

History of the Moravian Lovefeast and Candle Service

History of the Moravian Lovefeast and Candle Service (continued)

The wax, made from a mixture of beeswax and tallow are products of the created flesh, and a symbol of Jesus' humanity. The lighted wick burning with the wax stands for His divinity. The red paper reminds us of the Saviour's passion and death for our sins. The lighted candle represents the sacrifice of Christ for humanity and the flame of love which He came to kindle in our hearts. The message of the candle is that this flame of love will burn forever to His joy and our salvation. "Let your light so shine before men (to lead others to Him) that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

The Love Feast service comes from the tradition of the Moravian Church to gather and break bread to celebrate and affirm the unity of Christians as brothers and sisters in Christ. The Moravian Church is a Protestant denomination almost all but wiped out by persecution during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) in the area now known as Czech Republic. They immigrated to America in the 1740's and settled in Bethlehem, PA and Wachovia, NC. Today you can still visit Old Salem, a working historical settlement village located in Winston-Salem, NC, to experience what their early lives in America were like. The new colonists celebrated love feasts to celebrate their arrival to their new towns and continued to celebrate them at other times of the year as well. During the love feast a small meal of a bun and mug of coffee is served. The Christmas Love Feast is the most special with the addition of candles, lit at the end of the service as a reminder of the light of Christ's love.

The Methodists actually have ties with the Moravians. John Wesley made an Atlantic crossing with the Moravians and was very impressed by the strong faith they displayed when their ship almost sank in a particularly bad storm. It was Peter Boehler, leader of that Moravian group, who told Wesley he must preach faith until he got faith. Wesley took part in a Moravian Love Feast in 1783 and introduced it to his fellow Methodists the following year.

The Lovefeast: As the early Christians met and broke bread together in token of their fellowship and love, so the members of the Moravian Church family make it a custom to celebrate spiritual occasions by sharing with friends a simple meal called a Lovefeast. Food and drink for the Lovefeast vary with the nationality and location of the congregation. The first Moravian Lovefeast occurred in Bertheisdorf, Germany in 1727.

The Lovefeast is a translation of the Greek word "Agape", given by Christians after Pentecost to similar gatherings. The Lovefeast, where the symbolism is that of Christians sharing with one another, is not a substitute for the Holy Communion, where the teaching is that God shares with man. The Lovefeast strengthens the spirit of unity and good will among people. It removes, at least for an hour, all social barriers and distinctions. In the service is joy, dignified by reverence. You are asked to partake of the lovefeast in the belief that Christ is now beside you and your neighbor. Covenant with Him and receive a new Christ, who is the light of the world, the bright and morning star, and resolve to hold aloft your own light, given to God, and carry that light into the world.

The Coffee and Lovefeast Bun: The Lovefeast Buns are made from a traditional recipe which includes citron and orange peel for flavoring. The slash marks on the top of the bun are often mistaken by many to be a "M" for Moravian, but they are actually a "W", which was the mark of Winkler Bakery, the original bakery in Salem NC, still in operation today and where our buns today were baked.

The coffee is decaffeinated and is pre-mixed with sugar and cream. It is served in the simple, white, porcelain mugs that have been used in almost all Moravian Churches as long as we can remember.

The Candle: The candles traditionally are hand-poured beeswax from tin molds that have been handed down through the generations. They are then hand-wrapped (trimmed) in flame-proof crepe paper to prevent hot wax from dripping onto the holder's hands. Please handle the candles with caution and hold them vertically so that wax does not drip onto the floor. Candles are not collected for re-use and are yours to take home.

The Moravian custom of distributing lighted candles during a church service was actually begun at an informal children's service in Marienborn, Wetteravia (Germany) in 1747. The children were publicly examined on their knowledge of the Christmas story and their original poems were read.

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