

The Three Fires of the Forks

Thank you, Brother Todd and thank you church for this opportunity to share with you three significant events in the history of our church . . .

. . . the three fires of the Forks.

The reason I'm talking about this today is that it was 24 years ago this week that the church building across the road, the "little church" burned.

It was 6:40 am Wednesday, April 28, 1982 when the call went out to the local fire stations . . . "The church at Duckers is on fire."

Fire trucks from all directions-five from Woodford County and three from Franklin County responded to the call. When they arrived they found the fire burning through the floor of the sanctuary and up through the roof. Flames were visible 30 feet above the top of the building.

Those flames, the smoke and sirens told the people in the area that something was terribly, terribly wrong. Church members rushed to the scene to save what they could. Church records, books, pictures, whatever they could grab was thrown outside to safety as the firemen battled the blaze inside.

News of the disaster spread throughout the congregation faster than the flames spread inside the sanctuary. They gathered to pray, comfort, do what they could do as the church burned.

Hours later it was over. Left behind was a saddened, but faithful congregation and the smoking remains of their beloved church.

If one were to ask "Where was God in all this?" the answer became obvious if you looked through what remained.

First and foremost, no one was injured by the fire or during the fighting of the fire.

The people remained.

Next, although the church suffered extensive damage, the church was not totally destroyed.

The brick walls remained.



Finally, all the beautiful stained glass windows survived the fire unscathed. The fire which burned so hot that not even the firemen believed they could put it out could have blown the windows out, but it didn't happen.

The firemen could have knocked them out in their efforts to fight the fire, but they didn't.

A single drop of water from the firemen's hoses on the hot glass would have shattered them, but it didn't happen.

The beautiful windows remained.

Yes, God was with them through it all.

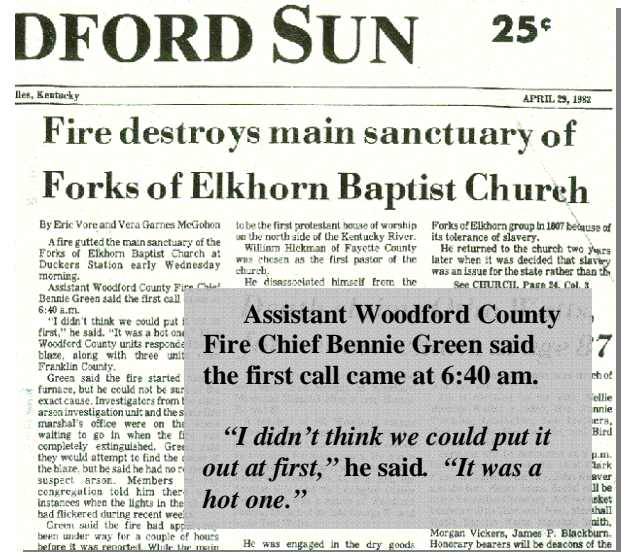
When this church crammed into the parsonage the following Sunday to hold its worship service, it had a choice-rebuild or close the doors-live or die. The answer was clear . . . we'd trust Him to lead us in a rebuilding effort.

And on October 17th, 1982 God delivered and the church at Duckers reopened its doors for worship . . . *again*.

That's right. You see this was not the first time the church had burned.

It was *39 years to the day* from this glorious reopening, when the first fire hit the Forks of Elkhorn Baptist Church.

The location was the same but the building was different. This church had been built in 1912 under the leadership and direction of Dr. John R. Sampey. It had been built for \$12,000 and had 13 rooms, a balcony, held 300 people. Dr. Sampey said "it was the best appointed church house in the open country to be found in Central Kentucky."



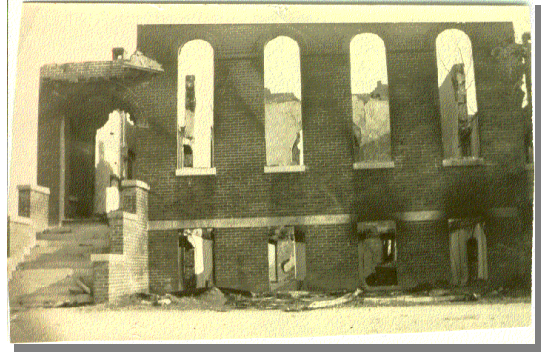
On Sunday October 17th, 1943, just before morning worship, fire broke out in the "Sampey Church." Again the call went out "The church at Duckers is on fire."

