

# THE WORD IN *Song*



Hymn of the Day  
Studies for  
**PRE-LENT**

**ONE-YEAR LECTIONARY**



THE  
**LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
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# Salvation unto Us Has Come

Lutheran Service Book 555 | study by Christopher I. Thoma

## Introduction

If you take a test and fail it because you didn't study, do you deserve an A? If you studied all week and memorized all of the necessary information and answered all of the questions correctly on the test, do you deserve an A? These are not difficult questions to answer because it is natural for man to play by the rule which says quite simply, "You get what you deserve."

Today's hymn, like the Gospel theme it supports, gets this rule a little mixed up. In fact, it turns it around completely.

- What do you believe to be the focus of the hymn?
- In your opinion, what is a "good work"? Read Article IV of the Augsburg Confession:

Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight (Romans 3 and 4 [3:21-26; 4:5]). (*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, 2nd ed. [CPH, 2006], 33).

- What light does this quotation shed on your understanding of good works in the Christian life?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Read Matt. 20:1-16. In this Gospel Reading, Jesus makes it clear that God's fairness is different from the fairness of man. He tells us that the reward of heaven is not based on what we do; rather, God gives to us something other than what we deserve.

- After working all day, how would it make you feel if you received the same amount of pay as someone who worked for only an hour?

- Remember that Jesus tells us that this parable represents the kingdom of heaven. With this in mind, what do we learn about the generosity of God?
- Read Is. 64:6. If we were to demand from God what we deserve because of our acts, what would we receive?
- Read Eph. 2:8-9. Salvation is referred to as what in this text?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Paul Speratus (1484-1551), a colleague of Luther and a significant contributor to the efforts of the Reformation, fashioned this hymn from the gut-wrenching threads of experience. Speratus was an ordained preacher who was expelled from several cities for his evangelical preaching. He was excommunicated for preaching salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and was eventually arrested, imprisoned and condemned to death. He did manage to escape his captors, and in this freedom was used by the Lord to great ends.

- During Speratus' time, what were the widely held views regarding good works? What role did monasticism play in this?
- How might the title of this hymn reflect the situation of the Reformation and the feelings of those hearing the pure Gospel through men like Luther and Paul Speratus?

### Text

The language and tune of this hymn are borne along with what is seemingly a sigh of blissful relief. There is so much joy, it appears that Speratus cannot stop writing stanzas, and so we are given a hymn with ten stanzas of great substance. Let's consider a few of these stanzas.

Stanza 1 does a wonderful job of telling the reader the purpose of the joyful hymn to follow. Stanzas 2-4 drop us into the dirty reality of the Law's requirement, our sinful condition, and our helpless standing against it.

- According to stanza 1, for whom did Christ die?
- Who else might have been considered as an advocate and/or redeemer (which is contrary to the Christian faith) by the people and Church of Speratus' time? Which statements in stanza 1 make Christ's role in the Church abundantly clear?
- What is the stance of stanza 2 toward those who would seek to purify themselves by monastic living? Describe

in your own words the burden of the Law to sinners (particularly those who believe they must do good works to get to heaven). Is there certainty of salvation in this?

- Read Rom. 3:10–20. How does this text shed light on stanzas 2–4?

Stanza 5 is a significant turning point in the text of the hymn, setting the stage for the Christian to sing the remaining stanzas with confidence and certainty.

- Who is the focus of stanzas 2–4? Who is absent in stanzas 2–4 and introduced as the focal point in stanza 5?
- With this introduction, how is the direction of the hymn changed? The spirit of its tune? Christian certainty?

The remaining stanzas (6–10) reintroduce the Church to familiar terms.

- Read again the text of Eph. 2:8–10. What ancient and yet radically new theology is presented here?

## Making the Connection

Reflect on the parable in Matt. 20:1–16. Perhaps we often grumble to the Lord as the workers grumbled to the landowner.

- Why is it this way for us?

## In Closing

“Salvation unto Us Has Come” seeks to reveal a right understanding of God’s Law, and it refreshes and strengthens the sin- and guilt-wearied heart with the Gospel. Ultimately, it reveals that this Gospel message truly is “foolishness” and a “stumbling block” as it flies in the face of the human understanding that “you get what you deserve.”

