



THE WORD IN

*Song*

Hymn of the Day Studies for  
THE SEASON AFTER  
PENTECOST



THE  
**LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
MISSOURI SYNOD

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# Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest

Lutheran Service Book 498/499 | study by J.H. Sorenson

## Introduction

“We don’t pray for the Holy Spirit!” said the young man to his pastor. The pastor was startled at first and wondered where this was coming from. He wondered if this man was paying attention to the service on Sunday morning and doubted the depth of his confirmation instruction, but of course did not say so out loud.

- How would you respond to that statement?

## Exploring the Scriptures

In John 14:16–26, Jesus promised to send His faithful disciples “another Helper ... the Spirit of truth,” who would remind them of everything He told them and be with them always.

- When was this promise first fulfilled?
- How does the Holy Spirit speak to us today?

In Rom. 8:5–11, Paul teaches that the Spirit gives life while the flesh means death.

- What does Paul mean by “life” in the Spirit?
- By contrast, what is “[living] according to the flesh”?  
Read Titus 3:5–7.

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

“Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest” is one of the oldest and most highly respected of the ancient Latin hymns. It was written in the ninth century, but scholars are not sure of its author. The most likely one is Rabanus Maurus (c. 776–856), a monk, scholar, abbot and archbishop of Mainz in Germany.

This hymn found its way into many books of daily prayer and orders of worship over the centuries. To this day, it is prescribed or recommended to be used in ordination rites in Roman Catholic, Episcopal and Lutheran churches, including the rite in *Lutheran Service Book Agenda*. It is also used for the dedication of churches and several other occasions, such as the coronation of kings and queens of England.

- What makes this hymn an appropriate choice for the Holy Trinity?
- What is the value in a hymn being used by many denominations of Christians?

- What are some ways in which we do pray for the Holy Spirit?
- What does the Holy Spirit use to get through to people? (Hint: Means of Grace.)

- What is the washing referred to here?
- Where does the power in Baptism come from?

This hymn is packed with biblical references. Every stanza has several, starting with Ps. 104:30.

- What other passages can you think of that tie the Holy Spirit to creation?
- What are the “graces sevenfold” (st. 3) in the hymn (Is. 11:2)?
- How do these differ from the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22)?

- Why do you think this hymn is widely used at ordinations?

### Text

Many translations of this hymn have been made. Among them is one by Martin Luther into German. Our translation is by Englishman Edward Caswall (1814–78). The tune in 498 is a version of the one Luther used. The one in 499 comes from the ninth century.

- Why do you think the hymn reads “Holy Ghost” instead of “Holy Spirit”?
- Might the use of such traditional language fail to communicate with people today?

As the first stanza links the Holy Spirit to creation and filling the hearts of believers, stanza 2 calls on the Spirit as “Counselor,” or “Helper” (ESV).

- What event does “tongues of fire” refer to?

Romans 8:26 reads, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

- What comfort and hope does this passage give you?
- Who is “our wily foe” (st. 5)?

In John 14, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will teach us all that we need to know.

## Making the Connection

No more comforting and encouraging words have ever been spoken than Paul’s passage on life in the Spirit in Romans 8. This hymn reflects not only that passage, but most of the scriptural teachings and reflections on the Holy Spirit. The point of view of this hymn is corporate. It is a prayer on

## In Closing

The pastor talking to the young man about prayer for the Holy Spirit rightly understood that he had other “issues” besides prayer for the Holy Spirit. He recalled the prayer said every Sunday at that time, “Grant to Thy Church Thy Holy Spirit and the wisdom that cometh down from above ...” He remembered that every service began “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The catechism teaches that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, and all interact together. The Word and the Sacraments bear the Spirit’s power to create and strengthen faith.

- Why is it especially meaningful to call on the Holy Spirit to enliven the Church’s mission today?
- How does the Holy Spirit move and motivate Christian people to their mission in our time?
- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 498 or 499.

- What doctrine do we ask to be taught in stanza 6?

Stanza 7 is called a “doxology,” a stanza of praise to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Such stanzas are marked with a small triangle in *LSB*. Many congregations stand to sing these stanzas.

- Is this a good or not-so-good idea?

behalf of “us,” meaning the worshiping community gathered in prayer and song, but it applies to every worshiper as well, a heartfelt prayer for all the Spirit’s gifts and activity. This hymn is over a thousand years old, but its thoughts are current and important for today.

### Prayer

Almighty God, grant to Your Church Your Holy Spirit and the wisdom that comes down from above, that Your Word may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ’s holy people, that in steadfast faith we may serve You and, in the confession of Your name, abide unto the end; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen (For the Church, *LSB*, p. 305).

# All Depends on Our Possessing

Lutheran Service Book 732 | study by Allen D. Lunneberg

## Introduction

What a wonderful expression of faith and trust in God in this hymn as we hear Jesus say in today's Gospel, "Do not be anxious" (Matt. 6:25, 34). For faith in the face of any and all anxiety is the precious possession of all who come to belong to God's family. It is a faith that does not depend on possessions nor even on hope based on whether our days are going well at the moment! In fact, this faith becomes all the stronger under persecution or pressure. God's grace is our anchor, our hope and our confidence.

Through the text of this hymn and the Scriptures upon which they are based we meditate on God's gift of faith and

its power to give and renew in us strength, boldness and confidence.

- Notice the hymn begins and ends praising God's grace. How does God's grace strengthen faith?
- How do we receive that grace?
- What's the difference between "treasures on earth" and "treasures in heaven"?
- What does Jesus say we ought to seek before and after all? Why?

## Exploring the Scriptures

The Gospel for today and the primary basis of our hymn text is Matt. 6:24–34. It is from the Sermon on the Mount. After the Beatitudes and illustrations of how our Lord came not to abolish the Law but to fulfill it, Jesus speaks of how the Christian faith is to be shown in the three fundamental acts of piety: almsgiving, prayer and fasting. But even these good works are not motivated by the Law, but are the activity of the heart redeemed, restored and renewed by God's gift of faith. With a tender and understanding heart Jesus then seeks to strengthen our faith and calm our hearts and minds by saying, "Do not be anxious."

Read Matt. 6:24–34.

- What are some of the issues that most often cause anxiety?
- What is "the kingdom of God" (v. 33)?
- What is God's "righteousness" (v. 33)?
- How does seeking these things calm anxiety?

Read Col. 3:1–4. St. Paul says that "you have been raised with Christ." Notice that he says this of us even before the resurrection of the Last Day!

- In what way, then, have you been "raised" with Christ? When were you raised to "live a new life" (*LSB*, p. 325)?
- Paul tells us, "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (v. 2). What are the "things that are above"? What are the "things that are on earth"?

Read Rom. 8:31–32 and 38–39.

- What are the "all things" that God graciously gives us? What is the one word that describes what all these things in verses 38–39 are attempting to do? Why or how will they fail?
- How is this confidence reflected in the hymn, "All Depends on Our Possessing"?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

It is amazing that such a well-known hymn of so many centuries would have been penned by an anonymous author unknown to this day! It first appeared in the *Andächtige Haus-Kirche, oder Aufmunterung zur Gottseligkeit ...* (Nürnberg: W. M. Endter & Erben, 1676). Catherine Winkworth's first translation of the text sounds almost more modern, saying, "All things *hang* on our possessing." Still it has remained a strong confession of faith in God's care and provision for Christians in the face of all the changes and chances and reverses of life.

- What is the main "earthly concern" mentioned in both stanza 1 and stanza 6?
- How are these things described in stanza 3?
- With what sort of "sorrows" is stanza 4 concerned?
- What do you think the author means by "the longing hopes that haunt me" in stanza 5?

### Text

The key to understanding this hymn is in the final stanza. In the face of the fact, "Earthly wealth is not abiding, / Like

a stream away is gliding,” nevertheless the Christian says, “All my trust in [God] I place.”

- To whom are we singing the words of this hymn?
- If this hymn is not a prayer to God, what would you call it?
- Read stanza 3. How does this reflect Ps. 39:6?

## Making the Connection

This hymn helps us confess the comfort of our faith in God’s constant care, provision and grace. God’s kingdom, His rule in our lives and in our world, are contrasted with earthly wealth and “things that have no solid ground.” When fear or sorrow seizes us the hope of faith is there, grounded in God’s Word. God “feeds us” not only with food for the body but with food for the soul, especially as He strengthens faith every time we gather to receive our Lord’s holy body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar.

- How does receiving the body and blood of the Lord strengthen faith and confidence before God?
- How do the words of this hymn give comfort to calm anxiety?

## In Closing

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 732.

### Prayers

Eternal God, You counsel us not to be anxious about earthly things. Keep alive in us a proper yearning for those heavenly treasures awaiting all who trust in Your mercy, that we may daily rejoice in Your salvation and serve You with constant devotion; 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 3A).

Grant, O Lord, to keep us this day without sin. O Lord, have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us. O Lord, let Your mercy be upon us, as our trust is in You. O Lord, in You have I trusted; let me never be confounded. Amen (“Te Deum,” st. 9, *LSB*, p. 225).

- How does Eccl. 3:1–8 reflect stanza 5 of our hymn?
- What blessings of God are mentioned in stanza 2?
- In stanza 3, what is the “treasure / That will bring me lasting pleasure”? See Matt. 6:33.
- How many things, how much of life “depends on our possessing / God’s abundant grace and blessing”?

The transience of life is an underlying concern of our hymn.

- How are the following words of Ps. 90:3–6 echoed in the sixth stanza?

“You return man to dust  
and say, “Return, O children of man!”  
For a thousand years in your sight  
are but as yesterday when it is past,  
or as a watch in the night.

You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream,  
like grass that is renewed in the morning;  
in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;  
in the evening it fades and withers.”

Almighty and most merciful God, in this earthly life we endure sufferings and death before we enter into eternal glory. Grant us grace at all times to subject ourselves to Your holy will and to continue steadfast in the true faith to the end of our lives that we may know the peace and joy of the blessed hope of the resurrection of the dead and of the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen (In times of affliction and distress, *LSB*, p. 317).



# To God the Holy Spirit Let Us Pray

**Lutheran Service Book 768** | study by Thomas E. Lock

## Introduction

Lutherans often are accused of speaking little of the Holy Spirit. The Third Articles (Holy Spirit) of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds are shorter than the Second Articles (Christ). The focus of Lutheran preaching is Christ and His salvation of man, not the works of the Holy Spirit shown in our own works. What frequently is overlooked is that whenever we speak of the Church of all believers, we speak of the Holy Spirit. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, no one could be saved. As Martin Luther wrote in his Large Catechism:

“The work of redemption is done and accomplished. Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, resurrection, and so on. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew about it, then it would be useless and lost. So that this treasure might not

stay buried, but be received and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed” (LC II 38, 403).

The task of the Holy Spirit is to sanctify us by revealing and delivering Christ with His blessings to sinners. Our prayers rarely are to the Holy Spirit. Yet, in today's hymn, we do pray to the Holy Spirit that He would keep His Church — and all her members — in the true faith that is created only by the Spirit.

- Whose work creates and sustains faith in man? Does man contribute anything to his own conversion? Why is it right that we pray to the Holy Spirit for faith to remain among us?

## Exploring the Scriptures

The Holy Gospel for the First Sunday after Trinity is the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. This story is spoken against the Pharisees, who are described as “lovers of money” (Luke 16:14). Read Luke 16:19–31.

- At the beginning, how are the “comforts” of the rich man described? Could Lazarus take care of himself? Upon whom did Lazarus rely? Could it be said that Lazarus was placed at the rich man's door to give him an opportunity to prove his faith and love?
- At death, where did these two men end up? Was it the man's riches or Lazarus' poverty that determined their place?

Abraham, one of the richest men in the Bible, is described as the father of all the faithful (John 8:48–58; Romans 4; Heb. 11:8–10).

- What riches (not money) did Abraham have that would gain heaven for him?
- The rich man is told that a great gulf separates him in torment from Lazarus in blessing. What had the rich man and his brothers not trusted? What person of the Holy Trinity reveals and delivers to sinners Christ and all His blessings of forgiveness, life and salvation? What is the Church (guided by the Holy Spirit) to proclaim?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

The anonymous first stanza of today's hymn is a Pentecost carol from the thirteenth century. This stanza was mentioned twice in a sermon by Berthold of Regensburg (c. 1210–1272) in which he encouraged his hearers to sing this hymn in the service on Pentecost. This encouragement is remarkable since congregational singing was rarely allowed (except for Easter/Christmas carols) in Roman Catholic congregations.

The singing of this stanza remained popular in German lands. Martin Luther (1483–1546) loved this stanza and encouraged its frequent singing. In 1524 Luther was in the midst of theological conflicts with many who believed that the Spirit guided people directly — apart from, and

in contradiction to, God's revealed Word. One of the false teachers was Luther's former colleague at Wittenberg, Andreas Karlstadt (c. 1486–1541). Karlstadt's primary focus was on what the Christian did, not on what Christ had done and what the Holy Spirit was doing by His Word. One of the ways Luther confronted this false theology was by this hymn's use. Luther also added three new stanzas to focus on the true work of the Holy Spirit.

- Are there false teachers in these days who emphasize the work of Christians over the work of God?

### Text

This hymn is sung by people the Holy Spirit has already brought to faith in Jesus Christ. All works apart from

Christ (especially a so-called decision to believe in Christ) are impossible (see John 1:12; 15:5; and Eph. 2:8–9). As Luther teaches in the Small Catechism: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith” (*LSB*, p. 323).

The first stanza is a prayer that the Holy Spirit would keep Christians in the only true, saving faith — the faith in Christ.

- Why do people need the Holy Spirit to be brought to faith in Christ? What dangers in this world tempt Christians to depart from this faith? How does the Holy Spirit defend Christians from leaving the true faith?

Stanza 2 addresses the Holy Spirit as “sweetest Love.” The Spirit is the one who makes Christians holy, granting His fire so that we show this love to one another. Read Acts 4:34–35.

## Making the Connection

There are many in this age de-emphasizing the work of Christ and His Spirit done in the Word, Holy Baptism and Holy Communion; these false teachers deny the very things given by the merciful Lord to the Church for her good.

- Do you look away from the Holy Spirit’s gifts in Word and Sacraments and toward your own good (or bad) works?

## In Closing

We confess: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church,” and the like (*LSB*, p. 323). The Holy Spirit is given so that all would hear and believe in Jesus Christ unto salvation. The Word and the Sacraments are the Spirit’s gifts so that people would believe in Christ and be strengthened in that faith by ongoing forgiveness of sins. When you confess the Holy Spirit, you confess the Christian Church, and vice versa. Lord, continue to have mercy on us all and bring us at last to our heavenly home!

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 768.

- How was the love of Christ, bestowed by the Holy Spirit, revealed in the Church? What can your congregation do for those in need within the Church and for others?

Stanza 3 calls the Holy Spirit “Comfort.” In the King James Version of the Bible, He is called “Comforter” by Jesus in John 14:16, 26; 15:26 (some translations use “Helper” instead). Read John 14:18–27.

- Against what does the Church of all believers need comfort? What comfort does the Comforter/Helper give?

Previously we saw from the Small Catechism that the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith. Luther continued by declaring that this Spirit still does these things for the whole Church on earth, keeping her with Jesus Christ. In this Church the Holy Spirit delivers forgiveness with the promise that all believers in Christ will live with Him in eternity.

- How does the final stanza describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church?

What comfort can be found in the Holy Spirit’s gifts of faith and guidance?

- Upon whom shall all Christians rely on the Last Day?
- Each stanza ends with the cry of the Church, “Lord, have mercy.” How is God (through the Holy Spirit) showering you with mercy?

## Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, You fulfilled Your promise by sending the gift of the Holy Spirit to unite disciples of all nations in the cross and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ. By the preaching of the Gospel spread this gift to the ends of the earth; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Pentecost Tuesday).

# Let Me Be Thine Forever

**Lutheran Service Book 689** | study by Richard J. Serina Jr.

## Introduction

We all know the old cliché that children don't come with manuals. Well, neither do baptizands or confirmands. All Christian parents worry that their children will neglect faith and worship. The teenage years are the most excruciating, as these children we have held in our arms and taught to speak and sent off to school suddenly take great liberties with their newfound independence. Parents worry, and with good reason.

But God has not called us to force our children to remain in the Gospel. What He has called us to do is educate them in their faith and model that faith for them in our own lives,

around the dinner table and at the bedside and, of course, on Sunday mornings when we attend the Divine Service.

The Reformation-era hymn, "Let Me Be Thine Forever," is the prayer of the Christian that God would by His mercy and grace keep us in His fold. It also serves as an encouragement to us that our faith is strengthened by attending to Word and Sacrament.

- What practices did your parents instill in you when it comes to public or private devotion? What practices did you start in your own family?
- What are some challenges facing our children that tempt them to abandon the faith?

## Exploring the Scriptures

The Gospel lesson for the Sunday is Matt. 9:9–13. In this passage, Jesus calls Matthew to follow Him as His disciple. Matthew was known as a tax collector, and tax collectors were considered traitors of the Jewish faith because they worked for the Roman government. They were also notorious for collecting more than was required so that they could "skim off the top" and take some for themselves. This obviously would lead to questions about why Jesus might choose such "sinners" as His disciples, but a criticism like that misses the point of the Gospel altogether. Read Matt. 9:9–13.

- Did Jesus choose Matthew because he "deserved" to be His disciple? Why did Jesus choose Matthew, even though he was considered wicked by many others? Why does He choose us?

- Why does Jesus refer to the sinners and tax collectors as "sick"? Whom does He refer to as "well" or "righteous"? Does He really mean that some are not in need of salvation and others are?
- How does calling sinners show God's mercy? What lesson does Jesus give us about acknowledging our own sin in this reading?

This Gospel lesson reminds us of the mercy God has shown His people in Jesus Christ. We are all sinners saved by His mercy through the grace poured out upon us at Holy Baptism. He has made us His children, and now we are about the business of learning His Word and receiving His gifts, specifically the Sacrament of the Altar.

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

During the days of the Reformation, when this hymn was composed, one of the chief challenges facing Lutheran churches was the education of the faithful in this grace they had received. While visiting many of the congregations throughout Germany, Martin Luther was aghast to see not only children but also parents who did not know the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, even the Lord's Prayer. Many did not understand or value their Baptisms and the gift of the Lord's Supper. So, Luther wrote both the Small and Large Catechisms for the purpose of instructing children in the faith, specifically to help parents teach that faith to their own children.

- How has the Small Catechism continued to shape your family and private devotions? How do you use the Small Catechism to explore the Scriptures with your family or to answer theological questions as they arise?

Another controversy of the Reformation relating to this hymn's background involved the rite of confirmation. Lutherans do not believe that the rite of confirmation is a Sacrament that bestows the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit is given at Baptism. Instead, the rite of confirmation is an opportunity for children to confess their faith as learned through the study of the Catechism. This time of instruction gives them an opportunity to learn and grow in the faith

they received at the font, so that they might come to the Sacrament prepared to receive the blessings offered there.

- What do you remember of your catechetical instruction leading to confirmation? How did your parents prepare you for that process at home? How have you in turn prepared the children in your family?

### Text

The text of this hymn addresses the way the persons of the Holy Trinity are involved with our growth in faith and knowledge as Christians, a growth that is not restricted to a two-year window during youth catechesis, but is part of our daily spiritual disciplines. The first stanza addresses our faith in God the Father as the sustainer of our faith. It is this God who does not forsake His children, but keeps them close through His Word and enables them to remain steadfast in faith and worship.

- Where has God given you access to Him? How does He strengthen your faith through the Means of Grace? What do we risk by neglecting the Means of Grace?

The second stanza calls our attention to Jesus Christ, our Savior. It is this Jesus who reveals the light and life from

## Making the Connection

Christian faith is not something we create or sustain on our own. Rather, faith is the work of God Himself, and He alone can sustain us in that faith, doing so through Word and Sacrament. Where we find Word and Sacrament, there we have access to God through Jesus Christ, there we have the forgiveness of our sins and there we have the protection and strengthening our faith requires to withstand the attacks of the devil. This is what our children need. They do not need entertainment or excitement; they need the Gospel that comes to them through Word and Sacrament. Our children need to live, breathe, receive and cling to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For there the God who created

God, who consoles us with His Gospel, who makes us His own to live with Him forever and who has purchased us through His “blood and bitter pain” upon the cross, that we might obtain eternal life from His hand.

- How does the language here reflect what the Small Catechism says about the Second Article of the Creed?
- How does Jesus console us in this life? What promises does He make that console us in the midst of a world infected with sin, death and the devil?

The third and final stanza concludes with a prayer to the Holy Spirit. The hymn tells us that it is the Holy Spirit who helps us cling to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, enables us to confess this Jesus as Lord, and blesses us with Christian faith even at death. All of this the Holy Spirit does through the Means of Grace, where He “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies” us by creating and strengthening faith in our hearts (*LSB*, p. 323).

- How does the Holy Spirit work in our lives? How can we be certain that it is the Holy Spirit working and not something else? Where do we find that Spirit?

them calls them through His Son, and there the Son who redeemed them forgives their sins and there the Spirit who creates faith in their hearts strengthens that faith through the Means of Grace.

- How have you instilled the value of Word and Sacrament in the lives of your children, your spouse or your family? What kind of an example have you given them of worship in your own life?
- How does worship strengthen your faith so that you might remain strong against the devil’s attacks?

## In Closing

God does not abandon us or leave us on our own. He is at work in our lives, sustaining, forgiving and sanctifying us in the faith through Word and Sacrament. Christian faith does not depend upon the reason of our minds or the strength of our hands. It is God’s gracious gift, and He alone preserves that faith through the Means of Grace we find in the Word and at the altar.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 689.

### Prayer

Almighty and most merciful God, You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to seek and to save the lost. Graciously open our ears and our hearts to hear His call and to follow Him by faith that we may feast with Him forever in His kingdom; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 5A).

# God Loved the World So That He Gave

**Lutheran Service Book 571** | study by Scott R. Schilbe

## Introduction

Look across a stadium of fans enjoying a professional sporting event and you may see a fan holding a John 3:16 sign. You may even see a sports fan paint “John 3:16” on his or her body. This emphasis on John 3:16 is because for many people, it summarizes Christianity’s central belief. Thanks be to God that this short summary of Christianity enjoys a large pop-culture following. Aside from professional sports (especially football), the reference of John 3:16 is printed on the bottom of paper cups used by the In-N-Out Burger chain.

## Exploring the Scriptures

John 3:1–21 is the account of Jesus teaching Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Jew, a member of the Pharisees. Curious about Jesus, he secretly came to Jesus at night, so that no other Jew would know of his curiosity. A catechetical conversation took place between the two men. Jesus instructed Nicodemus on how one enters the kingdom of God. Towards the end of the instruction (starting at John 3:14), Jesus speaks very directly: “whoever believes in him [the Son of Man, Himself] may have eternal life” (v. 15). He continues by speaking John 3:16–21.

Jesus’ teaching in John 3:16 is certainly comforting to us. That’s because it applies Jesus’ work to us. Here, the purpose of Jesus’ death is revealed. He died so that we can have eternal life.

- Have you ever shared John 3:16 with a friend to summarize the Gospel message?
- Why do you think this verse has become this widely known summary of the Bible’s teaching?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Little is known about the origins of this beloved hymn. Recent research suggests that the hymn was published in a 1778 Pomeranian hymnal. Whoever wrote it has enabled Christians to sing of the Gospel and the implications of the Gospel for the believer’s life.

### Text

Stanza 1 is a paraphrase of John 3:16. The stanza puts the verse in poetic form. Stanzas 2 and following begin explaining the implications of having faith resting on John 3:16.

- John 1:14 and Col. 1:15 express that Jesus is the infinite, uncreated, and eternal Son of God. According to stanza 2, what did this Son of God do?
- What is the result of the Son of God’s work (end of st. 2)?

- Is it our action of believing or is it the object of our belief that saves us from hell?
- Despite Jesus’ words here and elsewhere (John 14:6; Acts 4:11–12, for example), why do many people not believe that only Jesus saves? Why do people imagine that God includes all people in eternity, regardless of their beliefs?
- Usually overshadowed by verse 16, verses 17 and 18 are also helpful verses that clarify how one enters eternal life. Read verses 17 and 18. What do these verses conclude? Again, how is one saved?

- What is the significance of a “cornerstone?” Who is the cornerstone (read 1 Peter 2:6; Ps. 118:22; Eph. 2:19–22)?
- In stanza 3, God’s good and gracious will is proclaimed. What is His will? Read 1 Tim. 2:3–4.
- The Holy Spirit’s work is highlighted in stanza 3. By the Word, what does the Spirit declare? Read John 15:26; John 14:26; Titus 3:4–7.

Stanzas 4 and 5 calm fearful and anxious hearts. Sickness and death make us anxious, worried and fearful of life’s end. Questioning whether or not God forgives also creates fearful and anxious hearts.

- According to Rom. 6:3–10, how can Baptism grant us the “highest good”?

- To such fearful and anxious hearts, what good news does the hymn writer give us in stanzas 4 and 5? To help answer, read Rom. 3:21–28.
- When facing death, why are constant reminders of Christ’s work for us sinners especially important?

- Based on stanza 5, how can the Christian face death and the grave?

Stanza 6 concludes the hymn with a trinitarian reference. As with all stanzas marked with a triangle in our hymnal, we stand in reverence as we sing this trinitarian doxology.

## Making the Connection

In Matt. 10:1–15, Jesus commissioned His apostles to proclaim that the kingdom of God is at hand (Matt. 10:7). The kingdom of God is God’s rule and reign of grace and mercy. The kingdom of God is the Gospel, the saving message that God forgives sins and opens heaven to us because He gave up His only begotten Son unto death.

- In what present-day ways do pastors (those who follow the apostles in the apostolic ministry) continue to proclaim the kingdom of God?

- Who gives the apostles authority to proclaim the kingdom? Who gives pastors this same authority today? Read Matt. 28:18 and Matt. 10:1 to help answer this question.

- As the Gospel promises of God are proclaimed, the Holy Spirit is creating faith “when and where it pleases God” (AC V, 33). Besides pastors, all of us can proclaim God’s Gospel promises (Is. 40:9; Ps. 105:1; 1 Peter 2:9). Think of yourselves as sowers of the Word. While sowing the Word is difficult at times, what promise does God give us (Matt. 13:23)?

## In Closing

The next time you see “John 3:16” displayed at an athletic event or on a paper cup, perhaps you’ll be reminded of today’s featured hymn. John 3:16 nicely summarizes the main teaching of the Bible. The Augsburg Confession expresses it this way: “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])” (AC IV, 33).

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 571.

### Prayer

Almighty, eternal God, in the Word of Your apostles and prophets You have proclaimed to us Your saving will. Grant us faith to believe Your promises that we may receive eternal salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 6A).



# O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth

Lutheran Service Book 834 | study by Paul F. Becker

## Introduction

The first of the 95 Theses states: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” [Mt 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance” (*Luther’s Works*, American Edition, [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957], 31:25). As Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, on Oct. 31, 1517, he inadvertently began what today we call the Protestant Reformation. One of his primary concerns was with the sale of indulgences, which in his mind cheapened the grace of God and trivialized the treasure of Confession and Absolution, thus distorting the Church’s Gospel mission and witness. The good news of God’s grace held such importance for Luther that he was willing to defy the Emperor

at the Diet of Worms in 1521 with his statement, “Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me, Amen!”

Such a confession and prayer echoes in the lines of this Reformation hymn, “O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth,” which points out the path for our continuing bold mission and witness to Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- Discuss how the meaning of repentance — turning to God and changing the way you think and act — determines the nature of our mission and witness to Jesus.
- Are there any areas you can think of in which the Church today stands in need of reformation?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Martin Franzmann’s text makes use of the work of each person of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to draw out what each divine person has done and continues to do for our good. Read John 1:1–7.

- How does the phrase “All things were made through him” (v. 3) shape your thinking about life and creation?
- If darkness cannot overcome the light (v. 5), what prevents people from seeing the truth? Hint: What do we love more?

Who can fathom the depths of God’s love in becoming one of us (Rom. 11:33)? By sharing our flesh and blood, Christ did what we were unable to do. Read Heb. 2:14–15.

- How was the author of our salvation able to “destroy the one who [had] the power of death” (Heb. 2:14)?
- Describe the bondage from which we have been set free by His death.

Ultimately, only the Holy Spirit’s work of restoration will allow the Church to fulfill its task of bringing good news to a sick and dying world. Without His presence, “the way of peace they have not known” (Rom. 3:17).

Read Rom. 15:5–6.

- What Scriptures in particular give you endurance and encouragement?
- What kind of thoughts and words glorify God and advance the Church’s mission and witness?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Martin H. Franzmann (1907–1976) was called in 1946 to teach at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. In 1955, he joined the department of Exegetical Theology there. He was known for his traditional stance on biblical inerrancy and inspiration over against historical criticism, as well as his commentaries on Romans and Revelation. Five of his original hymns and one of his translations are found in Lutheran Service Book. Today’s hymn was written for the 450th anniversary of the Reformation in 1967.

- What uniquely qualifies a student and teacher of the Scriptures to compose new hymns for the Church?

- The 500th anniversary of the Reformation is Oct. 31, 2017. Discuss two or three Reformation themes that still energize us today.

### Text

Even as the first stanza expresses the aimlessness, futility, and brokenness of life, consequences of the fall, it offers a powerful refutation of the false claim that would lay responsibility for sin and death on God. Call to mind Michelangelo’s well-known painting of the creation, in which the “living finger” of God the Father gives life to the yet lifeless figure of Adam.

- Discuss the phrases and word pictures that demonstrate God's design and intention for mankind.
- In stanza 2, we discover the results of insisting on our "fatal" and "rebel will." What evidence do you see today that man's rebellion is still fatal?

Stanzas 3 and 4 capture in vivid terms how God spared no expense to win us back to Himself. He breathed our poisoned air, and drank the dark despair that strangle our "reluctant breath."

The hymn was written during the height of both the Vietnam conflict and the arms race of the Cold War.

- How does repeating the phrase "how beautiful the feet" (st. 3) — a direct reference to Is. 52:7 — bring a sense of hope and promise?

The final stanza evokes the "high doxology" of heaven heard in Rev. 5:12–13: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! ... To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" To this our lives aspire even now in "these grey and latter days" by virtue of the Spirit's breath.

- What are some things that would characterize your personal, family, and church life if these were among "those whose life is praise"?

## Making the Connection

As we give thanks to God for restoring His Church, there are many gifts for us to rejoice in.

- What means does the Spirit use to make the Church once again "the bringer of good news to men" (st. 4) today?

- How does God bring comfort and hope to us who still inhabit our "hall of death" (st. 3) and "house of doom" (st. 2)?

## In Closing

Every Lord's Day in each Divine Service, whether we feel it or not, God the Holy Spirit breathes afresh and anew on humble and repentant hearts through Word and Sacrament the very life and love that God desires for us to experience and share with our neighbors. God's people gather where He has promised to bring us back to Himself.

- Read aloud or sing together *LSB* 834.

### Prayer

O God, the strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; 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 the Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany).



# Lord of Our Life

**Lutheran Service Book 659** | study by Randall P. Wurschmidt

## Introduction

“Therefore, we Christians must be armed [Ephesians 6:10–18] and daily expect to be constantly attacked. No one may go on in security and carelessly, as though the devil were far from us. At all times we must expect and block his blows. Though I am now chaste, patient, kind, and in firm faith, the devil will this very hour send such an arrow into my heart that I can scarcely stand. For he is an enemy that never stops or becomes tired. So when one temptation stops, there always arise others and fresh ones” (LC III 109, 421).

- Have you found this to be true in your own life?

In this hymn we pray to God in the midst of strife and threats from Satan and the world. As Martin Luther wrote in the Large Catechism, we are under constant attack, though sometimes we are more aware of it than at other times. But it is against the Church that the greatest assaults are made, and thus this hymn — in the section of the hymnal called “The Church Militant” — is a prayer of steadfastness against the enemies of the Church.

It seems that in our lifetime the Church is under especially harsh attack. Describe some ways that you believe this is so.

- How does Satan use assaults against the Church to try to undermine your own faith?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Read Rev. 12:7–17.

- According to verse 11, how has Satan been defeated?
- What do you think it means for us that the devil’s “time is short” now (v. 12)?
- If he can no longer engage Jesus directly, where does he now turn his attention (vv. 13, 17)?

Left on our own, we have no defense against the schemes of the devil. But God has given us a way to shield ourselves from the onslaught. Read Eph. 6:10–18.

- What are the vivid ways that Paul suggests you arm yourself?
- Where will you find all these things supplied for you?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Although it seems that in our time Satan and the world are working especially hard against the Church, the truth is that there have been many such times in our history. One such time was the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48); although it was a time of death, disease and destruction, many great hymns of faith were born out of the horrific conditions caused by this conflict (for example, the many hymns of Paul Gerhardt). It was a largely political and territorial war, though it is also remembered — at least superficially — as a battle about religion. The author of today’s hymn, Matthäus Apelles von Löwenstern (1594–1648), was an imperial counselor in the courts of two Holy Roman Emperors during these years. He was a devout Lutheran, but his employers were Roman Catholic, and very determined to destroy the Lutheran faith.

- Why do times of great affliction and suffering produce such outstanding hymns of faith?

- Should we expect the world to become increasingly more peaceful as the day of Jesus’ return draws ever nearer? Why or why not?

The English translation of “Lord of Our Life” that we sing comes from Philip Pusey (1799–1855). His brother, Edward Bouvier Pusey, was a leader of the Oxford Movement in the Church of England (in the early-to-mid-1800s). Pusey, too, lived during a time when his Church was under assault, not by princes and emperors, but by secularization and liberal theology, and the Oxford Movement sought to reverse some of those trends. They found this hymn to be a source of comfort in their struggles.

- Some hymns are more timeless than others; hymns like this one successfully work well over many generations, while some seem quickly and embarrassingly dated. What makes some hymns more successful than others in crossing over the centuries?

## Text

There is marvelous imagery in every stanza of this hymn: light and darkness, storm and calm, battle and peace. The Church is the ark that protects us from the hungry billows outside and from the enemy, who unfurls his banners of war. The metaphor of the Church as the ark on stormy waters is an ancient one, and is even found in our baptismal liturgy (see *LSB* pp. 268–271).

- How would you interpret the “star” in the first stanza? See Is. 14:17 and Rev. 22:16.

The second stanza is an especially vivid description of how the enemy lurks outside, surrounding you and waiting to devour you (1 Peter 5:8).

- Does the imagery of the ark help you to feel secure? Why or why not?

## Making the Connection

“Lord of Our Life” is an affirmation of spiritual warfare, that Satan and his minions are at work against Christians and the Church in every effort to destroy her. Here we pray that God would hear us as we cry out to Him for help in our fight against the wily foe. He sent us Jesus to defeat him; He sends His Holy Spirit to us to strengthen us in faith and to arm us against temptation and despair.

With every crisis in worldwide Christianity, Satan tries to convince us that God has abandoned us. Modern atheists try to prove that Christianity is evil and that it causes wars like the Thirty Years’ War.

In the end, our only comfort in the midst of this world’s troubles is Jesus. He is the one who defeated Satan so that

John’s Gospel especially uses the language of light to describe Jesus. Read John 1:4–5 and 8:12.

- How does darkness describe the world?
- How has the light overcome the darkness?

The hymn generally follows a pattern of prayer that goes like this: (1) address to God; (2) an attribute or quality of God; (3) a petition to God; (4) the expected result; and (5) conclusion.

- Describe how this hymn fits the form of prayer stated above.
- What are the various forms of “peace” that the last stanza describes? What sort of peace has already been achieved for us in Jesus? When will we finally know true and everlasting peace?

we can thumb our nose at him. Jesus is the one who conquered death so that we need not fear it.

Jesus is the one who took on our sins so that we would be assured of forgiveness.

- Why is it so disconcerting for us whenever a church leader falls to sexual temptation or covetousness?
- How do Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper help us to put on the armor of God? Can these Means of Grace help keep us from being easily disillusioned or cynical?
- How else does the Divine Service deliver to us the means to shield ourselves against the evil one?

## In Closing

In this life we cry, “How long, O LORD?” (Ps. 79:5); yet we rightly look to Jesus as the “God of our salvation” (Ps. 79:9); He is our sun and shield (Ps. 84:11). Our Lord saves us through the blood of Jesus Christ, who is our hope in every need, and our only source of peace in God. Because Jesus has defeated Satan, the gates of hell shall never prevail against Christ’s Church (Matt. 16:18). Jesus is the Lord of your life because you have been baptized into His death and resurrection, to be raised with Him and to live with Him in life everlasting.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 659.

## Prayer

Almighty and gracious Lord, pour out Your Holy Spirit on Your faithful people. Keep us steadfast in Your grace and truth, protect and deliver us in times of temptation, defend us against all enemies, and grant to Your Church Your saving peace; 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 Reformation Day).

# Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus

Lutheran Service Book 685 | study by Charles Gustafson

## Introduction

A walkathon is a walking marathon used by a community to raise funds for various organizations. Walkathons are unlike marathons or races in that they focus upon non-competitive and low-intensity involvement. Those involved in the walking and organization of the walkathon are not competing against each other, but are working collectively for the benefit of a given challenge. The people are truly walking with each other to accomplish something important, life-changing and meaningful.

The hymn of this day talks about a walk and yet something that is more than a walk: it is a “lifeathon” that begins as a walk. It is one that incorporates many members, the main one being the Lord Jesus Christ. He walks *with* us through all the stages of life.

- What does it mean to you that Jesus is walking with you?
- If you are walking with Jesus, what might the goal(s) be?
- Is the walking that you do with each other and with Jesus one that promises to be problem-free?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Walking with Jesus and being with Jesus may entail situations both bitter and joyful. How are such possibilities suggested in Matt. 10:38–39?

Matthew 10:34 does not speak the language of peace one often associates with being in the presence of Christ. It rather speaks of violence, a violence that will cause separation from family. How can it be that being with Jesus could possibly cause division within one’s home? Has your allegiance to Christ caused differences to erupt within your family or community? How did you feel when the

differences for the sake of faithfulness to Christ and His Gospel of life arose?

Paul states in Rom. 7:1–13, the Epistle lesson for this day, that the Law is binding on a person during his or her life. He suggests that in order for the Law to lose its power and attachment to an individual, the person must die and be united to another (vv. 4–6). How does being with Jesus nullify the power or ownership of the Law on us? Does the nullification of the Law’s power make you feel alive and new?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

This hymn by Sigismund von Birken (1626–1681) was first published in his “Sacred Grains of Incense or Hymns of Devotion” (Nuremberg, 1652). He was a pastor’s son who had studied theology but gave it up and found his place as a writer of poetry. As a child Birken experienced the trauma of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648), which included exile, severe illness and being orphaned by age sixteen.

- Has there ever been a time when you felt moved to write about something spiritual? What themes from the Bible might you consider? What themes from life might you connect to your relationship to God as He has revealed Himself to you in His Word?

This hymn was subtitled “Imitation of Christ.”

- Would you consider this a good subtitle for “Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus”?
- In what way is your life an imitation of Christ?

### Text

In *LSB* the hymn is placed under the heading “Sanctification.” It is placed there because the hymn speaks to the response of the baptized to the new life received through the grace of the Holy Spirit. The new life is a regenerated life born anew, as John’s Gospel reminds us, by water and the Spirit.

The Small Catechism states that baptizing with water “indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (*LSB*, p. 325).

- How does the text of the hymn reflect the nature of Baptism in our lives?
- What is it that causes us to suffer and die with Jesus? Our sorrow over sin (contrition)? Our desire to follow Jesus’ example? Both?
- How do the words, “faith and hope and love” (st. 1) play into our walking with Jesus?

The hymn has a number of biblical references and allusions. Stanza 1 draws from John 1:35–43, the call to follow Jesus. However, the last part of the stanza, a petition to Jesus, “Faithful Lord, with me abide,” recalls John 15:4–8. Verse 4 talks about Jesus the vine, and how we need to be a part of the vine.

- Do you believe that it would be possible to walk “Through a world that would deceive us / And to sin our spirits lure. Full of faith and hope and love,” if you were not part of the true vine?
- Jesus did the “Father’s bidding,” which culminated at the cross of Calvary. As a branch of the same vine, list some of the things you believe to be the bidding of your heavenly Father in today’s world.

Stanza 2 mentions suffering with Jesus and bearing the cross. This is an allusion to Matt. 16:24 and Luke 14:27.

- Why is it mandatory to take up one’s cross as a disciple of Jesus? Is suffering then a good thing? Is it an expected thing? If so, why?

## Making the Connection

This hymn is one that causes us to think about the cost of discipleship. There is nothing cheap about it. It is a life that one enters through the power and grace of God in Holy Baptism. It is sustained by the Lord Himself in His Supper for us.

- Does it help you to know that you are a member of the Body of Christ and a part of His kingdom so that you can

## In Closing

The meaning to the Second Article of the Creed ends with the words, “that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity” (*LSB*, p. 323). The disciple of Christ Jesus is one who walks, suffers, dies and lives with the Lord. This is not simply a new walk; it is a whole new life that commends itself to the will of Christ the Head.

- Sing stanza 1 of hymn 685, then speak stanzas 2 and 3, and close with the singing of stanza 4.

The Gospel of John reminds us that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. In this Gospel it is Thomas the doubter, who is first the voice calling the other disciples to die with Christ (John 11:16). Stanza 3 invites followers of Jesus to do the same.

- How would you have reacted to Thomas’s invitation to go and die with Jesus? Would you affirm his invitation?
- We have the hindsight of the resurrection, which affirms the truth of Jesus being the “life.” How does this truth confirm the belief that “He will free us from destruction, / Give to us immortal breath?”

Paul writes in Eph. 4:15 that “we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” In 1 Cor. 12:27 he reminds us that we are the Body of Christ, and goes on to affirm how God gives gifts to the members through the Holy Spirit.

- What assurance of life eternal is there if one is a member of the Body of Christ? Why?
- If Christ is eternal and we are a part of His Body now, is the phrase in stanza 4, “to life we may awaken,” a reference only to future things or to things present now?

say, “Onward in His footsteps treading, / Pilgrims here, our home above” (st. 1)? Does it help you to live through any suffering you may have to endure, or any sorrow you may encounter along life’s way?

- Does it empower you to know Christ crucified and raised from the dead so that you can sing, “Joy will follow all our sadness; / Where He is, there is no loss” (st. 2)?

## Prayer

Almighty God, Your Son willingly endured the agony and shame of the cross for our redemption. Grant us courage to take up our cross daily and follow Him wherever He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 17A).

# I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say

Lutheran Service Book 699 | study by Scott R. Schilbe

## Introduction

Time for rest is much desired. To relax, to repose is actually not as easy as it sounds. Work and family responsibilities constantly interrupt that Sunday afternoon nap or Thursday evening leisure time. Home projects, originally estimated to take a short time, result in even bigger projects taking away more precious time! Email and social media inundate us with messages, status updates, blogs and tweets, all begging to be read. There is always something to do! No rest allowed!

- What are some of your regular activities that prevent you from resting as much as you'd like?

- Have you considered ways of limiting those activities? If so, how?

If only our constant activity were the problem. Many people are unable to find rest due to fear and despair — fear and despair over a holy God who cannot tolerate sin. Soon, such people find themselves working to appease a holy God, trying to do whatever they can to earn God's approval and favor.

- Why can't such a person ever find rest?
- Who is the only one who can provide rest from attempts to earn God's approval and favor? How does He do this?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Jesus' comforting words of Matt. 11:28–30 teach us that He is the only true source of rest. Jesus tenderly invites us who are wearied by sin, death and our own sinful flesh to come to Him, to lay all our burdens upon Him and to receive the rest He gives.

- Jesus uses agricultural images to issue His invitation to rest. Consulting a study Bible like *The Lutheran Study*

*Bible* or a Bible dictionary, comment on "yoke." How can a "yoke" be thought of as a "burden"?

- What are some of the heavy yokes you feel in your life?
- What are some of the heavy yokes an unbeliever may face in his or her life?
- How is Jesus' yoke different from the world's yoke? Of what does His yoke consist?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

The hymn's writer, Rev. Horatius Bonar (1809–1889), served as a Presbyterian pastor in Kelso, Scotland. He wrote this hymn for children in 1846, while serving his congregation. During this time, Bonar experienced a period of unrest within the church. The unrest within the established church led him and others to form the Free Church of Scotland. A prolific hymn writer, Bonar later in life became a leader of this denomination he helped form. Throughout church changes in Scotland, he kept focused on the hope of eternal life with Jesus, a hope that Rev. Bonar aids us in confessing today.

### Text

"I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say" is selected as today's Hymn of the Day because of its connection (especially in st. 1) with Matt. 11:28–30. Bonar takes Jesus' invitation to come to Him for rest and expounds on it.

- When Jesus issues the invitation, is He referring to rest from vocational responsibilities or social media that

weary us? What type of rest — what more permanent rest — is Jesus offering?

- Is this "rest" temporary or eternal or both?

Notice that Bonar begins each stanza with Jesus' words of invitational promise. The hymn's third line, in each stanza, changes the speaker from Jesus to "I." The third and fourth lines give the response to Jesus' invitation.

- To whom could "I" refer?
- Could "I" refer to you?

Stanza 2 changes the invitation from "rest" to "drink."

- Read John 4:14; 7:37; Rev. 22:17; and Is. 55:1. How does Bonar use these verses in stanza 2?
- Based on your study of the John, Revelation and Isaiah passages cited above, to what or whom does "living water" refer?

Stanza 3 again changes the invitation from “drink” to “look.” Using one of Jesus’ “I am” statements, Bonar incorporates John 8:12 in stanza 3. Read John 8:12.

## Making the Connection

Each stanza highlights one invitation issued by Jesus. But all three invitations are similar, with the same aim.

- What can the words “weary,” “thirsty” and “dark” describe?
- What can the words “rest,” “water” and “light” describe?
- Who has this desired and needed “rest,” “water” and “light”?

## In Closing

By the Gospel proclamation, the Holy Spirit delivers rest; rest anchored on Jesus, rest for sin-terrified souls. God declares you to be without sin. You can rest. You live in the light of Jesus.

- Recalling that Jesus gives you rest in Word and Sacrament, why is regular church attendance important for a Christian?
- Do you have a friend or family member without a church home who presently is searching for rest, for peace with God? What can you say to him or her to witness of Jesus?

- Is this “light” temporary or eternal or both? Read Rev. 21:22–25.

We believe, teach and confess that the Holy Spirit gives us this “rest,” “water” and “light” as the Gospel is proclaimed (Absolution, sermon) and distributed (Baptism, the Lord’s Supper). In those places, Jesus promises to give us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation that He achieved for us on the cross. In giving us His gifts, He enlightens our weary and thirsty souls.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 699.

### Prayer

Gracious God, our heavenly Father, Your mercy attends us all our days. Be our strength and support amid the wearisome changes of this world, and at life’s end grant us Your promised rest and the full joys of Your salvation; 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 9A).



# Almighty God, Your Word Is Cast

**Lutheran Service Book 577** | study by Frank J. Pies

## Introduction

Anyone who has raised crops or grown produce is familiar with the process in all its details. The ground must be prepared and the seed planted, watered and cultivated. The goal of this activity is usually reached by the grace of God, a healthy harvest realized from the mature plant. At other times, however, the effort is less than successful.

- What do you think is most important in farming or gardening? Why?

- If you have farmed or worked in a garden, how did you react when you were successful? Or when things unfortunately failed?

In the Holy Gospel appointed for Proper 10A, Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23, Jesus draws upon the agricultural practices of first-century Palestine in telling the parable of the sower. This story is the basis for today's chief hymn.

## Exploring the Scriptures

The parable of the sower reveals important spiritual truths by describing ordinary events. Read the story in Matt. 13:1–9.

The opening sentence of the parable in verse 3 announces its theme. What is it? In Bible times, farmers broadcast the seed by hand, scattering it in all directions in the field and implanting it with a harrow.

- What are the four kinds of soil in the parable, verses 4–8? What are the results of sowing the seed on these soils?
- Through the sober exhortation at the end of the story, verse 9, what is Jesus inviting the listener to do beyond hearing with his physical ears?

Christ Himself blesses us with the proper explanation of the parable. Read Matt. 13:18–23.

- According to the Lord's interpretation recorded in Mark 4:14 and Luke 8:11, the seed is the Word of God. How is this comparison stated in Matt. 13:19?
- What kinds of hearers and what results are represented by the first three soils on which the seed was sown, verses 19–22? About what dangers does our Lord here warn us?
- What does the good soil with its planted seed represent? (v. 23) In light of God's promise in Is. 55:10–11, what does the Word's fruitfulness among this group of hearers say about its efficacy? How does this fact encourage and comfort all those who sow the seed of the Gospel — pastors, teachers, missionaries, all Christians?
- Wherein lies the divine power that makes the difference between the one who rejects God's Word and the one who receives it in faith? Read Rom. 1:16–17; 10:17; and 1 Peter 1:23–25.

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

John Cawood (1775–1852) wrote this hymn in about 1815. Born in England, Cawood hailed from a family of humble circumstances. His parents were farmers on a small scale, and the formal education he received during childhood was limited. As opportunities for study and advancement became available, he earned degrees from Oxford University, Oxford, England, was ordained as a priest in the Church of England and served in that communion in various capacities until his death.

- How might the life story of Cawood demonstrate God's calling of those who are “weak in the world,” who are not of “noble birth”? Read 1 Cor. 1:26. How might this Scripture apply to you?
- Why does God work in this way? Read 1 Cor. 1:27–31.

“Almighty God, Your Word Is Cast” was first published in 1819, with a direction to sing it “After a Sermon.”

- Why is that direction appropriate?

### Text

The theme of stanza 1 is essentially repeated in stanza 4, providing the hymn's frame, while stanzas 2 and 3, the inner stanzas, are closely parallel.

- To whom is this prayer in hymn form addressed in the beginning of stanza 1? Why is the adjective “Almighty” appropriate?
- The Bible defines the term “Word of God” in a number of ways: Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14); the Scriptures (2 Tim.

3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21); Christian preaching and teaching (1 Thess. 2:13). Which of these is meant in stanza 1?

- What is the “dew of heav’n” in stanza 1? Why is the descent of this dew on the implanted Word necessary for the fruits of faith and holy living to abound?

Stanzas 2 and 3 continue to beseech the Lord, seeking His protection against the enemies of the Word and calling upon Him to counter and overcome their attacks.

- Who is the “sly satanic foe” (st. 2) who seeks to remove the Word from one’s heart? Read Luke 8:12. How does he use careless and indifferent hearing to work this evil?
- What are some of the “world’s deceitful cares” (st. 3) that threaten the “rising plant” of faith? Read Matt. 6:25 and 1 Tim. 6:9–10.
- In these middle stanzas, we call upon almighty God to give root to His Word in our hearts and let it yield the fruits of love, peace and joy a hundredfold. Read 1 Cor. 2:10–14; Matt. 6:33; 1 Tim. 6:17; 1 Peter 2:2–3;

and 2 Peter 3:18. What light do these passages shed on this process?

Stanza 4 concludes the hymn on a confident note.

- When the “precious seed” of God’s Word is sown, what accompanying gift is requested toward what glorious end?

Against this background, discuss the following declaration from the Augsburg Confession:

“Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given [John 20:22]. He works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake. This happens not through our own merits, but for Christ’s sake” (AC V 2–3, p. 33)

- Does this mean that God wants some people not to believe? When saving faith is created and preserved in the heart, who is to receive the credit and glory?

## Making the Connection

Like seed, God’s Word has power within it. It is His Word. Through the Law it prepares our hearts to be receptive. Through the Gospel it sprouts and grows faith in Christ, by which we are saved and strengthened to live unto Him.

- When this seed is cast into our hearts, how are we, by God’s grace, to respond? Read Matt. 3:1–2; Acts 16:31; and Eph. 5:1–2.
- What ought to be our attitude when we have the opportunity to hear God’s Word? Read Ps. 122:1 and Acts 17:11.

## In Closing

At the end of discussing the Third Commandment in the Large Catechism, Dr. Luther writes:

“[Y]ou are daily in the devil’s kingdom [Colossians 1:13–14]. He ceases neither day nor night to sneak up on you and to kindle in your heart unbelief and wicked thoughts. ... [T]he Word is so effective that whenever it is seriously contemplated, heard, and used, it is bound never to be without fruit [Isaiah 55:11; Mark 4:20]. It always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devoutness and produces a pure heart and pure thoughts [Philippians 4:8]. For these words are not lazy or dead, but are creative, living words [Hebrews 4:12]” (LC I 100–1, p. 370).

- How do these words summarize the hymn and its wonderful theology of the planting of God’s Word?
- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 577.

### Prayer

Blessed Lord, since You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; 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 10A).



# In Holy Conversation

**Lutheran Service Book 772** | study by Paul Gregory Alms

## Introduction

I sometimes ask students in my confirmation class: Is it easier to ask your parents for some money for a movie when they look happy or mad? Are you more likely to talk to someone who likes you or someone who is angry with you?

Turn to page 323 of *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)* and read what Martin Luther writes in the Small Catechism about the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer comes from faith, faith in the true God. True faith gives us a picture of God and then affects how we pray.

The hymn "In Holy Conversation" teaches us to trust in our giving, loving heavenly Father and to come to Him confidently with all our prayers, supplications and needs.

- What are some "pictures of God" we might have that lead us not to pray or pray wrongly?
- What picture of God does Luther's explanation (cited above) paint for us?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Prayer is a central part of the Christian faith and a central part of our Christian life. Yet for many Christians it can seem to be a burden or a difficulty to pray regularly. But the Scriptures point us to prayer as a grateful and joyous response to God's goodness.

- Read Ps. 50:15. What command is given by God to us there?
- What promise is also made to us?
- What final response from us is expected?

We see in Ps. 50:15 several aspects of the biblical portrait of prayer. God commands it. Yet the command is to call out to God in trouble. This is not a burdensome command but a gracious invitation. Also, the Lord promises to hear and

take action. Finally, we will pray yet again in thanksgiving, glorifying God for His answers.

- Read Phil. 4:6. Here prayer is presented as the opposite of anxiety. Why do you think Paul says that prayer conquers anxiety? Have you ever experienced this yourself?
- Read Matt. 7:7–8. Here Jesus Himself gives a command and a promise concerning prayer. What is the command? What is the promise? Why does our Savior include command and promise? Would it have been enough just to command or just to promise?
- Read 1 John 5:14. Sometimes people try to say that if you ask God in the right way you will get anything you ask for. How does this verse correct that idea?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

This hymn text is a modern one written by LCMS hymn writer and pastor Gregory Wismar (b. 1946). Wismar is a talented hymn writer and translator, with two original hymn texts published in *Lutheran Service Book*, as well as stanza translations in five other hymns.

Wismar wrote that the background of this hymn is his sense of the blessing that prayer brings. While much communication these days can be hurried texting or impersonal emails, Wismar writes, in an online devotion for Concordia University Chicago, that prayer "is a most special conversation, a holy and sanctified speaking with God."<sup>1</sup> This hymn focuses our attention on prayer. Do you think we talk and pay attention to prayer enough in our church and Christian life?

- What other ways can we focus on and appreciate prayer more?

### Text

"We speak to God." This is the simple definition of prayer given in the first stanza of the hymn. The holy conversation of prayer is simple talking to God. In simple phrases this first stanza outlines how that speaking to God comes about. First God speaks to us. He invites. He invites us to prayer not simply by telling us to pray but by saving us in Christ, forgiving our sins, opening heaven to us sinners. All God's mighty works of redemption are an invitation to us to trust Him, bring Him our needs and praise Him.

- Try to imagine praying to God without knowledge of Christ's saving work. What kind of prayers might we

<sup>1</sup> "Proper 11A," Center for Church Music, last modified July 20, 2017, accessed June 27, 2018, [cuchicago.edu/globalassets/documents/center-for-church-music/devotions/hymn-of-the-day-devotion---proper-11\\_2.pdf](http://cuchicago.edu/globalassets/documents/center-for-church-music/devotions/hymn-of-the-day-devotion---proper-11_2.pdf)

pray? Would we pray? What attitude might we have towards God? Can you see how prayer really is rooted in Christ and His love for us?

This stanza goes on to describe our actual prayers in straightforward but meaningful ways. We speak, we share our thoughts, we come as children bringing needs. Our prayers need not be eloquent or learned. The Holy Spirit intercedes, and so we can speak as children to their Father with confidence and without fear.

- The Lord's Prayer invites us to pray to God as our Father. How does this affect our prayers?
- How does our being children before God (never grown-ups!) affect our prayers?

## Making the Connection

Prayer is sometimes the most talked about topic in Christian life and the least practiced. There are many reasons for this, but one may be that Christians feel unworthy or inadequate when they pray. This hymn brings the scriptural content concerning prayer to our lips so that we can hear that prayer is the speaking of children to a loving Father.

We are those children and God is our loving Father. We are heard by Him through Jesus. Jesus has come and made prayer possible and full of joy and comfort. Christ's

## In Closing

Christ's work on the cross gives us the true picture of our Father in heaven. He loves us and pardons us out of His own grace and mercy. That is the invitation to pray that God addresses to us. We pray to God who is overflowing in love and goodness to us. Let us pray then, "securely, / Expressing hopes and fears / With confidence that surely / Our Father ever hears" (st. 3).

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 772.

The second stanza continues this theme of praying with quiet confidence and childlike trust. We can bring supplications because our Father listens with care to every thought expressed. Not only that, He answers in ways He knows are best.

- What are some prayers God has answered for you?
- What are some He answered in ways you did not understand or wish for?

The basis for our confidence in prayer is brought forward in the last stanza, where we sing that we are heard through Jesus and from that, our joy and assurance spring. Jesus has cleared the way for us to pray by dying for our sin and rising and opening heaven for us. Because of this we can know and be sure that our Father hears every prayer we pray.

work of redemption for us and our Baptism into Him have made us into children of God. Our Father in heaven loves us dearly, and the cross of Christ is the eternal proof of that love. When we hear the Gospel, when our sins are forgiven, prayer becomes what this hymn presents it as: the joyful speaking of children to a father who loves them.

- Reflect on your own prayers and habits. What keeps you from praying? What parts of this hymn might address those things affecting your prayers?

## Prayer

Almighty God, You have promised to hear the petitions of those who ask in Your Son's name. Mercifully incline Your ears to us who have now made our prayers and supplications to You, and grant that those things that we have faithfully asked according to Your will we may receive to meet our need and bring glory to You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen (Answer to prayer, *LSB*, p. 313).

# From God Can Nothing Move Me

**Lutheran Service Book 713** | study by John G. Fleischmann

## Introduction

Worries. Cares. Fears. Life is full of them! Sometimes they distract us. Sometimes they may even paralyze us. Ever since sin came into the world they have been a part of every human life.

Our Lord Jesus made it very clear that we should not worry about anything (Matt. 6:31–34).

In this wonderful hymn from the pen of Ludwig Helmbold (1532–1598), a lecturer at the University of Erfurt, in Erfurt, Germany, we are shown what it means to

trust the Lord and His promises especially when our worries and uncertain future take our eyes off the cross.

