

Baptist Women in Ministry

Month of Preaching

Martha Stearns Marshall



Kristy Bay was the BWIM Month of Preaching preacher at First Christian Church of Middlesboro, Kentucky

In 2007, Baptist Women in Ministry invited Baptist churches to participate in Martha Stearns Marshall Month of Preaching by having a woman preach during the month of February. This invitation became an annual event, one that has been a source of joy and discovery for many churches as they have celebrated the giftedness of women preachers.

BWIM named this annual preaching month for Martha Stearns Marshall, an eighteenth-century Separate Baptist woman, and for twelve years, hundreds of churches have celebrated Martha's influence and example. In 2019, BWIM redreamed this emphasis and has widened its circle of significant preachers to include three other significant Baptist preachers: Ella Pearson Mitchell, Helen Barrett Montgomery, and Edna Lee de Gutiérrez.

Martha Stearns Marshall, along with her husband, Daniel, converted to Christianity during the First Great Awakening. The couple eventually migrated from New England to Virginia, where they were introduced to Baptist beliefs. Concluding that scripture taught believer's baptism, they were soon baptized and joined a Baptist church, and Daniel was licensed to preach. But both Marshalls were preachers, and Martha's zeal apparently equaled that of her husband.

In 1755, the Marshalls, along with Martha's brother, Shubal Stearns, and his small congregation in Virginia, moved to North Carolina. The group settled at Sandy Creek and established a Baptist church. The church became the most influential Separate Baptist congregation in the South, and there Martha often stood alongside Shubal to preach. A few years later, the Marshalls moved to nearby Abbott's Creek and founded a new church, and in 1771, they moved to Columbia County, Georgia, where they established in Kiokee the first missionary Baptist church in Georgia.

In all these churches, Martha provided enthusiastic leadership and evangelistic preaching. Virginia Baptist historian Robert Semple wrote in 1810: "Mr. Marshall had a rare felicity of finding in this lady a Priscilla, a helper in the gospel. In fact, it should not be concealed that his extraordinary success in the ministry is ascribable in no small degree to Mrs. Marshall's unwearied, and zealous cooperation. Without the shadow of a usurped authority over the other sex, Mrs. Marshall, being a lady of good sense, singular piety, and surprising elocution, has, in countless instances melted a whole concourse into tears by her prayers and exhortations."

Martha's legacy of preaching lives on through the countless number of Baptist women who step bravely into the pulpit and share the good news. Today Baptist Women in Ministry invites you to remember and honor Martha Stearns Marshall and to celebrate the giftedness of Baptist woman who proclaim the gospel.



Jillian Mitchell was the BWIM Month of Preaching preacher at Spring Creek Baptist Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma