



HOLY COMMUNION AND EPIPHANY

CULTURAL RESOURCES

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I. Historical Background and Documents

Communion at Mt. Early Baptist Church, Dougherty County, Georgia

In the church in which I was raised and baptized, Communion was the most powerful ritual I witnessed as a child. The air changed as the church prepared to go to Calvary. The Ministers came down from the pulpit and were joined by Senior Deacons all in black suits. They were joined by the Mother of the church and Elder Sisters dressed in white. The combined group went down the center aisle through the center doors, to the small space to the right side of the front door, which was just outside of the sanctuary. As they moved out one of the elder sisters remaining in the Amen corner would start singing, "Get Right with God." When the small band that had left the sanctuary began to return,

they moved slowly to the pacing and singing of a meter hymn. The text of each line was chanted and raised to a familiar tune appropriate to the meter (common or long meter). The entire congregation joined in the raising of the hymn. The front four Ministers/Deacons would be carrying a table covered with a large white cloth. This they carefully placed in front of the sanctuary centered right under the pulpit. Then with two deacons holding the large white cloth, the ministers would be doing something at the table out of the sight of the congregation. While they were doing this the singing led by women in the congregation continued. One of the songs we heard during this time of preparation said, "Hallelu I'm gonna see my friends again, Hallelu." It always sounded like a funeral song to me, but it was never sung at a funeral, it was always sung at Communion. This would be followed by "*Drinking of the wine, wine, wine.*" When this was completed, my father, the pastor, would talk about the last supper and Jesus calling his disciples together to speak of what was to come. He would take us to the upper room and the table letting us know that what we were about to do was a part of a Covenant we keep with the Savior who asked his disciples to from time-to-time, gather in remembrance of me. My father would hold up the bread and in words as if spoken by Jesus that solemn night before Calvary, he'd say, "Take this bread, this is my body which will be broken for thee, when you eat it remember me. And then breaking the bread, Jesus passed it to the disciples. Then taking the cup, "Jesus said, "This is my blood, which will be shed for thee and whenever you drink it remember." And then the women in white would pass the round plates with broken saltines around and the men would pass the silver holder with tiny glasses filed with Welch's grape juice. The song you might hear while this was going on was *I Know it Was the Blood.*

If you were not a member of the church, you did not sing the songs and you did not eat the bread or drink the wine. It was a solemn experience and done with great reverence.

After the drinking of the wine and eating of the bread, my father would call us together with closing words that would help us go out into the world wearing the armor gathered in this ritual. Then bringing the congregation to its feet, we would join hands in our rows singing "I'm Gonna Trust in the Lord." This joined hands of fellowship had a form and rhythm to the way the joined hands swung in a pattern rather than the usual one to one right hand of fellowship.

Bernice Johnson Reagon

Traditional Songs for Communion

Get Right with God

Get right with God
And do it now
Get right with God
And he will show you how
Down at the cross where Jesus shed his blood
Get right with God
Get right, get right with God

This song confirms that the dead in Christ shall rise. The tomb is not the end. It was only done at Communion services.

Hallelu

Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelu
Hallelu, Hallelu, my Lord
I'm gonna see my friend again, Hallelu

Death come to my house
Didn't stay long
Looked on the bed and my father was gone
I'm gonna see my friend again, Hallelu

Alternate lines:

Looked on the bed and my mother was gone...

Looked on the bed and my sister was gone...

I Know It Was the Blood

I know it was the blood
I know it was the blood
I know it was the blood for me
One day when I was lost
He died on yonder's cross
I know it was the blood for me

He never said a mumbling word...
They whipped him all night long...
They speared him in the side...
The blood come streaming down
He hung his head and died...

Drinking of the Blood

If my pastor ask for me
Tell him death done silenced me
Oughta been there 10,000 years
Drinking of the wine...

Refrain:

Drinking of the wine, wine, wine
Drinking of the wine, oh my Lord
Oughta been there 10,000 years

Drinking of the wine

If my mother asks for me...

If my sister/brother asks for me...

Refrain:

Eating of the bread, bread, bread,

Eating of the bread oh my Lord

Oughta been there 10,000 years

Eating of the bread...

Mind my brother how you walk on the cross

Foot might slip and your soul gets lost

Oughta been there 10, 000 years

Drinking of the wine

Satan wears a slipper shoe

You don't mind, he'll slip it on you

Oughta been there 10,000 years

Drinking of the wine

I Will Trust in the Lord

I'm gonna trust in the Lord

I'm gonna trust in the Lord

Till I die (at this point in the singing, each congregant let go of the hands and reached out to get a new neighbor's hand and to shake. The shaking of the hand is done collectively in rhythm with the singing of the song)

I'm gonna trust in the Lord

I'm gonna trust in the Lord

I'm gonna trust in the Lord

Till I die

Who's going down in the grave with me...

