



Holy Communion and Epiphany

Sunday, January 2, 2011

Guest Writer for this Unit: Elvin J. Parker III. Elvin is a fourth generation preacher for thirty-five years, and currently resides in Fort Pierce, FL.

The unit you are viewing, Holy Communion and Epiphany, is a compact unit. This means that it does not have a supporting cultural resource unit and worship unit. Instead, to enliven the imagination of preachers and teachers, we have provided scriptural text(s) that we suggest for this moment on the calendar along with a sermon outline, suggested links, books, articles, songs, and videos. For additional information, see Holy Communion and Epiphany in the archives of the Lectionary for 2008. In 2009 Epiphany is celebrated along with Baptism, and in 2010 Epiphany is not listed on our liturgical calendar but communion is listed. 2011 is the first year that the African American Lectionary has posted compact units for moments on its liturgical calendar.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment: Holy Communion and Epiphany

Dr. Stephanie Buckhannon Crowder wrote in the 2008 African American Lectionary commentary for Communion:

Holy Communion *commemorates* Jesus' redeeming grace, *celebrates* God's limitless love, and *anticipates* the day when the faithful will eat and drink at heaven's welcome table. Bread, wafers, or crackers represent Jesus' broken body. The use of wine or (more commonly) grape juice symbolizes his shed blood.

The various designations of Holy Communion include: the Lord's Supper, the Last Supper, and the Eucharist. The term "Eucharist" is derived from a Greek verb meaning "to give thanks" (*eucharisteo*). Across the centuries, Christians have come to the communion table with great gratitude for Jesus' ultimate sacrifice at Calvary.

Among African Americans, this gratitude expresses itself creatively. For some African American congregations, Holy Communion is a solemn occasion with exquisite attention to detail. Deacons or stewards are meticulously dressed in black, and missionaries and deaconesses or members of the Altar Guild wear white. The white linen cloth covering the elements on the communion table is carefully removed and folded. The distribution of the elements proceeds with military precision. Trays of bread and cups move seamlessly from the pastor to the lay leaders to the congregation, as soft organ music floats through the sanctuary.

In other African American congregations, Holy Communion is a more festive affair. As the meal is being distributed, a sainted elder in the congregation shouts the familiar words of a song, such as, "I know it was the blood for me." Then the organist, choir, and entire congregation lift that song until hands start clapping; feet begin tapping; bodies begin swaying; tambourines start rattling; and souls get happy: "I know it was the blood...they pierced him in His side...He never said a mumblin' word...He hung His head and died...He's coming back again...one day when I was lost He died upon the cross...I know it was the blood for me." In the folk language of our ancestors, this beloved song narrates the Lord's suffering, death, and certain return.

Whether the atmosphere is solemn, festive, or a creative combination of the two, the person officiating at the Communion Table—usually the pastor—speaks passionately about the forgiveness and grace that come from Jesus' suffering on the cross—suffering prophesied by Isaiah 53:1-9.

Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon wrote in the 2008 African American Lectionary cultural resource unit for Communion and 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....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.

With this material as our backdrop we provide a sermon outline for Holy Communion and Epiphany.

II. Holy Communion and Epiphany: Sermonic Outline

A. Sermonic Focus Text(s): Isaiah 60:1-6 and Mark 14:22-25 (New Revised Standard Version)

Isaiah 60:1-6

(v. 1) Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. (v. 2) For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. (v. 3) Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

(v. 4) Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far away, and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms. (v. 5) Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. (v. 6) A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.

Mark 14:22-25

(v. 22) While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." (v. 23) Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. (v. 24) He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. (v. 25) Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

B. Possible Titles

- i. Gratitude and The Gift of God
- ii. Gifts for the Giver
- iii. The Magical Moment of the Magi

C. Point of Exegetical Inquiry

In any text there can be several words or phrases that require significant exegetical inquiry. One exegetical inquiry raised by this text is the fact that the visit of the Magi or Kings from afar is prophesied by Isaiah in the first six verses of chapter 60 of Isaiah and fulfilled in the second chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. The connections between Old Testament and New Testament texts are always worth noting. The Magi were Persian mystics. They were also astronomers who constantly observed the movement and shift of the stars and set about to understand the times and the future through interpreting these astrological shiftings.