Unfortunately, fire stations were few and far between. Transportation and communication was not what it is today. Not enough help could get there in time.



Soon it was over.

The fine “Sampey Church” lay in total ruin. Gone were the bibles, books, hymnals and pictures. Gone was our written history. The church records, painstakingly kept since 1788, now lay in ashes. Everything-totally consumed by the fire. Forks was once again at a crossroads-rebuild or close the doors-live or die.



For three long years they met in the old Woodburn School as supply shortages caused by World War II delayed reconstruction efforts. But through their faith in God and obedience to Him, this flock endured. In 1946, Forks first opened the doors to the church we see across the road.

So the fire we had in 1982 was not our first . . . nor would it be the last.

Come with me now to another time about eight or so years ago. Things were different at the Forks of Elkhorn Baptist Church then. The old “Mother Church” as it was known, had fallen on hard times. We had a building-beautifully rebuilt after the 1982 fire, but it was nearly empty. I’m told, Sunday attendance had fallen to thirty or so people.



The church was again at a cross-roads, they could keep the doors open or let them close-live or die.

This tiny band of believers once again turned to God for guidance and strength. They prayed for His mercy and grace.

God answered their prayers.

Like with a fire that is about to go out . . . that’s only embers, God reached down, picked up those few remaining embers, He drew them close and He . . . softly blew on them . . . breathing into them new life.

And something happened. Those embers began to glow and then flickered into a little flame as a few more people came . . . then some more and that flicking flame begin to spread and it got a little bigger.

- More still came and the empty pews filled. And the fire spread and it got a little bigger.

- More still came and a second service was offered. And the fire spread and it got a little bigger.

- More came still and folding chairs went up in the aisle. And the fire spread and it got a little bigger.

- More still came and they overflowed into the basement, watching the service on TV. And the fire spread and it got a little bigger . . . so big that those walls could not hold them any longer.

Soon we had to leave the old church again and worship elsewhere.

For the third time in our history, fire had taken the Forks of Elkhorn Baptist Church building. But this fire was different. Unlike the first two fires that burned and destroyed everything, this third fire was more like the burning bush fire in Exodus, that burned yet did not consume. This third fire was revival fire. This revival fire continues to burn today.



The three fires of the Forks dramatically altered the course of this church. The first two were tragedies but were extinguished. The last one if extinguished would be a tragedy.

May we never ever do anything to put out the third fire, the revival fire that burns here today.

As I close, my prayer for those who have a fire, a love for Jesus Christ burning in your heart, may it burn hotter than it has ever burned before. May it burn brighter each and every day.

If you are here today and that fire doesn't burn quite as bright as it once did, I pray that today, during this service, the Holy Spirit will breathe fresh life into your embers and renew the flames that once burned hot within you.

If you're here today and have never accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, I pray that Holy Spirit uses something that is said

. . . a scripture that is read

. . . a song that is sung

. . . a handshake

. . . hug or a smile

. . . uses something to strike that spark in your heart that will erupt into a flame that burns for our Lord.

My prayer for this church today is that the third fire, the revival fire that burns in this church today, continues to burn and never dies. May we never do anything to put it out.

May the thoughts we have, the actions we take, the words we speak keep this fire burning until the day of Jesus' return.

May it burn and not consume.

May it spread and get bigger each and every day.

Finally, I ask that when conditions are right . . . according to His will . . . this fire will reach Flash Point and explode into something that can never be extinguished by the efforts of man.

And when we look back and ask that question we've always asked after the previous fires-"Where was God in all of this?" . . .

we will know that He was in the middle of this all.

May we always keep Him in the center of our all.

Thank you.



The Three Fires of the Forks
was presented by church historian David Nance
on April 23, 2006 during the morning services at
Forks of Elkhorn Baptist Church
in preparation for Homecoming 218