith steady when progress felt slow. Scripture says one generation will proclaim God's works to another, and we are to show God's strength to those who come after us. Your faith laid the foundation. Your sacrifice built the bridge. Today — we honor you.

As we celebrate Black History, let us remember:

We come from people who prayed in the dark and dreamed in the daylight.

People who believed when believing made no sense.

People who held onto faith because faith held onto them.

And here we are — standing on their shoulders.

So let us recommit ourselves:

Church and university. Community and campus. Faith and knowledge. Hand in hand. Side by side. Working together.

Because when faith opens the heart and knowledge expands the mind, God opens doors. And He is able to do exceedingly, abundantly above all we can ask or think.

Thank you, St. John, for allowing me to share in worship today. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine upon you. May the Lord give you peace.

May God continue to richly bless this church, and may God bless Langston University.