When I die...

Jesus going down in the grave with me...

Jesus going down in the grave with me

Calvary

Calvary Calvary,

Calvary Calvary

Calvary Calvary,

Calvary Calvary

Calvary Calvary,
Calvary Calvary
Surely he died on Calvary
Surely he died on Calvary

Don't you hear the-- hammer ringing
Calvary, Calvary,
Don't you hear the-- hammer ringing
Don't you hear the-- hammer ringing
Surely he died on Calvary

Don't you hear the thunder rolling...
Don't you see the lightning flashing...
Can't you hear him calling his father...

II. Epiphany

Most Church calendars in the West and the East agree that Christmas begins on December 25th and ends on January 6. Thus the 12 days of Christmas end in many traditions with the Feast of Epiphany also sometimes called the “Adoration of the Magi,” or the “Manifestation of God.” If Jesus was born on December 25th then on January 6, he is still a baby about two weeks old and into this nurturing space comes the three Kings. The three Kings on the night that Christ was born saw a bright star and followed it to where the child and his parents were in Bethlehem. On their way they had an audience with King Herod, who asked them to come back to him after they had found the child so that he too might worship the Christ child. Epiphany celebrates the coming of the Kings to honor the Christ child and family; and in their leaving they extend the honor with protection, for as they leave they return a different way and thus did not report to King Herod.

To be born again in Christ through baptism is also a rebirth and January 6, is also commemoration of the Baptism (also called the Day of Lights, or the Illumination of Jesus). In some records Christmas and Epiphany were referred to as the first and the second nativity, born of the virgin Mary, and reborn as Christ's manifestation to the world.

Epiphany Song Texts

We Three Kings (John H. Hopkins)

We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Fields and fountain moor and mountain
Following yonder star
Oh star of wonder, star of night
Star with loyal beauty bright

Western leading, still proceeding
Guide us to thy perfect light

Oh Po Little Jesus

Oh po little Jesus
Oh this world's gonna break your heart
For there's no where to lay your head my Lord
Oh po little Jesus

Come down all ye Holy Angels
Sing round him with your golden harps
For he is the Prince of Peace my Lord
Oh po' little Jesus

Oh Mary she's the mother
Oh Mary she lay down and cried
For he's gonna have to die to save the world
Oh po' little Jesus

Little Baby Boy (Willis Laurence James)

Little baby boy, little baby boy
When my Jesus was a baby boy
Oh Herald was a wicked man and he did say
Go into every town and baby boys all slay
Little baby boy, little baby boy
When my Jesus was a baby boy

Joseph Dearest, Joseph Mild

Joseph Dearest, Joseph Mild
Joseph dearest, Joseph mild
Help me rock my little child
God will give you your reward
In heav'n above,
The son of Virgin Mary
Gladly, dearest, Mary mild
I will rock your kindeline
God will give us our reward
In heaven above, The son of Virgin Mary

In many cultures a new born child is not named the same day. Sometimes it is a least a week or more before the naming is done.

Good Morning Sister Mary

Good Morning sister Mary
What are you gonna call your little baby boy
Well I think I'll call him Jesus

Such a pretty name is Jesus
God's a holding him
God keeps holding him
God a-holding him in his hands

Well I think I'll call him counselor...
Well I think I'll call him Emanuel...

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON EPIPHANY

Definitions:

1. "Epiphany - January 6 observance as a church festival in commemoration of the Magi as the first manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles or in the Eastern Church in commemoration of the baptism of Christ.¹"
2. Epiphany - "The twelve days of Christmas and with the Feast of Epiphany also called 'The Adoration of the Magi' or 'The Manifestation of God.' Celebrated on January 6, it is known as the day of the Three Kings (or wise men/magi): Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar. According to an old legend based on a Bible story, these three kings saw, on the night when Christ was born, a bright star, followed it to Bethlehem and found there the Christ child and presented it with gold, frankincense and myrrh.²"
3. Theophany - "The Feast of the Holy Theophany (Epiphany) of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ is celebrated each year on January 6. The Feast commemorates the Baptism of Christ and the divine revelation of the Holy Trinity. At the Baptism of Christ, all three persons of the Holy Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - were made manifest. Thus, the name of the Feast is Epiphany, meaning manifestation, or Theophany, meaning manifestation of God.³"

Notes

1. Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition, 1998
2. Ruth M. Reichmann, Epiphany-Three Kings.
<http://www.serve.com/shear/germusa/3kings.htm>
3. Epiphany – "Feast of the Holy Theophany of our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ," Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.
http://www.goarch.org/en/special/listen_learn_share/epiphany/learn/