

# Amid Praise to God, Shooting and Death

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ATLANTA, June 30—It was 11 A.M. The morning worship service had just begun at Ebenezer Baptist Church.

The choir had sung the processional hymn, "Praise God," the congregation had chanted the Lord's Prayer and Mrs. Alberta W. King, the organist and choir director, had just played the opening bars of the next hymn, "Just a Little Talk with Jesus."

Then the pistol shots rang out and the memory-stained sanctuary was filled once more with death.

The first victim was the organist, the mother of the man who made Ebenezer a landmark. A little more than six years ago she had stood in this same church, a few feet away, and wept over the coffin of that slain son, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

## Rush for Safety

Once shooting had shattered the peace, the frightened churchgoers scattered and screamed as they rushed for safety.

Someone noticed the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr., the pastor, move across the pulpit to the place where his wife lay dying, and when he reached her he tried to lift her.

"Everybody ran for the door," Mrs. Bertha Thrasher, the superintendent of the adult Sunday school, recalled. "I started to go out but changed my mind. I fell and rolled under the seat." She continued:

"He had two guns. He must

have fired a dozen times. I counted six shots and thought it was over, but he shot several times after that."

There was screaming, she said, as the well-dressed, middle-class churchgoers jammed the aisles.

Fred Brookins, the 6-year-old chief usher, was in the balcony in the back of the church. He said he heard the gunman yell, "I'm going to take over this place," as he began shooting and cursing.

The man sprayed bullets all around the building before members of the congregation overpowered him, Mr. Brookins said.

Mrs. Lillian D. Watkins, who has been a member of the church for 49 years, was singing in the choir. She looked toward the organ when she heard the first shots and her eyes fixed on Mrs. King. "I saw her grab her face," Mrs. Watkins said.

## 'I'm Taking Over'

Then, she said, the gunman yelled, "I'm taking over, I'm taking over." He crossed the pulpit toward where the black-robed choir members stood, climbed over a wooden railing and stood facing Mrs. Watkins. He raised his gun and yelled, "I'm going to shoot you, too." Then he snapped the trigger. It did not fire.

When it was over, after the congregation had subdued him, several bullets were found on the floor where he apparently had dropped them when trying to reload the empty gun.

The sidewalk outside the



Associated Press

Members of the Ebenezer Baptist Church gathered at church entrance after the shooting yesterday.

old red brick building was quiet again by late afternoon.

A knot of people stood on the corner as the cars buzzed past on Auburn Avenue. They argued over whether the killer was sane or insane.

Another group stood talking in front of a laundromat across the grimy street.

Still another stood behind the fence on the other side of the church and studied the tomb of Dr. King, saying nothing.