



Bio & Character Sketch of Rev Jonathan Lyle Caston

April 16, 1897 – June 11, 1966

Age in April, 1923: 26 Age at Death: 69

Age when picture was taken: est. 27

Church Pastor
Rev. Jonathan Lyle Caston

Reverend Jonathan Lyle Caston was born in Springfield, Illinois on April 16, 1897. His father was John Tolbert Caston and his mother was Lena Finney Caston. Caston's father was a well known surgeon and minister and his mother was a school teacher. He moved to Missouri at age three and the family relocated several times during his childhood. He attended Lincoln University in Jefferson City, MO, Western College in Kansas City, MO, The University of Chicago's Divinity School, the University of Southern California, and McMaster University. Caston was ordained in 1916.

In 1917, Caston married Violette Charlena Maupin and together they had three daughters, Victoria (1919), Gladys (1921), and Emily (1925).

Broadway Baptist Church in Columbia, MO was Caston's first pastorate, begun in 1920, followed by Hill Memorial Baptist Church in Winnipeg, Canada, Mount Olivet Baptist Church in Portland, OR, Second El Centro Baptist Church, and finally, Trinity Baptist Church, both in California.

Mt. Olivet Baptist Church's Pastor between 1928 and 1931, Reverend Dr. Jonathon Lyle Caston, was noted as one of the country's foremost brilliant orators both in and out of the pulpit, and his sermons in particular were well-attended. As an advocate for racial tolerance within the church community, Reverend Caston was often asked to preach about social justice in white churches. He organized a joint service between Mt. Olivet and the predominantly-white Sunnyside United Methodist Church in February 1930 and at various times addressed the Mt. Tabor Presbyterian Church, United Presbyterian Church, Woodstock Methodist Episcopal Church, and "the Friars," a local group of white pastors. He also organized a Race Conference in 1929 in association with the Mt. Olivet Brotherhood, a men's fellowship group. In 1930, Caston was appointed a board member of the Oregon State Baptist Convention, and in 1931 he became the first African American clergyman to deliver an invocation at the opening of the Oregon Legislature.

Sometime before 1936, Caston divorced his first wife Violetta and married again, this time to a woman sixteen years his junior from Mississippi by the name of Ineza Cordelia Smith. They have no additional children and Ineza remains married to Caston for the remainder of his life.

In January 1936, Dr. Jonathan Lyle Caston became the sixth pastor of Trinity Baptist Church. Under his dynamic leadership, the membership increased and soon outgrew its second home at 36th and Normandie. In 1945, ten lots were purchased at Jefferson and Cimarron Streets, and on Sunday April 4, 1948, ground was broken for a recreational building which was used as the Sanctuary until one could be built. Dr. Caston was a great minister, teacher, humanitarian, organizer, builder, and community leader. Along with Reverend Ernest Redd, who assisted him for 11 years, the congregation came to full maturity and a real identity as a family of God.



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Character Sketch

Throughout the screenplay, Caston comes across as much more mature than his twenty-six years of age. He is helpful, an activist who has connections (like Vaughn), a healthy mistrust for the legal and political system which he exists within, and a deep empathy for those in less fortunate or in dire circumstances likely instilled in him by his highly educated parents and Chicago University's Divinity School.

Caston is smart and he is careful not to attract the attention of those who would hurt him. He is protective of his family – all females. He is developing his soon-to-be-admired speaking skills, but he fears his age and lack of real world knowledge and experience. He is an idealist and constantly looks for the best possible outcomes to all the problems he encounters. He is not afraid to “get his hands dirty” in order to help people. Whatever “juice” his education and position earn him, Caston is ready to expend if someone will benefit from it.

As a young family man with two daughters in 1923, Caston is friendly, approachable, outgoing and self-deprecating. He easily makes new friends, looks for the good in everyone and is a key source of light in his community. And Caston enjoys fishing, hunting and golf whenever he can get a chance to relax.

SIDES

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A handsome small church with impressive stained glass windows is filled to capacity. Sitting in the front row are Vaughn and Davis. Caston readies his sermon from the pulpit.

CASTON

Like most of us here this morning, I have not slept. Like most of us, I saw the dawn, but couldn't feel the joy that should come with it. Only four weeks have passed since we gathered here to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, whom both our faith and our reason declare to be the light of the world.

A PAIR OF CONGREGANTS

Amen!

CASTON

And yet many of us feel shut out from the light, sealed in darkness. Our brother James Scott, who played the piano and sang and prayed with us on Easter morning, is dead. Dead after a night in which he, like Jesus, suffered unspeakable pain and humiliation at the hands of a heartless mob.

A PAIR OF CONGREGANTS

That's true. That's right.

CASTON

And what about brother Scott's torment, here in a Christian land? What about his blood, flowing from wounds inflicted by men who call themselves Christians? How are we to cope with this suffering?

A FEW CONGREGANTS

Amen! Yes, Lord!

SIDES

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CASTON

If we can do anything to redeem this tragedy, anything to bring the light into this dark place, we must begin with remembering. We must remember James as Gertrude's husband, as Sarah's son, as Aker's brother and Helen, Anna and Carl's father. We must remember him as a leader in our community. We must remember him kneeling in the last minute of his life and praying this simple prayer, "Have mercy on an innocent man."

SEVERAL CONGREGANTS

Amen! That's true! Amen!

CASTON

We must remember him, and we must remember the mob that forced him through the streets of our city with a rope around his neck. And having remembered all that, we will be able to say like the prophet Amos: "Let judgment run down as waters, . . .

SEVERAL CONGREGANTS

Amen! Say it, now!

CASTON (more congregants joining) . . . and righteousness as a mighty stream."

MANY CONGREGANTS

Amen! That's the truth. Amen!