- Name some of your fears. What keeps you awake at night?
- How do these things distract you from trusting God's promises in Christ Jesus?
- Have the things about which you worry ever come to pass?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Read Psalm 73 the basis for this hymn.

- In this psalm, what does the Lord tell us will happen to all evil?
- What promise of hope is given?

This hymn is also based on the well-known and often-cited passage from Rom. 8:38–39. Read this section of Scripture.

- What are the things Paul mentions that cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus?
- Are any of your worries left off of this list?

God's chosen, Israel, often wandered from the Lord. Because they did not obey God, God dealt severely with them. Yet, even in their exile, God gave them tremendous hope. Read the Old Testament lesson for Proper 25B, Jer. 31:7–9.

- What restoration does God promise?
- How have you wandered and disobeyed God?
- How has the Lord restored you?
- How do we walk in His ways?

Read the Gospel for Proper 25B, Mark 10:46–52. The account speaks of Bartimaeus, a “blind beggar.”

- What may have been some of Bartimaeus' worries?
- Who made his worries vanish?
- Martin Luther once said, “We are all beggars. We are saved by one who became a beggar.” Who is it that makes our worries vanish? How?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

This hymn was written during the plague that struck Erfurt in 1563. Ludwig Helmbold wrote this hymn for the rector of the university and his wife, Pancratius and Regina Helbich. They fled the city to escape the deadly spreading disease. It was intended by Helmbold to give them strength on their journey.

- Name times when your future was uncertain.
- Have you ever had to leave your friends and start a new life elsewhere?
- How did God's Word help you at those times?

### Text

The stanzas of this hymn unfold the wonderful assurance of God's abiding presence in our lives at all times. Stanza 1 begins with the surety that God will never leave us. It then speaks of what God does in our lives.

- What does it mean that He “gently will reprove me”? See Heb. 12:6, 10.
- “He stretches out His hand” is a powerful biblical image. What are some biblical examples of this? What does God do each time this happens?

Stanza 2 speaks about losing those in life who were regarded as “trustworthy and sure.” This can mean those whom

we love that are left behind when life takes a different course. It can also refer to those who betray us.

- In either case, what is true about God?
- What are the “chains that bind me”?
- How does one receive “peace ... within”?

Stanza 3 speaks of the providence of God. We don’t plan our lives — He does.

- Why is understanding this truth so important?
- How does God change “All sorrow into joy”?
- How does God’s love “still” us?

Stanza 4 assures us that God’s will is done each day in our lives.

- Read the Third Petition of the Lord’s Prayer and its meaning in the Small Catechism (*LSB*, p. 324). What is God’s will?
- What is the most important gift the Father gives us according to stanza 4?

## Making the Connection

We don’t know what happened to Dr. Helbich and his wife after they fled Erfurt. Their departure was a painful experience for them and those whom they left behind.

Likewise, we don’t know what life has in store for us this side of heaven. Without Christ the journey of life is dangerous and uncertain.

But we have been baptized into Christ! God’s promises stand. Nothing can separate us from His love.

As the biblical truths captured in this hymn brought the rector and his wife hope and encouragement, they speak the same to us.

## In Closing

So, what about those worries you shared at the beginning of this study? What assurance has God given you in the words of this hymn?

Worry and fear are sins. Jesus slew them on the cross.

As we sing this hymn laden with the declarations of God’s grace and presence, we are moved to trust Him above all things, even our worries and fears.

It is through this life of uncertainty that “He leads us home to heaven. / O praise the Three in One” (st. 7). Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 713. Let the words speak to you.

- What is meant by “The bread of earth and heaven”?

Stanza 5 speaks about our worship of God — our response to His grace, love and mercy.

- What is meant by the word “vocation”?
- How is our worship eternal?

Stanza 6 speaks of suffering and assures us that our deliverance is in Jesus.

- What is meant by “That day of bliss divine”?
- How do we look forward to that day?

Stanza 7 is a doxological stanza, that is, it gives glory to the Holy Trinity. It also sums up the hymn.

- What did the Father will?
- How did His Son fulfill this will?
- What does the Spirit give?
- What is our hope?

- “The Lord my life arranges; / Who can His work destroy?” (st. 3). How, with the power of the Holy Spirit, can we reframe our thinking so that we understand this truth, causing worry to cease?

- “The bread of earth and heaven / Are by His kindness given” (st. 4). Why is the Eucharist so vitally important in our lives?

- “Praise God with acclamation / And in His gifts rejoice” (st. 5). What are the gifts of God that cause you to rejoice?

## Prayer

O God, the helper of all who call on You, have mercy on us and give us eyes of faith to see Your Son that we may follow Him on the way that leads to eternal life; through the same 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 25B).

# O Living Bread from Heaven

Lutheran Service Book 642 | study by Jon D. Vieker

## Introduction

To introduce his sermon one Thanksgiving Day, a pastor held in his hands a loaf of bread and asked the question, “Where did this loaf of bread come from?” Eventually someone answered, “The grocery store.” “Yes,” he replied. “And where did the grocery store get it from?” “From the company that baked the bread,” someone else replied. And so the conversation went, from the baker, to the miller, to the farmer, to the seed, to the soil, to the weather. Finally the pastor asked, “And where did the rain and the soil come

from? Everyone knew the answer: from the Lord of heaven and earth.

Today’s hymn is addressed to Jesus Christ, the “Living Bread from heaven,” who comes in His Holy Supper to feed and comfort us with His body and blood.

- What do you think it means that Jesus is described as “Living Bread” in relation to the Lord’s Supper? Why is the word “living” important?
- What kinds of blessings do we receive from this “Living Bread”?

## Exploring the Scriptures

The readings for today provide a wonderful context in which to view the hymn. Read Is. 55:1–3.

- In verse 1, what type of food is being served? How much does it cost?
- In verses 2b–3, which of the five senses (surprisingly!) is connected with this eating? What does Rom. 10:17 reveal about the use of this sense?

In today’s Holy Gospel (Matt. 14:13–21), Jesus multiplies the five loaves to feed the crowd. The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle of Jesus that appears in all four Gospel accounts.

- In verse 19, Jesus “looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples.” What does this remind you of in the liturgy? Why?
- According to verse 20, what was the result of their eating this meal?

Following John’s account of this miracle (John 6:1–15), the story continues throughout the remainder of chapter 6. Read John 6:32–35.

- Who is this “bread of God ... who comes down from heaven” (v. 33)? What will this bread do for the world?
- What does Jesus promise in verse 35?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Johann Rist (1607–1667) was a famous poet and Lutheran pastor who wrote the words to “O Living Bread from Heaven” and nearly 680 other hymns during his lifetime.

Like his contemporary, Paul Gerhardt, Rist lived through the horrors of the Thirty Years’ War (1618–1648) as it raged across much of Europe. In Germany alone, the population was reduced by about 30 percent as a result of the destruction of twenty thousand villages and towns and the resulting widespread famine and disease.

The little village of Wedel, near Hamburg, Germany where Rist served as pastor his entire ministry, was no exception. It was sacked in 1643, and the musical instruments and organ in the parish church were destroyed along with much of the rest of the town.

- Imagine if some sort of disaster (tornado, earthquake, fire, etc.) were to destroy your church buildings and the homes surrounding them. Discuss what some of the challenges ahead might be for your congregation. How might these challenges affect morale?

Despite these hardships, Rist appears to have lived a contented life. He was one of the most prolific German hymn writers of his day, and made significant contributions to the poetic style in which hymn texts were written then. Yet few of his hymns have made it into English. Catherine Winkworth (1827–1878) first translated this hymn into English in 1858.

- Considering the tragedies of the Thirty Years’ War, how does Rist’s “living Bread from heaven” give the singer hope, encouragement and contentment?

- Where are such things found, according to the hymn? Why there?
- Make a list of what you consider to be some of the qualities of Rist's hymn that have enabled it to speak to Christians for nearly four centuries.

### Text

This hymn text is written with language emphasizing the perspective of the individual ("You gave me all I wanted" (st. 3); "Lord, grant me then, thus strengthened" (st. 4)). Many hymns are written in this way, but many others are written from a corporate perspective ("O God, Our Help in Ages Past" (*LSB* 733); "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" (*LSB* 656)).

- Do you consider the individual perspective of this hymn to be a strength or a weakness? Why?
- If the pronouns in this hymn were changed to "we," "our" and "us," would it make a difference? Why or why not?

This hymn has many additional biblical references and allusions. Stanza 1 draws from Exodus, when the Lord fed His people in the wilderness with manna from heaven. Read Ex. 16:2–7.

- In verses 2–3, what was the occasion for the Lord raining down bread from heaven on His people?
- In verse 6, what reason did the Lord give for His raining down bread from heaven on His people? What does this say about the Lord?

## Making the Connection

This hymn draws us to consider the many blessings given us in the Lord's Supper. How might the following lines speak to the blessings of the Lord's Supper in your life today?

- "The gifts that You have given / Have filled my heart with rest" (st. 1). What kind of "rest" or relief have you experienced as a result of receiving the Lord's Supper?

## In Closing

In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (*LSB*, p. 323). The Son of God, the Living Bread, came down from His Father in heaven to give His life for the life of the world, and in the Supper today, the living Christ gives us His body and blood to forgive us our sins and to give us life and salvation. "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation" (*LSB*, p. 327).

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 642.

Stanza 2 describes the Lord's leading of His hungry people to the Lord's table ("this most holy place.") Read aloud together these words: "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" (Is. 55:2).

- List some ways that we spend our money and time! on things which do not satisfy. Which of the Ten Commandments is this related to ultimately?
- Now compare Isaiah's words with the second half of stanza 2. What is the good news proclaimed in this stanza?

What does stanza 2 suggest really matters in life? Luther writes in the Large Catechism:

"... Therefore, Christ asks me to eat and drink, so that this treasure [the Lord's Supper] may be my own and may benefit me as a sure pledge and token. In fact, it is the very same treasure that is appointed for me against my sins, death, and every disaster.

On this account it is indeed called a food of souls, which nourishes and strengthens the new man" (LC V 22–23, 434).

- In stanza 3, what is this "food of souls" described as having the ability to do? How does the Lord's Supper do this?
- What are the eternal results, according to stanza 4?

- "Oh, cup that heals our woes!" (st. 1). What sort of healing have you experienced as a result of receiving the Lord's Supper?
- "This food can death destroy" (st. 3). How will eating and drinking the Lord's Supper destroy death for you?

### Prayer

Heavenly Father, though we do not deserve Your goodness, still You provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may acknowledge Your gifts, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; 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 13A).



# Eternal Father, Strong to Save

**Lutheran Service Book 717** | study by Gregory Just Wismar

## Introduction

What hymns would you like to have sung at your funeral? Some people very carefully choose what hymns they would like to incorporate into that service; other people do not make any selection in that regard. “Eternal Father, Strong to Save” has become associated with the funerals of some great figures in American history, including presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. Known as the “Navy hymn” in the United States, the original text and tune are both creations of gifted Englishmen. The two “middle stanzas” in the version used in *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)* were written at a later time by an American clergyman. The hymn is an expression of confidence in the

ability of God to grant His protection to all travelers. The words remind us of our dependence on the grace of God not only for the success of our earthly journeys, but also for the completion of our final journey from earth to heaven.

- Have you given any thought to what hymns you might like to have sung at your funeral? What factors have helped you to make your choices?
- For many people, this hymn brings to mind experiences they have had “on the waters” of some sort. Can you recall a time when your experience on a lake, river or the ocean has reminded you of God’s creating powers?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Although the Old Testament people of God for the most part avoided large bodies of water, there were “storm stories” that became part of their shared experience and part of their worship life. Read Ps.107:23–32.

- What was the result for those who called out to the Lord? What was the psalmist’s suggested response for the deliverance received?

The Bible begins with the event of creation that centers on the primeval ocean. Read Gen. 1:1–2.

- Where was the Spirit of God hovering at the time that creation was begun?
- How are we reminded by the creation narrative of the central role of water on our planet?

One of the most stirring Gospel narratives is the account of Jesus stilling the storm on the Sea of Galilee. Read Matt. 8:23–27.

- What physical description of the storm by the Gospel writer makes the experience of the disciples in the boat come alive for the reader?
- How is the divine nature of Jesus displayed in this account? Where might we see His human nature in these verses?

The Gospels also share the account of Jesus meeting the disciples on the Sea of Galilee. Read Matt. 14:22–33.

- Matthew describes Peter’s attempt to walk on the water. How does Jesus show His lordship here?
- How does Matthew “put us in the boat” in his telling of the events of that evening on the water of the Sea of Galilee?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

“Eternal Father, Strong to Save” was originally written by William Whiting (1825–1878), an English schoolmaster, for a student of his who was sailing across the Atlantic to America. In the middle of the nineteenth century, transoceanic travel was still considered to be very perilous. Whiting wanted his student to be encouraged by the poem that he wrote as a farewell gift.

- How do the words of the original hymn (stanzas 2 and 3 of that poem are listed on the page following *LSB* 717) give a sense of encouragement to a traveler?

### Text

The creation account relating to the waters in Genesis 1 is expressed in a different way in the book of Job. Read Gen. 1:6–10 and Job 38:8–11.

- In what way does each of these accounts speak to the power of God over the water?
- How does the first stanza of the hymn reflect that it is God who sets the limits for everything in creation?

- How does Whiting include all three persons of the Holy Trinity in the four stanzas of the hymn?
- What words chosen by Whiting show the strength of the seas through which ocean travelers sail?

- How does the choice of words increase the sense of awe that is felt when God's power in nature is displayed?

## Making the Connection

The hymn “Eternal Father, Strong to Save” is centered on the theme of God’s providential care. Read Psalm 93.

- How could remembering the words of the psalmist help us when we become apprehensive about taking a journey?
- How might the thoughts of the hymn be shared with others who have travel fears?

*LSB* 717 has been chosen as the Hymn of the Day for Proper 14A, the Sunday when Job 38:4–18 is the Old Testament

Lesson and Matt. 14:22–33 is the appointed Gospel. Read both lessons.

- What does the hymn writer express in stanza 4 as the best response to the God whose power is seen in the deliverance of His people?
- What might be fitting expressions of “glad praise from air and land and sea”?

## In Closing

“Eternal Father, Strong to Save” is a hymn of trust that is appropriate for times of personal travel and for times when others are traveling as well. Its use as a hymn for funerals is understandable, in that our final traveling to God’s eternal presence — that place where “the sea was no more” (Rev. 21:1) — is the greatest of journeys.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 717, first in the way it was originally written, and then with the two replacement stanzas. How do both versions impart a sense of confidence for a Christian traveler — for whatever journey lies ahead?

## Prayer

Lord God our Father, You kept Abraham and Sarah in safety throughout the days of their pilgrimage, You led the children of Israel through the midst of the sea, and by a star You led the Wise Men to the infant Jesus. Protect and guide us now in this time as we set out to travel. Make our ways safe and our homecomings joyful, and bring us at last to our heavenly home, where You dwell in glory with Your Son and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Before Travel, *LSB*, p. 287).



