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Emotion and Eulogy Fill Final Rites for Mrs. King



The Rev. Martin Luther King Sr. and his daughter, Mrs. Christine Farris, at the service for Mrs. King at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta yesterday.

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By B. DRUMMOND AYRES Jr.

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ATLANTA, July 3—After a soulful, two-hour funeral service, Mrs. Martin Luther King Sr. was entombed on a Georgia hillside this afternoon, and another violent chapter ended in the tragic saga of America's most famous black family.

More than 500 persons crowded into the steaming hot sanctuary of downtown Atlanta's historic Ebenezer Baptist Church for the emotional ceremony, which reached a tearful climax when Mrs. King stooped and visibly saddened 70-year-old husband, the pastor of the church, gazed forlornly down at her rose-covered casket and mumbled:

"I'll be coming up there soon, 'Bunch.' I'll be home most any old time now. We shall overcome."

Killed on Sunday

Mrs. King, known as "Bunch" or "Mamma" King to her family and close friends, was fatally wounded Sunday morning when a black man went on a shooting spree in the church. At the time she was playing the organ and leading the choir in "The Lord's Prayer."

The gunman was quickly seized by churchgoers, but not before he had also killed a church deacon and wounded another member of the congregation. The police identified him as Marcus Wayne Chenault, 23, of Dayton, Ohio, and quoted him as saying he hated all Christians.

Investigators were still trying today to determine whether Mr. Chenault had been involved in any conspiracy.

Mrs. King was buried in a raised marble crypt situated in Southview Cemetery, in the rolling hills of the Atlanta suburbs. The burial, immediately after the Ebenezer service, was almost anticlimactic, given the emotional outpouring that occurred at the church.

Tragedies Recalled

Present on the minds of the great and the humble who gathered in Ebenezer's vaulted sanctuary were the previous tragedies that had struck the King family.

First, there was the assassination six years ago of the family's most famous son, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. His grave is just beyond the walls of the church.

Next, only a year after the assassination, a second son, the Rev. A. D. Williams King, was found dead in a swimming pool.

And now, on a bier in front of the pulpit and among the floral tributes, was the coffin of Mrs. King.

Mrs. King's husband, "Daddy" King, sat in the front pew, leaning heavily on the arm of his sole surviving child,

Mrs. Christine King Farris. Next to Mrs. Farris was Dr. King's widow, Coretta, dressed in white, her long black hair covered with a lace shawl.

On the other side of the church were a number of luminaries, including Mrs. Gerald Ford, the wife of the Vice President, and Jimmy Carter, Georgia's Governor.

Representative Andrew Young of Atlanta, a former aide to Dr. King, opened the service, calling the death at hand a triumph rather than a tragedy.

Then a succession of speakers testified, each recalling Mrs. King's greatness and each eulogy bringing forth from the congregation ever louder shouts of "Amen," or "Sweet Jesus," "Glory!"

'A Rock of Ages'

Atlanta's first black Mayor, Maynard Jackson, called Mrs. King "a rock of ages" and added that "no bullet will ever change that fact."

The Rev. Ralph David Abernathy, who took over leadership of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference after Dr. King's death, compared her to Mary, Mother of Jesus. "Through her," he said, "God gave to this world the most peaceful warrior of the 20th century."

The Rev. Otis Moss of Lockland, Ohio, a former aide to "Daddy" King, said that Mrs. King had had no control over the dates that would appear on her tomb, 1904-1974. Then he added, bringing some members of the congregation to their feet, arms upraised in heavenly supplication and responding to his words:

"But that little dash in between 1904 and 1974, she could control that. (Yes! Yes!) She would not lose it. (No!) She would not abuse it. (No!) But God only knows she did use it. (Yes, brother! Sweet Jesus!)"

Finally "Daddy" King haltingly made his way to the pulpit. Then, finding the strength to stand alone, he waved off those supporting him, faced the congregation and said:

"I'm not going to let nothing stop me. We've got to carry on."

"We've lost 'Bunch' and Martin and A.D., all gone. But you thank God for what you have left."

"They say he [the gunman] came after me last Sunday, too. Let him come back. He can't do nothing but kill this broken old body."

He turned to leave. But just as he passed the coffin, he paused for a final word. Almost mumbling, he said:

"I'll be coming up there soon, 'Bunch.' I'll be home most any old time now. We shall overcome."