By Christ’s life, death and resurrection we are spared from what we deserve. In fact, the Innocent pays for the guilty, and the guilty are declared free. By the power of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, faith and the merits of Christ’s innocence are given to us. What a joyful declaration of justification for the believing heart, a heart now strengthened to cling to the Lord and not to self.

- Consider the following terms in the remaining stanzas: Atonement, baptized, ransom, the cross, trust, peace, justify. How does “saved by grace through faith in Christ” theology change their substance? (For example, Baptism as taught in the Roman Catholic Church removes only original sin. Actual sin remains.)

- Look for and discuss other words.

The hymn ends with a Trinitarian conclusion.

- Consider the First through Third Articles of the Apostles’ Creed and their meanings in the Small Catechism (*LSB*, 322–23). In his explanations, how does Luther make clear God’s redemptive plan in Christ?
- Read John 14:8–11, 23–28, and 15:26. How do these texts reflect upon not only stanza 10 but the entire hymn?

- Read Luke 15:3–7. What do these words reveal to us about others? About ourselves?

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 555, “Salvation unto Us Has Come.”

### Prayer

Lord God, heavenly Father, since we cannot stand before You relying on anything we have done, help us trust in Your abiding grace and live according to Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 20A).

# May God Bestow on Us His Grace

Lutheran Service Book 823/824 | study by Thomas E. Lock

## Introduction

When Martin Luther (1483–1546) wrote in 1522, “recently many islands and lands have been discovered, to which the grace [of God] has not appeared for these 1500 years,” he wrote of the discovery of the Americas (AE 16:135n 7). The next year Luther wrote our hymn for today, “May God Bestow on Us His Grace,” a hymn of thanksgiving for the rich blessings of God. This paraphrase of Psalm 67 is also a hymn for missions; in fact, it was the first mission hymn of the Reformation. All Christians, including those living in these discovered islands and lands of the Americas, can

give thanks that they have been blessed with the bestowal of the Gospel, which converts and saves sinners.

- Of what types of grace was Luther writing in this hymn? Why was it important to ask for such bestowal of grace? Why is it important for you to ask for grace from God?
- How is the bestowal of God’s grace linked with
- Christian missions? How has — does — God’s grace come to these discovered islands and lands?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Our hymn is a paraphrase of Psalm 67. Read Ps. 67:1–2.

- For what does the psalmist ask in verse 1? This verse reminds you of what part of the Divine Service?
- In verse 2, what was to be made known among all nations of the earth?

Read the Holy Gospel for Sexagesima (Luke 8:4–15), the parable of the sower. This sower spreads his seed on differing soils in hope that all the soils will bear fruitfully from his seed.

- In verses 5–8 Jesus described the results from the sowing of the seed on the differing soils. What were the four

differing types of soil upon which the seed was sown? What happened to the seed on each type of soil?

- The disciples asked for an explanation of this parable. Jesus’ reply is given in verses 10–15. What is the seed that was sown? How do the differing soils describe hearers of the Gospel?
- The sower in this passage demonstrates recklessness by tossing the seed not only onto soil likely to bear abundantly, but also onto soils where he knows it will not come to fruition. Who is the sower? Why is He so reckless? Whose fault is it if the seed of the Gospel does not result ultimately in salvation — God’s, or the hearer’s?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

After Luther was declared an outlaw by Emperor Charles V in 1521 (meaning anyone could kill Luther without fear of punishment), Elector Frederick the Wise spirited Luther away to Wartburg Castle near Eisenach. Luther returned to Wittenberg in 1522 to restore order within the congregations. He also soon began writing hymns for the people to sing. Today’s hymn is one of the first in that outpouring of new hymns in German.

- Imagine that the government was seeking your death. You would most likely try to hide out somewhere. Is there *any* reason why you would return to your hometown? What would motivate that return? When you returned, would you then start writing things for public consumption? Why or why not?

