Sunday, November 22, 2015 at 11 a.m., I attended an apostolic Christian church service at Shekinah Glory and Worship Ministry. The church is located at 11101 Indian Head Hwy in Fort Washington, Maryland. The service was presided over by Pastor William Watkins Jr.

The appearance of the church was simple, not a lot of architecture. It was not a traditional style cathedral or chapel but rather a regular building. There was a large, orange and purple banner outside with what seemed to be a crest that stated the name of the church, address and a phone number. The crest was in the shape of a shield with a large “S” in the center. Inside, there was a small lobby before you entered what was known as the “sanctuary.” In the sanctuary there were rows of chairs set up and a small stage with a large cross hanging in the center.

I felt very welcomed as a visitor. There were many greeters with name tags as soon as I walked in, as well as ushers to show me to a seat. I observed that the congregation was predominantly African American and age largely varied, from newborn babies to grandparents. There were many extended families in attendance, both parents, children, along with aunts, uncles, and so forth.

This congregation was very open to speaking out in agreement with the service, through clapping, shouting, and using words like “Amen” and “Hallelujah.” Service started by welcoming everyone and then greeting your neighbors, where music was played and everyone went around introducing themselves or simply spreading love. It was very warming. Following that the praise and worship team was brought up and sang some songs I really enjoyed. After that, offering was collected. Members are expected to pay what are known as tides, which are typically 10% of your earnings and visitors are asked to give what they can. If you could not add to the offering they asked that you touched the offering basket in hopes that you will have something to give next time. I was told the offering goes toward “bettering the kingdom of God and reaching out to the community.” I liked that while offering was collected the Pastor explained different charitable deeds it went towards so people were not blindly giving. The congregation prayed over the offering once everything was collected. I heard the phrase “what you give, He will return triple fold,” meaning that because they are blessing others with what they can their charity will be rewarded. Finally, the sermon began.

The sermon was about creating an understanding of Jesus and the belief that God is involved with all aspects of life. Some feel that they should not pray about certain things because God doesn’t approve but He already knows. I felt that the service was sincere and from the heart. The pastor did not only read verses straight from the Bible but he put it into understandable terms and used relatable
metaphors.

As I mentioned before, during the service the congregation was very open to sharing their agreement. The service was very emotional and ritualistic in a means of following a schedule but spontaneous in that you never knew how someone was going to react. This is something I noticed that was quite different than other places of worship I visited this semester. At other locations typically the official would lead and the crowd would listen and only participate in ritualistic practices however, here each individual had their own experience you could say. When the pastor was done with his sermon everyone was welcomed to the altar for individual prayer.

Some practices that this church believed in were the laying of hands, catching the holy spirit, crying, shouting and speaking in tongues. That and speaking out then and there I'm told are encouraged because they believe that if you hold back you are not fully opening up your heart to the message of Jesus.

This was my first time seeing someone in person catching the Holy Spirit. They kind of just passed out. It was weird to me but not uncomfortable, just new. Before coming I had heard the joke that “oh people don't actually catch the Holy Spirit, they're faking.” After witnessing it I would say it is a genuine experience and not for show.

I enjoyed this visit and might even go again. It was interesting to see the way they worship, being that I am more reserved however I fully enjoyed the message and new perspective. I would say I experienced a feeling of more openness and it was very spiritual. I thought crying, fainting, and stuff of that nature was very dramatic if I ever saw videos but being there in person was incredibly eye opening.

Written Fall 2015. © Daija Resurreccion.