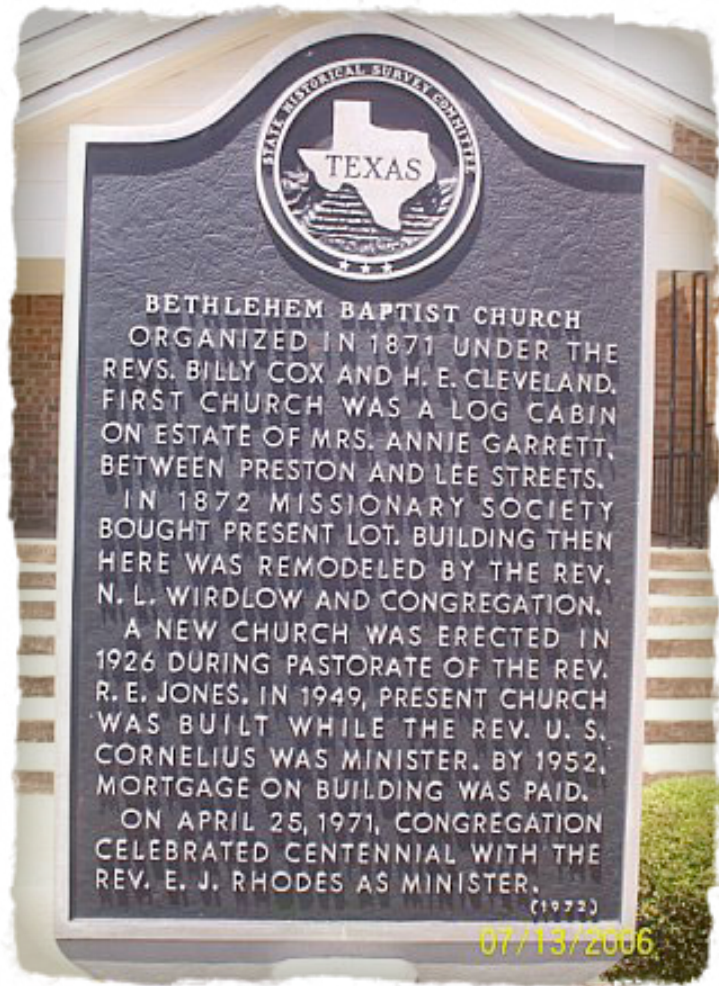


According to church records, the original building, constructed in 1871, was a log structure located between the five hundred block of Preston and Lee Street. As the congregation grew, church members decided to buy the lot had a desire to worship together in one centrally located place, and under the leadership of the Reverend Billy Cox and H. E. Cleveland, and that is when Bethlehem Baptist Church was organized. The first church was built on the estate of Mrs. Annie Garrett.



As the membership grew, the church members saw a need for a larger and better place to worship, so in 1872 the current location was purchased and given to the church which is now Franklin Street that is the site of the present church building, built in 1924 by the Missionary Society. Mrs. Callie Davis was the president of the Society at that time. A cafeteria was added in 1941, and additional renovations were completed in 1988. By 1952, mortgage on the building was paid. On April 25, 1971, Congregation celebrated centennial with the Rev. E. J. Rhodes as Minister.



It's interesting to note that one Bethlehem Baptist member, Bonham resident Dorothy Dale, recalls that her first three years of elementary school, grades 1-3, were taught in church, the Fairview Baptist Church in Windom in the mid-1940s when it was located far north of its present site next to the former Fannin Bank location. After the third grade, Mrs. Dale continued her education at Booker T. Washington School in Bonham.

Bethlehem Baptist_Organized in 1871

The church has been rebuilt and modified under the leadership of several great Pastors. Reverend E. J. Rhodes, Reverend N. L. Wirdlow, Reverend R. E. Jones, Reverend Joseph Wilson, Reverend H. W. Cunningham and Reverend L. S. Wilson. Including the aforementioned leaders Bethlehem has been blessed to have 32 pastors in its one hundred and thirty seven (137) years historical existence. In the last thirty years Bethlehem has been served by Pastor L. S. Wilson (18), the late Pastor Enoch Spencer (8) and our current Pastor, Reverend Stuart P. Courtney.

Bethlehem has been a constant source of strength and spiritual influence in the community of Bonham for more than 130 years. The church was presented a One hundred year historical marker in May of 1972. Bethlehem Baptist Church has been and will continue to be God's church doing God's work God's way.

