

MORAVIAN MOMENT #62
Easter Tradition in the Moravian Church

In many Moravian Churches, Easter is observed in a special way with a service held at sunrise, concluding in the graveyard. The idea originated in Herrnhut in 1732 with a group of young Brethren who had met for prayer on the preceding evening. They decided that as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, they, like the Disciples, would go to the place of burial. Unlike the Disciples, they knew that the Lord is risen and to Him they sang their hymns and praises.

The impromptu service of those young men proved so impressive that it became a custom, and it was taken to America by the early Moravian settlers who introduced it in their communities in colonial days. It is one of the most devotional services of the Church year.

During Holy Week the preparation for Easter or Resurrection heightens with work in the Moravian Cemeteries. Relatives of the departed visit the graveyard to clean the graves and paint the tombs. The graveyards by Easter Saturday, look like a beautiful Botanical Garden, for having cleaned the graves and painted the tombs, flowers are planted on every grave and wreaths are placed all over the graveyard. This is especially true in Jamaica and Tobago. In Tobago, for instance, between 4-6pm on Easter Saturday, the graveyard is filled with hundreds of persons, mostly relatives of the deceased who would go there to make sure that their relative's grave is well prepared. It is generally a very festive affair, with family members returning home from the USA, Canada, England and Trinidad.

The Easter begins with the words, "The Lord is Risen", the Congregation responds, "He is risen indeed". It is a profound statement of hope, expectation and affirmation of the God who came on a rescue mission to save His people from their sins. The service continues with a great statement of faith in the Triune God, patterned after the Nicene Creed with many passages from Scripture and two passages from Martin Luther's Small Catechism (This is my Lord who redeemed me...and We believe that by our own reason and strength...). Following the short service within the Sanctuary, the Congregation being led by the Pastor(s) and a group of musicians, march to the tune of "Up from the grave he arose" or "Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow him". The march culminates in the graveyard or God's Acre with the final part of the service. Generally, the names of all those who would have been buried in the graveyard since last Easter are announced and prayers said that one day we would all be united on that grand Resurrection day, when Jesus himself would return. A happy and blessed Resurrection day to all.

23rd March, 2008