# In Christ There Is No East or West

**Lutheran Service Book 653** | study by Paul J. Cain

## Introduction

In school we learned about Western civilization and the search for spices from the Far East. American history tells us of a great war between the states of the North and the South.

## Exploring the Scriptures

Read Gal. 3:23–29.

- How are all people the same, in need of God's grace in Christ? Does this spiritual similarity do away with all other distinctions between male and female? Why not?
- What was the guardian of verse 25?
- How are we heirs of Abraham?

Read Col. 3:11–17.

- What is the unifying factor for all Christians of various backgrounds?
- How are we kept together as a Church?
- What qualities are our Christian "garments" as we bear with one another?

Read John 10:16 and 17:11–21.

- Based on our understanding of the Old Testament, what does Jesus mean by "other sheep"?
- In chapter 17, how is the Christian unity of verse 21 meaningless apart from verse 17?
- How is Christian unity created and maintained?

The Old Testament Reading for Proper 15A is Is. 56:1, 6–8.

- Considering the title of the hymn, how are such compass terms irrelevant to Christianity?
- How have things like distance, language barriers and racism hindered Christian evangelism? How do they still hinder it?

- Who are the foreigners? What is required of them? How is this an Old Testament picture of the New Testament Church?

Read Psalm 67, intended to help us reflect on the Old Testament Reading and prepare for the Epistle.

- How are "peoples" and "nations" synonyms? What does this tell you about the Lord's plan of salvation?
- Compare the psalm to John 3:16. How does God show that He loves the whole world?

Read today's Epistle, Rom. 11:1–2a, 13–15, 28–32 or the whole of chapter 11 if there is time.

- Are all who are genetically descended from Israel/Jacob part of Israel spiritually?
- According to this text and other Scripture, is there one covenant, or are there two covenants? Who is the one Savior of all people, both Jew and Gentile? What is required, pedigree or faith in Christ?

Read Matt. 15:21–28, the appointed Holy Gospel for the day.

- Was Jesus really ignoring this woman? Why does He appear to ignore her? How does He test her faith?
- How was she different from the disciples? Why is His ultimate care for her so encouraging for Gentile Christians? See Matt. 28:18–20.

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

First presented at a 1908 exhibition of the London Missionary Society, the hymn "In Christ There Is No East or West" was intended to encourage missions and evangelism. First published in 1913, it was written by John Oxenham, the pen name of William Arthur Dunkerley (1852–1941).

The 1908/1913 hymn had four stanzas. The original first stanza appears in *LSB* with only minor changes in

capitalization. The original second stanza read: "In Him shall true hearts everywhere / Their high communion find. / His service is the golden cord / Close-binding all mankind."

In *LSB* 653:4, "disciples of the faith" replaces "Brothers of the Faith" and "child" replaces "son," as compared to the original version of stanza 3. Similarly, "Christly souls" of the original stanza 4 is now "Christian souls."

Inspired by the first line of the Dunkerley/Oxenham hymn, Michael Perry (1942–96) wrote a five-stanza hymn around 1979 with the same name and the same Common Meter (CM) rhyme. It was first in *Hymns for Today's Church*. That new hymn's fourth stanza appears as *LSB* 653:3. Stanza 2 in *LSB* was written for the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod hymnal, *Christian Worship*, by Mark A. Jeske (b. 1952).

- What are the benefits and challenges of three authors on one hymn?
- Do text “updates” clarify, “water down” or both? Could a modern editor use different words in our day to better communicate the original author’s original intent?

### Text

Read the promises of God concerning the removal of our transgressions in Ps. 103:12, the Abrahamic Covenant language of Gen. 28:14 and the promises of the kingdom of God/kingdom of heaven found in Matt. 8:11, Luke 13:29 and Rev. 21:13.

- Explain how these verses give a brief overview of salvation history.

The Holy Spirit creates one great fellowship of love in Jesus Christ, our Lord. The love of Christ reaches all “four corners” of the earth in the proclamation of the Good News. Our fellowship with one another is found only in Him. Stanza 1 provides a bookend with Stanza 5, with a common final phrase for both stanzas.

- What is the difference between visible churches/congregations and the one holy Christian and apostolic Church? How is believing in the latter truly an act of faith?

## Making the Connection

We have brothers and sisters in Christ among the many languages, skin colors and peoples of the world.

- How could your congregation welcome minorities or other new Americans to Sunday school, VBS, Bible studies or church services?

## In Closing

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 653.

### Prayer

Almighty and everlasting Father, You give Your children many blessings even though we are undeserving. In every trial and temptation grant us steadfast confidence in Your loving-kindness and mercy; 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 15A).

- Why is having one Church “throughout the whole wide earth” important?

While the Lord did bless Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, a specific “tribe,” stanza 2 explains the purpose behind the ancient blessing and promises: “He loves us as His children through / Our faith in His dear Son.” Christ is the promised seed of Abraham through whom all the children of earth are blessed by faith in Him.

- How are people groups (tribes, language groups, ethnicities, clans, etc.) beneficial to spreading the Gospel? How could they be detrimental?

Praise naturally follows the reception of the gifts of God. In stanza 3, we join hands and sing praise to God for the death of Christ which sets us free “From sin, division, hate, and shame, / From spite and enmity!”

- Compare and contrast praise and enmity.

Stanza 4 is a call to unity for all disciples regardless of race or color. Not all who merely say, “Lord,” but those who do the work of the Father are our true “kin.”

Christians find unity in Christ: His Word, His mind, His forgiveness. Nothing truly matters but faith in Christ. Stanza 5 provides the best short summary of this hymn’s message and comfort in the final two phrases, “All Christian souls are one in Him [Christ] / Throughout the whole wide earth.”

- What reinforces fear and distrust of people who are different from us? Are such things positive or negative? Are they Christian qualities? Why not?
- How can Christianity bridge apparent or real racial divides and bring healing and reconciliation?

- Turn to page 1022 in the back of *Lutheran Service Book*. How could these foreign language hymns in both German and Spanish help?

# When in the Hour of Deepest Need

**Lutheran Service Book 615** | study by Larry A. Peters

## Introduction

A wise pastor once advised a young man just beginning in the ministry: “Preach to pain and need, and you will never have a shortage of hearers.” Pain, need, want and fear are the common companions of daily life. Where do we turn for aid? In our moments of greatest need, faith finds its greatest urgency.

God has always invited us to “call upon [Him] in the day of trouble” (Ps. 50:15) and promised to be our “very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). The hymns that remind us of God’s presence with us in time of need and that His grace is sufficient for that need are among the most treasured of all the Church’s songs.

## Exploring the Scriptures

This hymn was penned by Paul Eber (1511–69), but it flowed from a Latin hymn written by his teacher, Joachim Camerarius (1500–74). Both hymns are based upon the great prayer of King Jehoshaphat. Read this prayer in 2 Chron. 20:6–12.

- What does verse 6 tell us about God? What does it mean that He is the God whom “none is able to withstand”? How does that address us in our need?
- In verse 9, we hear the king say of God, “You will hear and save.” Are these just brave words in the face of trouble, or is this faith speaking?
- At the end of verse 12, we read: “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.” Are these words a reflection of your own faith? Why or why not?

This hymn is appointed for Proper 5A, Proper 15C and Lent 2. On each of these Sundays, the lessons describe

Today’s hymn confronts the questions, fears and wounds of this life directly. Its title directs us to where we can turn “when in the hour of deepest need.”

- What are some of the greatest needs that you have faced in life?
- What does it say about the God who delights in standing with His people in their weakness and anguish?
- Can we Christians expect to be freed from every ill (st. 5)? When does this full deliverance come to us? Does God require anything of us before delivering us from our fears, troubles and needs?

Jesus healing or raising the dead. Read Matt. 15:21–28 and Luke 7:11–17.

- How does illness or death challenge our faith?
- In both instances, the Lord showed “compassion” to those wounded by death and disease. Can we still be confident of His compassion in the same situations today? How do we know this?

Read Psalm 30.

- Verse 7 says, “You hid your face; I was dismayed.” Does it seem that sometimes God does hide His face from us in our need? Why or why not?
- In verse 5, we are told, “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” How have you experienced this truth in your own life?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Paul Eber was among the most gifted of the Wittenberg poets and hymn writers. He suffered childhood illness, was handicapped after being thrown from a horse, buried all but two of his 14 children, and endured blistering theological attacks.

Though we know little of the circumstances surrounding the composition of this hymn, one of its first known uses was in a service that was a call to prayer issued by Johannes Bugenhagen on Ascension Day 1547, after Emperor Charles V demanded that the city of Wittenberg lay down its arms.

- How might this hymn have been a personal response to all the troubles and trials of life endured by its author?
- How might this hymn have contributed to the calm and support of a people caught in fear at the military threat of their emperor?

### Text

Read the stanzas of this hymn again. Compare them to the prayer recorded in 2 Chron. 20:6–12. See how the hymn stanzas connect to the verses from Scripture.

- What passages come to mind that share this same theme and perspective? Read Rom. 8:31–39.

Look at where the hymn writer locates the source of our comfort.

- Is the throne referenced in stanza 2 the throne of the cross or the throne of God in heaven? Or is it both?

Stanza 3 directs us to the promises of God and to Him whose name alone is great. We call Jesus the Word of God and the fulfiller of His promises. We also call Jesus the one name under heaven and on earth by which anyone will be saved (Acts 4:12).

- Is this reference to Jesus implicit or explicit? Does the Christian always see God through the lens of Jesus Christ? Why or why not?

What do we have to offer the Lord? With this question, the hymn frames our definition of “need.”

- What do we have to offer God besides our fears and woes? When we lay them down before the Lord, it is an exercise of faith — not only that God will not be turned away by them, but that He will answer them with mercy.
- Is sin just one of our woes and fears, or is it the cause of them all?

## Making the Connection

Our lives are very different from Jehoshaphat or Paul Eber, yet our lives are still touched by adversity and need. Even with all our choices, all our technology and all our advancements, we so often find ourselves not knowing “where to look for aid” (st. 1).

- What are the biggest things that cause you fear, misery or anxiety today?

## In Closing

“Preach to pain and need, and you will never have a shortage of hearers.” This is no less true today than it was 500 years ago when this hymn was written, or even earlier when Jehoshaphat prayed these words. The challenge to faith continues to be the questions of whether our sufferings matter to God and if He can and will deliver us. The lens through which we see our sufferings is always the cross — where Jesus suffered on our behalf. Just as God’s good will and purpose were not confounded by His suffering but hidden there, so faith finds opportunity in our greatest needs. In the hand of God, these become the fruitful moments when we grow in that grace which is sufficient for our every need.

It is a common image to describe sin as a sickness or illness both in Scripture and in hymnody.

- How might we describe sin as an illness or sickness?
- How did we acquire it? Is it treatable or fatal?

Take a look at the psalms to see how often the author begins with a description of great need but then turns to thanksgiving to God for His merciful deliverance by the end of the psalm. See how this is mirrored in this hymn by the content and tone of the sixth stanza.

- Is the closing thought of thanksgiving because the author has already witnessed God’s intervention and seen evidence of His deliverance? Or is it because he has such confidence that the Lord will deliver him that he does not need to see the outcome to know it will happen?
- Do you need to see the outcome of God’s action at work in your life before you offer Him praise, or are you confident enough of His mercy that you trust Him to make “all things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28)?
- In the Small Catechism, Luther tells us that for all that God has done, it is our duty to “thank and praise, serve and obey Him” (*LSB*, p. 322). How is obedience and praise a fitting response to God’s grace and mercy in our lives? Are obedience and praise the prerequisites of God’s intervention, or are they our response to His gracious presence and deliverance?

- How is our Savior the advocate we can turn to in time of need? See 1 John 5:3–4.
- The hymn writer says, “Cast down, we stand.” How is this possible? See Rom. 5:1–5.
- Is there a connection between our sufferings and the sufferings of Christ? See 2 Cor. 5:5.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 615.

### Prayer

O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; 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 the Second Sunday in Lent).

# Built on the Rock

**Lutheran Service Book 645** | study by Robert A. Sorensen

## Introduction

For over a hundred years the logo of Prudential Insurance Company of America has been a picture of a rock, the Rock of Gibraltar. The company chose this logo because the rock image conveys the strength and security that the company offers to its customers.

In the Bible, the word “rock” also conveys strength and security.

- Read Ps. 18:2; 31:3; and 95:1. To whom does the rock refer?
- Why do you think the psalmists use this image?
- Read Matt. 7:24–27. On what does the wise man build his house? What does this foundation symbolize?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Matthew 16:13–20 is the account of Peter’s confession. He confessed Jesus to be “the Christ.” Rather than Jesus’ last name, “the Christ” is a title referring to Jesus as Messiah, the Lord’s anointed servant. Note that Jesus asks all the apostles, “But who do you say that I am,” since “you” in Greek is plural (v. 15). Because Jesus asked the question of all the apostles, Peter responds with God-given words confessed on behalf of the disciples. Jesus is pleased with this confession. He says, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church ...” (v. 18).

In this response, “rock” refers to the strong confession of Peter and the apostles.

- Read Eph. 2:20. How is the apostles’ confession foundational for the Holy Christian Church (and our congregation)?
- Also in Eph. 2:20, who is the “cornerstone,” the object of such confession?

When we sing “Built on the Rock,” we sing that the Holy Christian Church is built upon Peter, all the apostles and prophets. The Church, however, isn’t built upon them as individuals. The Church is built upon them on account of their strong and secure confession of Jesus Christ.

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Danish Lutheran pastor Nikolai Grundtvig (1783–1872) wrote this hymn text that first appeared in 1837. Besides serving as pastor, Grundtvig developed an interest in strengthening educational standards among citizens. This interest resulted in establishing a system of public schools throughout Scandinavia.

In this hymn text, Grundtvig’s interest in teaching shines, as he teaches about the doctrine of the Holy Christian Church. Therefore, he puts this doctrine on our lips, so that we not only learn it but also proclaim it to others.

### Text

Stanza 1 echoes Jesus’ words to Peter in Matt. 16:18. In the stanza, as in the text, “rock” refers to Peter’s (and the apostles’) confession, a confession anchored on Jesus. We can define “rock” as their confession. But because their confession points to Jesus, ultimately the Rock is Jesus, our strong and secure Savior.

- Think about Christianity in twenty-first century America. How can falling steeples and crumbling spires

symbolize the challenges the Christian Church faces in our land?

- What hope do the “bells” give us?

We recall God’s presence with His Old Testament people when singing stanza 2.

- Read Ex. 25:8 and 1 Kings 8:27–30. In the Old Testament, how did God dwell with His people in love?
- Read John 1:14. In the fullness of time, how did God choose to dwell with His New Testament people?
- Through Word and Sacraments, who does God make His dwelling place today (1 Cor. 3:11–16)?

Stanza 4 causes us to reflect upon important church furnishings. Even church furniture teaches us the faith!

- What do the baptismal font, altar and lectern/pulpit confess?
- Why is it good to have a constant reminder of these furnishings’ purpose?