III. Introduction

The Feast of the Epiphany, as this Sunday is sometimes called in Christendom, marks the last of the Twelve Days of Christmas. It is the significant celebration of the visit of the Magi to the Manger Messiah. Epiphany retells to us the story of the adoration and welcome from foreign delegations to Bethlehem's stable and the witness of the corral of livestock, shepherds, and an angelic retinue in that crisp, cold, quiet stillness of the night where the Prince of Peace and infant King of Kings lay.

In the Classical sense an epiphany, a concept derived from the ancient Greek word ἐπιφάνεια, (*epiphaneia*), meaning a "manifestation" or "striking appearance," is the sudden realization, understanding, or comprehension of the larger essence or meaning of something. This term is often used in either a philosophical or literal sense to signify that the claimant has "found the last piece of the puzzle and now sees the whole picture." It is indicative of new information or a new experience, often insignificant by itself, that illuminates a deeper numinous foundational frame of reference. The Epiphanic Juncture is the place where a luminous light is cast upon deep darkness and that which was enigmatic is now startlingly clear.

Such was the occasion of both the visit of those whose wisdom had given them the insight to know that this happening in the backstretches of Judea was no insignificant occurrence. Just as the simple celebration of Passover in the cramped, musty quarters of an attic apartment was also a pivotal action in the salvific journey of the faithful.

IV. Moves/Points

Move/Point One – Wise Ones Still Seek Him

Wherever we are on the journey, the consummation of our journey depends upon whether we are "God-Chasers," ever seeking the will and ways of God. To do this shows wisdom and is what God desires of us.

- a. Our present situation does not preclude our hope of redemption;
- b. The dawning of your day has come; and
- c. Strangers shall see your daybreak and praise and bless the Lord.

Move/Point Two – We Bless Him with Our Gifts

- a. We bless Him in our praise;
- b. We bless Him with our talents; and
- c. We bless Him through our stewardship.

Move/Point Three – He Blesses Us with His Gifts

- a. He blesses the bread and wine;

- b. He shares the bread and wine; and
- c. He offers us salvation and promises redemption!

V. Celebration

What a wonderful gift! Oh, what a mighty gift! Oh what a blessed gift born out of Bethlehem, the City of Bread, and baptized in the muddy, murky waters of the Jordan.

The gift of Salvation, the promise of God to restore, is a glorious prospect to become more than we have ever been. Out of our darkness God blesses us with light. We could not see our way so Jesus became an illumination to show us the way. He came to show us the way out of the stagnation and the density of darkness. We who battle in the current fray of economic distress and melee' are recipients of Heaven's finest gifting as well as Heaven's greatest sacrifice. He was born in a barn, wrapped in rags, laid in a manger, God's love personified and given to us.

Oh, when all hope is gone and light is bleak, and the chilling winds of our benighted, baneful existence leave us empty, God's gracious hand gives us hope and redemption. Bread blessed, broken, and shared to strengthen our faith and the cup of wine lifted to heighten our expectation and move us each day closer to that Great Day when blessed Divinity shall again touch wretched humanity. One day the fellowship of Cosmic Companionship that once existed in the Garden shall be restored and henceforth shall be known in the New Jerusalem. On that day, joy bells shall be ringing, saints shall be shouting, the Redeemed shall be singing. The dewdrops of Redemption shall overflow!

Thank you, God, for your gift. Thank you for thinking about me. Thank you for considering a poor sinner like me. Bless your name! Hallelujah, YES!

VI. Illustration(s)

Wash Day

When my mother did the laundry it was my job to make the fire. After I made the fire my mother would wash our clothes. After she washed them she would then wring them out and hang them on a clothes line outside. For hours they would be blowing in the breeze. When our neighbors saw the clothes hanging on the line they automatically knew it was wash day at our house. I said that to say this, ever since Jesus hung out on Calvary, every day has been wash day!

—Caesar A.W. Clark Sr., Dallas, Texas.
Reverend Clark died in 2008.

