

# History of Gospel Music

For centuries, Black Gospel Music has told the story of struggles and hardships faced by African Americans in this country. Originating during slavery, gospel songs such as: *Oh Mary Don't You Weep*, *Didn't It Rain*, *Jacob's Ladder*, and *Were You There When They Crucified My Lord*, were passed down through generations.

During the Antebellum years, it was considered a crime to teach slaves how to read and write. These songs became a way to remember the past and offer comfort from Bible teachings.

Slave masters allowed the slaves to sing while working. They saw a correlation between their singing and the amount of work that was accomplished; the more they sang, the harder they worked.

During the civil rights movement of the sixties, gospel music was used as a means of non-violent protest; songs like *Amazing Grace* and *Precious Lord* were often sung at rallies and funerals of slain civil rights workers. While marching, they would sing songs like *We Shall Overcome*, *People Get Ready*, *A Change is Gonna Come*, and *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round*, all with gospel intensity.

Rhythm and Blues got its beginning from Black Gospel Music. Singers Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin, Sam Cooke, Johnnie Taylor, Lou Rawls, Curtis Mayfield are a few R&B performers who began their careers as gospel singers. Even the King of Rock and Roll, Elvis Presley, once sang black gospel music in the East Trigg Baptist Church Choir in Memphis, Tennessee, during his high school years.

Black Gospel Music traditions are just as powerful today as they were decades ago and continue to provide a strong unifying connection to the past.

For more information call the Southport Visitors' Center (910) 457-7927.

**Enjoy uplifting entertainment with WinterFests' first "Old Timey Gospel Fest", sung by the choirs of Smithville Township's seven black churches. The event is sponsored by the Smithville Township/ Southport Black History Committee Saturday, December 10th from 1-3 p.m. in the Southport Community Building, located at 223 E. Bay St.**