## Making the Connection

The Christian Church lives with the confidence that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8, alluded to in st. 4). In this assurance the Church, built upon the rock of the apostles' and prophets' confession, continues to faithfully confess the person and work of Jesus. Acknowledging the crumbling spires and falling steeples, this hymn reminds us that although life for the Church and her members is challenging, we have God's promise.

- Stanza 3 reminds us of our status in Christ. Based on Titus 3:4–7 and the middle of the stanza, what is our status?
- How does this new status give us hope (see Rom. 8:31–38)?
- Also in stanza 3, Grundtvig echoes 1 Peter 2:5, calling us “God’s house of living stones.” Consider this designation. How does living as God’s “living stones” adjust the way you live your life?

## In Closing

In the strong and secure Rock, Jesus, we continue to confess as Peter, the apostles and the prophets confessed. We, as individual members, and together as the Christian Church, take comfort that Jesus is truly present when “the church bells are ringing” (st. 5). Jesus is present to forgive and to give faith and salvation.

- Sing or pray together stanza 5 of *LSB* 645. Reflect on how Jesus comes in the Divine Service, bringing His Gospel to sinners. No wonder we, with the psalmist, call our triune God “a rock,” for He is strong and secure to save!

### Prayer

Almighty God, whom to know is everlasting life, grant us to know Your Son, Jesus, to be the way, the truth, and the life that we may boldly confess Him to be the Christ and steadfastly walk in the way that leads to life eternal; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 16A).



# Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus

**Lutheran Service Book 531** | study by Marion Lars Hendrickson

## Introduction

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “We pray these Psalms when we regard all that God does once for his people as done for us ... and when we finally see the entire history of God with his people fulfilled in Jesus Christ” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Books, 1974], 35).

- What do you think Bonhoeffer means when he writes that we see “the entire history of God with his people fulfilled in Jesus Christ”?
- Based on Bonhoeffer’s words here, how may we see the history of God with us revealed in Jesus Christ?
- What are some possible benefits for our faith of rehearsing or repeating God’s deeds of old?

## Exploring the Scriptures

In *Lutheran Service Book* (LSB) this hymn has been designated as the hymn of the day for Proper 17A in the Sundays after Pentecost.

- Read Jer. 15:15–21. In verse 18 the prophet laments his lot in life. Why does he say that his lot is unfair? What is his fear concerning God?
- Read Rom. 12:9–21. St. Paul spells out a long list of exhortations. Is his list easy? Difficult? Why?
- If a person were in a state of despair and shame, could he or she hear St. Paul’s words and carry them out? Why or why not?

- Who is able to fulfill these verses perfectly? How does His perfect obedience become our obedience?
- Read Matt. 16:21–28. Peter does not accept the path of humiliation that Jesus announces for Himself: “This shall never happen to you!” (v.22). What might be in Peter’s mind to say such a thing? How can Peter’s thoughts be, in fact, the very thing that Satan would prefer?
- Jesus outlines the things of God in verses 24–25. In your own words, what is Jesus saying? Crucifixion and resurrection are inseparable, neither the one without the other. What comfort, what fellowship do these words give to all who take up their cross and follow Jesus?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

This is a hymn born in 1757 as a two-stanza poem once attributed to the Englishman, John Bakewell (1721–1819), but now credited to an anonymous author, then cut into pieces and expanded to four stanzas by another writer for a 1760 hymn collection by the Englishman Martin Madan (1726–1790). It was further expanded in 1776 by yet another hand, Augustus Toplady (1740–1778), to serve his Calvinist theology, before finally being cut back to four stanzas. After the English had worked over the hymn, it first appeared with minor variation in the 1893 *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book*, followed by modest changes for *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941), updated into modern English for the 1982 *Lutheran Worship*, and then returned to a variation of the 1893 text in *LSB*. A hymn put through so many changes is not likely to be successful. As the old saying goes, “Too many cooks spoil the broth!” Yet this eighteenth-century hymn successfully and poetically bears the singer from the cross to heavenly glory.

When Martin Madan included this hymn and others in his 1760 collection, his admitted purpose was to touch the

hearts of the people who sang the hymns. He hits upon the juxtaposition of the efficacy of the Word with the art of the preacher, hymn writer, composer or musician who proclaims that Word.

- Can the way in which a preacher or poet presents the Word make it more accessible? Explain your answer.
- What are some ways in which music can enhance the proclamation of the Word?
- What do these thoughts suggest about singing the praises of Christ and His work in “Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus”?

### Text

“Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus” draws on a number of events in the life of Christ and His work of salvation. At the same time, the hymn alludes to passages from the Old and New Testaments.

- Read Isaiah 53. This is a familiar passage assigned to be read on Good Friday. Compare Isaiah 53 with the first

stanza of this hymn. List as many similarities between the two as you can.

- This first stanza refers to Jesus with the words “Hail, Thou universal Savior.” What is the significance of the word “universal”?
- Look at Is. 53:6. What word appears there that highlights the universal work of the crucified Jesus?
- Read Eph. 2:13–18. St. Paul writes to “you who once were far off” (v. 13). Who does he have in mind? What has Jesus done, according to verses 15–16, that makes Him a universal Savior? How does calling Him “Thou Galilean King” in stanza 1 emphasize the words of the apostle?
- Read 1 Peter 1:18–20. According to the apostle, what is more precious than silver or gold?

## Making the Connection

In a preface to the hymnal published by Valentin Babst in 1545, Martin Luther wrote,

“For God has cheered our hearts and minds through his dear Son, whom he gave for us to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. He who believes this earnestly cannot be quiet about it. But he must gladly and willingly sing and speak about it so that others also may come and hear it” (AE 53:333).

- What is the cheer in the following phrases that gladdens Christian hearts and sets our tongues to sing and speak of Christ?
  - “Thou didst free salvation bring ... Bearer of our sin and shame!” (st. 1). What does shame cost you? Where is that shame relocated?

## In Closing

Bonhoeffer observed that

“it is a dangerous error, ... to think that the heart can pray by itself. For then we confuse wishes, hopes, sighs, laments, rejoicings—all of which the heart can do by itself—with prayer. And we confuse earth and heaven, man and God. Prayer does not mean simply to pour out one’s heart. It means rather to find the way to God and to speak with him, whether the heart is full or empty. No man can do that by himself. For that he needs Jesus Christ” (Bonhoeffer, *Psalms*, 9–10).

This hymn points us to the Word of Christ that we hear with our ears, which then pours out in music on our tongues so that others may hear.

- What has been accomplished by this precious gift?
- List phrases in stanza 2 of the hymn that expand on this “ransom” in 1 Peter 1:18.
- Read Rev. 5:9–14. What does St. John see in his vision? What does he hear? Who is at the center of this scene? Why is He “worthy”?
- Compare the poetry of St. John’s vision with the words of Heb. 9:11–15. How is Jesus both sacrifice and priest?
- Like St. John’s vision, this hymn elicits praise from the lips of those who confess the Paschal Lamb as high priest and king. Since our human tongues can stammer under sin, stanza 4 draws on other singers. Who are they? Why is their musical help inspiring?

- “Opened is the gate of heaven, / Reconciled are we with God” (st. 2). Is this a present reality or only a future hope? What difference does your answer make?
- “There for sinners Thou art pleading; / There Thou dost our place prepare” (st. 3). Knowing that you have someone who speaks and works on your behalf with God, what effect does this have on your life now?
- “Help, ye bright angelic spirits, ... Help to sing our Savior’s merits” (st. 4). When you don’t feel like praising God, how does the thought of singing angels comfort you? Does guilt sing with joy? Why or why not? Where there is guilt, how does returning to stanza 1 lift up the singer once again?

- Sing or read together *LSB* 531.

### Prayer

Almighty God, Your Son willingly endured the agony and shame of the cross for our redemption. Grant us courage to take up our cross daily and follow Him wherever He leads; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 17A).



# My Soul, Now Praise Your Maker

Lutheran Service Book 820 | study by Paul J. Cain

## Introduction

Confess together the First Article of the Apostles' Creed (*LSB*, p. 322).

"My Soul, Now Praise Your Maker" is a hymn of praise and adoration for what the Lord has done in creation, but not only for what He has done in creation.

- Why is a "First Article only" confession of faith an insufficient confession for Christians from a biblical standpoint? What is missing?

## Exploring the Scriptures

There are four main Bible texts for us to consider that are listed at the bottom of the page for *LSB* 820.

Read Is. 40:6–8.

- What is distressing about these verses? Is the prophet only speaking about grass and flowers?
- What is comforting about verse 8?
- Have you ever seen the letters "VDMA"? They are the initial letters of the Latin motto that translates, "The Word of the Lord Endures Forever" (*Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum*). Why is that an appropriate motto for Lutherans, and especially for Lutheran laypeople?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Intended as a paraphrase of Psalm 103, "My Soul" has a royal history. Martin Chemnitz knew that this hymn was commissioned by Albrecht the Elder, Duke of Prussia, a supporter of the Lutheran Reformation and of Luther himself. Psalm 103 was the Duke's favorite psalm. This hymn was a favorite of Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus. A hymn of consolation, it was sung in thanksgiving for the conclusion of the Thirty Years' War by Christians in Osnabrück, Westphalia. Author Johann Gramann (1487–1541) was known at the time for his preaching and pastoral care, as well as church visitation and the establishment of Lutheran schools. Today his hymn of praise, one of the earliest Lutheran hymns, lives on in *Lutheran Service Book* (*LSB*).

- In what ways does this hymn sound like a sermon?
- What parts of the hymn reflect soul care from a faithful and compassionate pastor?

### Pray

O God, the strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; 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 Epiphany 7).

Read Is. 57:15–16.

- How is the Law proclaimed here? The Gospel?
- Contrast the dwelling places of the Lord and humanity. Why is the incarnation of Christ so comforting to us?

Read Ps. 119:89–90.

- What do we learn about the reliability of the Lord and His Word in these verses?

This hymn has become a somewhat unlikely favorite hymn at my congregation's school for chapel at the grammar school level, and was even used for vacation Bible school.

- How and where does the hymn encourage sound catechesis at home, church and school to pass on the faith to the next generation?
- What words and phrases in the hymn encourage evangelism and mission work? Which words and phrases provide good models for use in mission work and evangelism?

### Text

Stanza 1 presents Ps. 103:1–6. Read those verses and compare them to the stanza.

- What words in stanza 1 reflect the individual nature of the praises offered in Ps. 103:1–5?

Stanza 2 is based on Ps. 103:7–12. Read those verses and compare them to the stanza.

- In Ps. 103:6–14, the whole community praises the Lord. How is this subtly reflected at the end of stanza 2? Skip ahead for the moment to stanza 3. Note specific language that shows the Lord’s care for the flock of Christians He gathers to Himself.
- Consider the influence of the following on stanza 2:
  - Is. 30:18; Is. 48:9; 2 Peter 3:9; Lam. 3:22; Ps. 34:18; and Ps. 51:17.

Stanza 3 is a metrical paraphrase of Ps. 103:13–16. Read those verses and compare them to the stanza.

- God is eternal. Human life is frail. How are these truths shared poetically in stanza 3? In Is. 40:6–8?

## Making the Connection

Most Christians agree that salvation was won by Christ on the cross (that is, if they are still willing to confess the veracity of the Scriptures, the divinity of Christ and the truth of His incarnation and resurrection). Where Christians so often differ is where the benefit of that salvation is delivered to Christians.

- “His grace remains forever” (st. 4). How would you explain to a non-Christian where and how the grace of

- How are Mal. 3:17; 1 John 3:1; Rom. 8:15; Gen. 2:7; Gen. 3:19; Job 10:9; Job 14:1–2; Job 34:14–15; Ps. 90:3–6; Ps. 102:11; Eccl. 3:20; and James 1:10 alluded to in stanza 3?

Stanza 4 gives us Ps. 103:17–22. Read those verses and compare them to the stanza.

- All of creation is to honor the Lord, as Ps. 103:20–22 encourages by “Bless the LORD.” Where are these thoughts of praise and adoration expressed in stanza 4?
- Read 1 Peter 1:25 and Is. 59:21. Why are these verses so important to stanza 4?

God is delivered to you here and now? Would your answer differ if you were giving the same kind of explanation to a Christian who was not a Lutheran? Why or why not?

- “His love beyond all measure” (st. 2). How would you use phrases from the hymn to counter the response, “It sounds too good to be true”?

## In Closing

Confess together the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed (*LSB*, pp. 322–3).

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 820.

### Prayer

O God, from whom all good proceeds, grant to us, Your humble servants, Your holy inspiration, that we may set our minds on the things that are right and, by Your merciful guiding, accomplish them; 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 18A).

# Come Down, O Love Divine

Lutheran Service Book 501 | study by Paul F. Becker

## Introduction

The Lutheran Confessions describe the person and work of the Holy Spirit in some detail.

“Faith brings the Holy Spirit and produces a new life in hearts. It must also produce spiritual movements in hearts. ... Therefore, when we have been justified by faith and regenerated, we begin to fear and love God, to pray to Him, to expect aid from Him, to give thanks and praise Him, and to obey Him in times of suffering. We also begin to love our neighbors, because our hearts have spiritual and holy movements” (Ap V 4, p. 102).

Likewise, in the Eastern Church the following is included in the daily prayers:

“O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit Truth,  
Who art everywhere and fillest all things; Treasury of

Blessings, and Giver of Life—come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.”<sup>2</sup>

Our hymn today summarizes and describes how the Holy Spirit works changes both in the inward being and outward living of each child of God.

- Why is it important for “Love Divine” to come and abide in us? How do things like love, joy and peace become part of our lives?
- How does “Love Divine” bring about even “obedience in times of suffering” and help us see this as working together for our good?

## Exploring the Scriptures

God’s Word gives us unique insights into the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Read Ezek. 36:25–28.

- In verses 25–26, how is the Sacrament of Holy Baptism foretold? What metaphor is used to describe the miracle of rebirth?
- What specific verbs/actions are ascribed to God? To us?

Jesus indicates that we will stay close to the Father and the Son by the Holy Spirit. Read John 14:16–17, 23–27.

- What names does Jesus give the Holy Spirit? In what ways will the Spirit be a “Helper” to us?

- How does the Spirit help us love Jesus and keep His words?

By the Spirit’s presence, we “begin also to love our neighbors.” Read Rom. 12:9–15.

- When charity becomes our “outward vesture” (st. 3), what specific activities can be expected?
- Remember a time in your life when the Spirit helped you love a neighbor in a difficult situation.

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Little is known about the author of our text, Bianco da Siena (c. 1350–1434) except for a collection of ninety-two poems entitled *Laudi spirituali*, literally, “spiritual praises,” or songs. These simple songs, sung in Italian, were composed by members of lay organizations of a devotional or religious nature.

Apparently, members of such orders made promises to pursue poverty, humility and charity. Living a relatively long life of eighty-plus years in a time known for its wars and plagues could not have been easy by any means.