When Luther first reformed the Divine Service in 1523, he still retained the Latin, while removing those portions of the service that smacked of self-righteousness. Luther emphasized the work of God in the service. For the Benediction, Luther recommended that either the Aaronic Blessing (Num. 6:24–26) or Ps. 67:6–7 be used. The Aaronic Blessing was given by the Lord so that His name would be put upon the children of Israel (v. 27). On the other hand, Ps. 67:6–7 refers to God blessing the nations.

- What are the similarities and differences between the Aaronic Blessing and Ps. 67:6–7? What are their strengths and weaknesses at the close of the service? Why do you think Lutherans have retained the Aaronic Benediction?

## Text

We have already discovered the recklessness of the sower, the one who casts the seed upon all nations and all people. In this first mission hymn of the Reformation, there are many references to the nations of the world.

- How many references to these nations can you find in this hymn?

Luther's understanding of right worship can be summed up with the German word, *Gottesdienst*, that is, Divine Service. In this Divine Service God first serves man, and then Christians return thanks and praise to God.

- Look at the first stanza. Which aspect of Divine Service is being described? How is God serving the people of the earth? What is the goal of that service?

Stanza 2 is the paraphrase of Ps. 67:3–4. The emphasis of the hymn text and of these verses from Psalm 67 is about praising God (the second aspect of Divine Service).

The second half of stanza 2 includes these lines:

For Thou shalt judge the earth, O Lord,  
Nor suffer sin to flourish;

Thy people's pasture is Thy Word  
Their souls to feed and nourish,  
In righteous paths to keep them.

- Why should the people praise God?
- Where has the judgment of the earth and its sinfulness taken place in Christ? When will the final judging of the earth and its sinfulness take place? If sin will not flourish, how was it removed and how will it be removed?
- What is the connection between Psalm 23 and the last three lines of this stanza?

Stanza 3 is a paraphrase of Ps. 67:5–7. It also includes a reference to the parable of the sower: “The land shall plentiful fruit bring forth, / Thy Word is rich in blessing.”

- Read a portion of the Old Testament Reading for Sexagesima, Is. 55:10–13. How are seed and the Word linked? What is the connection between this reading and the parable of the sower? Who converts the people? To whom, then, do the people give thanks?

## Making the Connection

Read Rom. 1:8. What does St. Paul say about the faith of the Roman Christians? How far had the knowledge of their faith gone even in the time of the apostles? (If time allows, see also Col. 1:3–6 and 1 Thess. 1:8.)

- If the Gospel has already gone to all the nations, does that mean that we no longer need to send out

missionaries or bear witness of Christ to those who do not believe in Him?

- For what blessings of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) do you give thanks? How can you show this thankfulness to God and to other people, both near and far away?

## In Closing

The Holy Spirit distributes the rich blessings of Christ in His Word, Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution and Holy Communion in the Church, even as we confess in the explanation to the Third Article of the Creed from the Small Catechism (*LSB*, 323).

- Read this explanation aloud together.
- Sing or read aloud *LSB* 823 or 824.

## Prayer

Almighty God, in Your kindness You cause the light of the Gospel to shine among us. By the working of Your Holy Spirit, help us to share the good news of Your salvation that all who hear it may rejoice in the gift of Your unending love; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Mission Observance).



# Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness

Lutheran Service Book 849 | study by Paul Robert Sauer

## Introduction

How would you describe yourself to a stranger? What would be the most important things to highlight? How do you boil down all of your interests and passions into just a few short descriptive words?

Who is Jesus? It is a question that Jesus Himself asks the disciples (Luke 9:18–20), and after some stumbling about Peter answers, “The Christ of God” (v. 20).

Today’s hymn seeks out other biblical descriptions of who Jesus is, in an attempt to fill in the picture of “Jesus, the divine Messiah” with “Jesus, the man who walked on

this earth and did great things,” so that a complete picture of Jesus, who is both truly human and truly divine, can emerge.

- What images come to mind when you think about Jesus? Are they mostly divine? Mostly human? A mixture?
- Who do “others” today say Jesus is? In the face of confusing and conflicting images of Jesus, where do we go for answers?