This illustration is taken from the Sermon Illustrations section of the African American Lectionary.

See the Sermon Illustrations section of the African American Lectionary for additional illustrations that you may wish to use in presenting a sermon for this moment on the liturgical calendar.

VII. Sounds, Sights, and Colors in These Passages

Isaiah 60:1-6

Sounds: People rejoicing, people arising, people gathering from near and far, sounds of camels;

Sights: People arising, the glory of God rising upon people, darkness covering the earth, people lifting their eyes and looking around, baby girls carried on the arms of nurses, the abundance of the sea being brought to God's people, the wealth of nations coming to God's people, camels, people bringing gold and frankincense; and

Colors: Thick darkness, the color of God's glory, the color of gold, the color of frankincense.

Mark 14:22-25

Sounds: Jesus and the disciples eating, the breaking of bread, Jesus speaking, Jesus giving thanks, Jesus and the disciples drinking of the cup and eating of bread;

Sights: A loaf of bread, the color of wine, Jesus and the disciples sitting in a room sharing a meal, the Kingdom of God; and

Colors: The clothing of Jesus and the disciples, the colors of the wall of the room, the color of the table at which Jesus and the disciples sat, wheat-colored or white bread, burgundy wine, and cream-colored drinking cups.

VIII. Songs to Accompany This Sermon

A. Hymn(s)

- The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power. By Andraé Crouch

- Come Share the Lord. By Bryan Jeffery Leech

B. Well-Known Song(s)

- He Decided to Die. By Margaret Douroux. Re-recorded by L'Tanya Moore
- Let Us Break Bread Together. By Cassietta George
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEgnoSFNjPo&feature=related> accessed 5 December 2010
- Just for Who You Are. By Victor Johnson. Online location:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adw3kVQHtIM> accessed 5 December 2010

C. Spirituals

- Dere's a Star in Da East (Rise Up, Shepard, and Follow) Negro Spiritual

- Go Tell It on the Mountain! By John W. Work, Jr. Negro Spiritual/Gospel

D. Modern Song(s) (Written between 2005–2010)

- Christmas . . . Just Remember. Sung by Fred Hammond; for use during Communion.
- These Nails. By Donald Lawrence
- Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZEyiyMKISI> accessed 10 December 2010

You can review past Lectionary worship units for Holy Communion and Epiphany to find additional songs and suggestions for planning a worship service for this liturgical moment.

IX. Videos, Audio, and/or Interactive Media

COGIC Bishop, GE Patterson in Holy Communion at Bountiful Blessings. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-0QpdA4n80> accessed 5 December 2010

“Holy Communion Jan. 16, 2005 Pastor Jerry Black & Beulah Mass Choir in Worship,” Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvFzVgj1tR8> accessed 5 December 2010

X. Books to assist in preparing sermons or Bible Studies related to Holy Communion or Epiphany

- True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary (Mark). Powery, Emerson B.; Ed. Brian K. Blount. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007. pp. 147-148
- Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospel (2nd Edition). Malina, Bruce and Richard L. Rohrbaugh. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002.
- African American Religious Cultures (2 Vol. Set). Pinn, Anthony and Stephen Finely, eds. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009.

Scholars of history, religion, and other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences provide short entries and more substantial essays about the myriad religious cultures among Africans and people of African descent throughout the Western Hemisphere. A chronology is provided, along with appendices containing primary documents and short essays on related topics. The two volumes are paged and indexed together.

- The Africana Worship Book (Volume 2 Year B). Fousa, Safiyah and Valerie Bridgeman Davis, eds. Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources (GBOD), 2008.

The Africana Worship Book, Year B, contains the new calls to worship, liturgies, prayers, litanies, offertory prayers, doxologies, choral readings, creeds, chants, and benedictions as we continue to unite Africana worship to present experiences. This volume gives

special attention to next-generation liturgies written with the culture of young adult worshippers in mind, several short dramatic monologues, and sound files on the CD-ROM with demonstrations of several of the worship resources.

- Companion to the Africana Worship Book. Fousa, Safiyah and Valerie Bridgeman Davis, eds. Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources (GBOD), 2008.

Building a bridge of understanding through the collective experiences of elders in African-American churches as well as emerging 21st century voices, this companion volume exposes worship at its roots. A wide breadth of writers contribute extraordinarily rich essays concerning worship and the African-American faith community to be circulated among pastors, scholars, and faith communities in order to enrich the future of worshipping communities.

XI. Links to Helpful Websites for Holy Communion and Epiphany

“African American Communion Bulletins.” Broadman, Holman Church Supplies. Online location: <http://www.christianbook.com/african-american-communion-bulletins-100/9780805438130/pd/38132#curr> accessed 5 December 2010

LBGT: Epiphany challenges us with the light of truth. Will we step into it or shrink away from it? Slack, Mykal; Mona West, and Greg Cary. “Epiphany, Year B: Arise, Shine.” Out in Scripture: An Honest Encounters Between LGBT Lives & the Bible. Online location: <http://www.hrc.org/Scripture/?page=01-06-09> accessed 5 December 2010

Reichmann, Ruth M. “History of 3 Kings Day – Epiphany.” Online location: <http://three-kings-day.123holiday.net/> accessed 5 December 2010.

Disability Awareness Information: This year the African American Lectionary wants all churches to do a better job of including the disabled/differently abled. Please consider the following when planning, during all worship services, and all other church activities:

We need to give people with disabilities access to society’s most important place: our compassionate hearts. In fact, if we each begin with opening our hearts, access to our church buildings, programs and our lives will be a natural expression of welcoming all God’s children into the community of Christ’s body, freely and without prejudice. Our proactive inclusion of adults and children with disabilities into the full life of our churches then will become the living and best example of being like Christ.

Taken from The Episcopal Disability Network. Online location: <http://www.disability99.org/id69.html> accessed 5 December 2010

XII. Notes for Select Songs

A. Hymn(s)

- The Blood Will Never Lose Its Power. By Andraé Crouch
Location:
Andraé Couch and the Disciples. Take the Message Everywhere. Nashville, TN: Light Records, 2010.

African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, 2001. #256

African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal. Nashville, TN: The African Methodist Episcopal Church, (1984) second printing 1986. #137

The New National Baptist Hymnal 21st Century Edition. Nashville, TN: Triad Publications, 2001. #97

Cleveland, J. Jefferson. Songs of Zion: Supplemental Worship Resources. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1981. #184

Church of God in Christ. Yes, Lord! Church of God in Christ Hymnal. Memphis, TN: Church of God in Christ Pub. Board in association with the Benson Co., 1982. #250

- Come Share the Lord. By Bryan Jeffery Leech
History of this hymn:
“In reflecting on the text, the author’s theology of communion unfolds. Sharing the Lord’s Supper is a response to the “burning in our hearts” for the love of Christ who “makes us one.” In the stanzas that follow we find that this is an open table where “No one is a stranger” and “everyone belongs.” Furthermore, this is a table where we “find... forgiveness” and “we in turn forgive all wrongs.” Hawn, C. Michael. “History of Hymns: Hymn celebrates unity in resurrected Christ.” UM Portal Home of the Resurrection. 8 August 2008. <http://www.umportal.org/article.asp?id=3900> accessed 5 December 2010

B. Well-Known Song(s)

- Let Us Break Bread Together. Traditional. Sung by Cassietta George
Location:

The Caravans. Let’s Break Bread Together. Redding, CT: Veejay Records, 1970.

- Just for Who You Are. By Victor Johnson
Location:

Pugh, Ernest. Just For Who You Are. Detroit, MI: Crystal Rose Records, 2006. Online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adw3kVQHtIM> accessed 5 December 2010

C. Spiritual(s)

- Dere's a Star in Da East (Rise Up, Shepard, and Follow). Online location: <http://www.hymnsite.com/fws/hymn.cgi?2096> accessed 5 December 2010

Go Tell It on the Mountain! By John W. Work, Jr. Negro Spiritual/Gospel. Photo of John W. Work, Jr. and lyrics online location: <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/g/o/gotitotm.htm>
<http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/g/o/gotitotm.htm> accessed 5 December 2010