## Exploring the Scriptures

In today’s Epistle, 1 Cor. 13:1–13, St. Paul speaks about how “faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (v. 13).

- Why might love be considered the greatest of these three?
- Is love simply an emotion? In what way does Jesus’ incarnation reinforce the greatness of God’s love?

Incarnation is at the heart of this hymn. Read John 1:1–14.

- How is Jesus’ incarnation described by St. John? What image is used?
- What does this incarnation give birth to (vv. 12–13)?

In today’s Gospel, Luke 18:31–43, Jesus breaks the darkness of a blind beggar by giving him sight.

- To what does Jesus attribute the man’s restoration of sight (v. 42)? What does the beggar do with sight restored?

In our churches there is rightfully a strong emphasis on the forgiveness of sins offered through Jesus Christ. Read Luke 4:16–21.

- How does Jesus describe His mission (by quoting from Isaiah)?
- Is the Christian life simply about forgiveness of sin? What else is included in the Gospel (Good News) that Jesus brings?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

In 1986, Lutheran pastor Rusty Edwards (b. 1955) opened his Bible with the intention of creating a Bible study on the actual life and unique ministry of Jesus:

What on earth did Jesus really do? As I prayed, studied, and thanked God for the life of Jesus, I began to write down some of his works. The list grew longer. Suddenly, I gazed down at the list and the list looked almost like a hymn. (Rusty Edwards, “Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness,” *CrossAccent* 15, no. 2 [2007]: 39)

Edwards then set aside the Bible study and composed “Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness,” a celebration of the marvelous works of the incarnate Son of God.

- If you were to describe Jesus to a friend, would you focus more on His theological importance or on His historical life?
- What do the historical life and works of Jesus contribute to our understanding of His theological importance?

Edwards titled his hymn after his favorite image of Jesus — the one who breaks the darkness in the world.

- What is your favorite image of Jesus? Why?
- Did Edwards leave out images of Jesus that you would include if you were writing the hymn? Which ones?



### Text

This hymn is deeply descriptive of the life and works of Jesus. It is filled with biblical imagery. Yet Jesus is not explicitly mentioned by name until the third stanza.

- If stanza 3 were removed from this hymn, would it be as powerful? Would you still know who the hymn was about? How?

The hymn begins by celebrating the freedom that is brought by the “light” (John 1:4–9) who breaks the darkness. Out of that light comes freedom and all its benefits (described in st. 1). Read John 8:34–36.

- What is the slavery that John speaks of? Is it physical? Does it manifest itself in physical ways?
- How is creation itself affected by the freedom brought by the liberating light (st. 1)?
- Stanza 1 concludes with a reference to “the very Bread of peace.” What is this a reference to?

## Making the Connection

This hymn calls to our attention the many works of the incarnate Son of God.

- What difference does it make to you to have a God who became one of us?

## In Closing

The incarnation of the Son of God has changed everything. God is not content to allow His people to live apart from Him and His presence. God continues to come to His people through His Word, through the bread of life (Communion), and through water (Baptism). Ultimately the incarnate Word draws us back to God through His role as Redeemer, “the One who makes us one” (st. 3) both with God and with each other as fellow members of the Body of Christ.

In the second stanza humanity (the children), the spiritual realm (demons), and the whole of creation (burning sand) are made whole by the one who is “living water.” Read John 4:7–15.

- Where do we go to get the living water?
- Is a celebration of Baptism present in this stanza? Why or why not?

The hymn concludes with the explicit identification of “the One” as the incarnate Word. We have been moved from table (Communion) to font (Baptism), and now the hymn concludes with a focus on the grace that table and font bring. Edwards saves the best for last. Read John 3:16–17.

- Why did God send Jesus? What is the greatest of the works done by the incarnate Son of God?
- Where is our unity found (Eph. 4:4–6)?

- How do we encounter the incarnate Word today?
- In what ways can we bring the incarnate Word to others (1 Cor. 12:27)?

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 849, “Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness.”

### Prayer

O Lord, mercifully hear our prayers and having set us free from the bonds of our sins deliver us from every evil; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Quinquagesima).