- Discuss various lay organizations available to believers today (e.g., Lutheran Women’s Missionary League, Lutheran Laymen’s League, etc.) and what kind of Christian life they promote.

- Bianco da Siena joined his order at the early age of seventeen. How can we encourage young people today to take their Christian vocation seriously?

### Text

This hymn text overflows with action words (verbs) attributed to God the Holy Spirit, love divine — come, seek, visit, draw near, appear, kindle, bestowing —all in stanza 1.

<sup>2</sup> “O Heavenly King and Psalm 51 (Psalm of Repentance),” Orthodox Church in America, accessed June 28, 2018, [oca.org/orthodoxy/prayers/trisagion](http://oca.org/orthodoxy/prayers/trisagion).

The action continues in stanza 2 as the fire of divine love consumes worldly passions and illumines our path.

We live in an age that makes two common false assumptions: that people are basically good and that I can “decide” to become a Christian — “I prayed to ask Jesus into my heart.” How does our text overturn such thinking? Does it matter what hymns we sing?

“Thy holy flame” recalls the Day of Pentecost when “divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them” (Acts 2:3).

Read Titus 3:4–7.

- How and when does Pentecost become personal for a Christian? Talk about keeping the creative tension of a

connection between the individual and churchly nature of the Spirit’s work.

After His Baptism, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Isn’t life very much the same for us? Read Rom. 5:1–5.

- Note the sequence: suffering, endurance, character, hope. Several hymnals omit stanza 3, which mentions things like lowliness, humility and weeping with loathing over personal shortcomings. While not painting a very pretty picture, our Lutheran theology has a certain grounding in reality that offers a blessing. How would you describe that blessing to someone who felt this language is too “negative”?

## Making the Connection

The soul “Wherein the Holy Spirit makes His dwelling” (st. 4) refers to us: “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Cor. 12:27). Not only the soul, but the body also: “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?” (1 Cor. 6:19).

- What gifts does Christ give to assure us that He abides in us and we in Him? Read 1 Cor. 10:16.

- In his letter to the Galatians, Paul speaks of the Spirit’s fruit that, as it grows, “shall far outpass the pow’r of human telling” (st. 4). “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22–23).

- Pick one or two of these fruits and describe an experience in which “His grace” produced something of “love divine” in your life.

## In Closing

St. Paul concludes his letter to the Church in Rome with references to the critical importance of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives: “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17). “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Rom. 15:13).

- With these Scriptures in mind, sing or read aloud together *LSB* 501.

### Prayer

O God, our refuge and strength, the author of all godliness, hear the devout prayers of Your Church, especially in times of persecution, and grant that what we ask in faith we may obtain; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 19A).

# 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?

## 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?

## 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?

- In your opinion, what is a "good work"? Read 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])" (AC IV, p. 33).

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

- 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?

### 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?

- 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*, p. 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?

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

## 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.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 555.

### 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).



# Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word

Lutheran Service Book 655 | study by Marion Lars Hendrickson

## Introduction

Read the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer and its meaning from the Small Catechism (*LSB*, p. 324).

- Name some concrete examples of how “the devil, the world, and our sinful nature” attack a person of faith.

## Exploring the Scriptures

Read Jer. 23:16–29.

- In verses 16–17, why does the Lord warn the people not to listen to false prophets?
- What is the great danger of listening to false prophets (v. 27)? Where can such forgetting lead?
- What do verses 19–20 suggest? Is there a connection between these verses and the people listening to the false prophets?

Read Heb. 11:17–12:3.

- What is the author's point?
- “By faith” is a recurring phrase throughout the list of the great works of God's people of old. How do these two words qualify and refine these great works?
- Like St. Paul, the author of Hebrews begins chapter 12 with “therefore” in order to draw a conclusion. What is his conclusion?
- How are joy, shame and endurance (v. 2) held together in Jesus?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

In the first part of the sixteenth century, not only was the young Lutheran church dealing with the conflicts of the Reformation, but the Ottoman Empire was also making inroads onto the European continent. 1521 marked Luther's confrontation with the Holy Roman Empire at Worms, Germany. In 1530, the Lutherans presented their confession to the Empire and to the Roman Catholic Church at Augsburg. Near the same time, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent was leading the armies of the Ottoman Empire into the Kingdom of Hungary in 1526, attacking Hapsburg Vienna in 1529 and 1532, invading Moldavia in 1538 and taking the twin Hungarian cities of Buda and Pest in 1541.

Luther included this joint threat in his hymn of 1541/1542. The opening stanza originally listed both

- What does it mean to “overcome them and win the victory”? Do they no longer touch a person of faith?

Read Luke 12:49–56.

- How would you harmonize Jesus' words in verse 51, “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division,” with the song of the angels at His birth, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace” (Luke 2:14)?
- List some ways that the person and work of Jesus can be divisive today. Must these be divisive? Why or why not?
- In verse 50 Jesus refers to a coming “baptism.” Since He was already baptized in the Jordan by John, what is He speaking about here?
- Why might He have more distress waiting for that “baptism” than undergoing that “baptism”?
- How does Jesus' “baptism” bring together both the divisiveness and the peace inherent in His coming?
- In what ways might that “baptism” be the best sign for our times today (v. 56)?

enemies of the Gospel: “Lord, keep us in Thy Word and work, / Restrain the murderous Pope and Turk, / Who fain would tear from off Thy throne / Christ Jesus, Thy beloved Son.” In time, these particular enemies became the more general enemies of Christ's Church, as shown in stanza 1.

- Who or what could be named today as enemies of Christ and His Church?
- Did you include yourself? Why or why not?

Luther viewed these threats as the harsh “rod” or discipline of God, justly deserved by sinners (see AE 43:232).

- How can the severe trials of life be God's discipline? Is discipline the same as punishment? Explain.

- Where does a person of faith find hope under the “harsh rod” of God? How does such hope sustain a person of faith in the midst of troubles?

### Text

The three stanzas of this hymn form a trinitarian prayer. In stanza 1, we implore God the Father to “keep” and to “curb.”

- Read Ps. 119:5–10. What keeps the psalmist steadfast (v. 5)? On what does he fix his eyes (v. 6)? What makes his heart upright (v. 7)?
- Is this merely a matter of obedience to God’s Law? What does verse 9 add to your answer?
- Read 2 John 9. What does it mean to “abide in the teaching of Christ”? What does it mean to “not abide” in that teaching?
- As he does in his first epistle, St. John writes of a fellowship in this “abiding.” With whom? In what ways does this make “the teaching of Christ” also a “confessing of Christ” in faith?
- These verses seem to address only the prayer of “keeping us steadfast.” In what ways do these verses from Psalm 119 and 2 John also speak to our prayer for God’s “curbing” work in this stanza?

Stanza 2 implores the defending work of Jesus, the Son. Read John 8:31. Jesus speaks about abiding.

- Is He using the word “abide” in the same way St. John does in his second epistle above? Different?
- Read Jesus’ “High Priestly Prayer” in John 17. How do His words expand our understanding of abiding?
- In verses 14–15, Jesus speaks of a consequence of our abiding with Him. What is it? How does such hatred come about?
- In verse 14, Jesus’ prayer is similar to our prayer in this hymn. Verses 17–19 tell us how God answers this prayer. How are we sanctified/consecrated by abiding with Christ in God’s Word?

Stanza 3 draws the first two stanzas into a petition to the Holy Spirit.

- Read Eph. 4:1–6. Abiding with Christ becomes “walking” in that calling. How are these two expressions the same? What are the hallmarks of such walking (vv. 2–3)? Are such things the result of our walking or of the calling in which we walk? Explain.
- Stanza 3 implores the Spirit, “Send peace and unity on earth.” In what ways do the words of Ephesians 4 address the subject of peace?
- Who is the common element inhabiting and making possible the unity expressed in verses 4–6?
- See also Rom. 5:3–5. How does our abiding (God with us, us with God, by His Spirit) yield the sequence of suffering, endurance, character and hope?

## Making the Connection

Luther wrote,

“Jesus Christ, God’s Son, has by his most holy touch consecrated and hallowed all sufferings, even death itself, has blessed the curse, and has glorified shame and enriched poverty so that death is now a door to life, the curse a fount of blessing, and shame the mother of glory” (AE 42:141).

Luther’s hymn is less about escape from troubles than it is a cry for faithful endurance in the midst of troubles. What difference does this make for us in living as Christians?

- Where, then, does our hope lie in the midst of troubles?

## In Closing

When we are tempted to discern God’s inscrutable will in the suffering of this world, the Small Catechism reminds us: “God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature ... and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die” (*LSB*, p. 324).

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 655.

### Prayer

Merciful Lord, cleanse and defend Your Church by the sacrifice of Christ. United with Him in Holy Baptism, give us grace to receive with thanksgiving the fruits of His redeeming work and daily follow in His way; through the same 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 15C).

# O Love, How Deep

Lutheran Service Book 544 | study by Larry A. Peters

## Introduction

Two little words but on these words hang everything. *Pro nobis* — for us. Faith is the key that opens to all that God has said and done. For us. Not for principle or for His own satisfaction but for us and our salvation. Frame the whole of the Christian message and the church year with this phrase, and you find yourself confronted with the ancient but ever fresh and new text that is our hymn.

- Think how these two words direct the faith we confess in the Nicene Creed. “Who for us men and for our salvation ...” (*LSB*, p. 191). How significant are these two words?

## Exploring the Scriptures

The whole of Christ’s life and work are presented in the New Testament and in this hymn. His incarnation, birth, Baptism, life, suffering, death and resurrection are read in Scripture, confessed in the creed and sung in this hymn.

- Read John 1:1–14. How does John tell us more of the incarnation than the actual birth of Christ?
- Read Heb. 2:9–10, 14–18. Why is Christ higher than the angels? Why did Christ come instead of an angel? Read Ps. 8:4–5.

The temptation of our Lord was not merely a little test, but the rerun of Eden without the fall. Read Matt. 4:1–11. Christ was baptized for us, tempted like us and obedient for us.

- Do we value Christ’s righteous obedience as much as we value His suffering in our place? Should we?
- Christ’s obedient life is our gift as well as His obedient death. How can we say that His preaching, teaching, miracles and ministry were for us?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

The rich liturgical resources of the Medieval Church have yielded a treasure of hymns and chant. This hymn is attributed to St. Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471) because it sounds like him; we do not know for sure that he was the author. It survives in but one source. St.

Thomas is known mostly for *The Imitation of Christ*.

Originally twenty-three stanzas, it has generally been published with only seven; the doxological stanza is from another source. It leads us from the incarnation of our Lord through His Baptism, His obedient life, His life-giving death and His glorious resurrection.

- Luther says in his explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe that I cannot by own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel ...” (*LSB*, p. 323). The whole of the Christian faith is just words until the Holy Spirit teaches us to confess, “For us, for me.”

- Read John 17:20–26. How does Jesus pray for us?
- The Passion takes up the majority of the Gospels. The story of Jesus’ betrayal, suffering, crucifixion and death constitute the highest demonstration of God’s love for us. Read Matt. 26–27.
- How did Christ turn the cross from shame to glory?

The resurrection of Jesus was not for Him but for us, that we might know with confidence that His Word is true and His work is complete. Read Phil. 2:5–11.

- How is Jesus’ ascension for us? What does the ascended Lord do for us?
- Note the work of the Spirit (John 14:16–17) whom the Father sent in His name. How does the Spirit guide, strengthen and cheer us?

- How could this be a hymn for the whole church year?

### Text

The first line and the final doxology are both drawn directly from Scripture. Read Eph. 3:14–21, especially verse 18.

- How do we comprehend the expanse of God’s love?
- Faith is the highest form of worship. What does God desire from us for all that Christ has done for us?

St. Paul speaks of the unimaginable destiny that God has prepared for those who love Him. The Savior whom we

meet in the manger is a gift and reality beyond comprehension or expectation.

- Though we do not know how the almighty God can wear human flesh, do we know why?
- God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. How do we see the whole Trinity at work to save us?

The Baptism of our Lord gets only a few short verses in the Gospels, but it is where He began His public ministry and where He demonstrated what He had come to fulfill (all righteousness for us).

- What does Jesus' Baptism tell us of His purpose?
- What does Jesus' holy and obedient life do for us?

God used the wickedness of men who would crucify Jesus for our benefit. Read Acts 2:36; 4:10.

- Did God know what was to happen?
- Did God plan our salvation?
- When were these plans laid? Read Eph. 1:4; 1 Peter 1:20.

## Making the Connection

We talk often about the need for faith to be personal. What does it mean to have a personal faith? It is easy to confuse personal faith with intense emotion or sentiment. These come from and through our faith, but the personal nature of that faith is the work of the Holy Spirit, who leads us to see all Christ has done for us and to trust in His saving work alone. This hymn uses that repeated expression to help us acknowledge, rejoice and boldly witness to all that Christ has done for us and for the whole world.

One of the most profound gifts of this hymn is the way the words confront us with all that Christ did — from His incarnation to His suffering to His death on the cross to His resurrection from the dead to His exalted reign as Lord of all. While it is certainly true that our Lord did all of this to fulfill the prophetic word and to accomplish God's plan of salvation, He also sent us His Holy Spirit so that faith may

The ascension of our Lord and the sending of the Spirit often seem odd to us. Part of us would rather have Jesus here walking and talking with us than the Spirit.

- How does it benefit us that Christ has sent His Spirit in His name? What does the Spirit do for us?
- All the events of Jesus' life are inseparably united as one saving work. Does it help us to see everything Christ has done as one complete action?

Note how the final doxological stanza connects right back with stanza 1 and with Eph. 3:18.

- Jesus said, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent" (John 6:29). What does God seek from us?
- We confess in the Athanasian Creed that the catholic (universal) faith is this: "that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity ..." (*LSB*, p. 319). We adore God by acknowledging what He has done and believing in Him whom He has sent as Savior and Redeemer. How does the repetition of "for us" throughout this hymn call us to this faith and worship?

rejoice and trust in His saving work. For us. We were in His mind and heart as He took on flesh, lived in holiness of life and adopted our salvation as His purpose even to suffering and death on the cross. For me. Thanks be to God!

- We say God is love, but the words are fulfilled in Christ. What does the love of God look like?
- This hymn was a fifteenth-century Latin text that was discovered some three hundred years later. Now we add our voices to those who sang it before us. The hymn will be taught to those who come after us. What unites us with those who went before, and what will unite us to those who follow us?
- How does it impact you when you think of those who once sang of Christ *for us* and who will sing in the future the same words that we sing?

## In Closing

The words "for us" seem so small, but it took the Holy Spirit to teach them to us. It took the Spirit to build faith in our hearts to believe that Christ was incarnate and He accomplished salvation *for us*. Faith is not something small. It is deep and profound. It requires the full resources of God to bring us to faith, keep us in faith and teach us the joy of love high enough, deep enough and broad enough to save sinners like us.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 544.

### Prayer

Gracious God, You gave Your Son into the hands of sinful men who killed Him. Forgive us when we reject Your unfailing love, and grant us the fullness of Your salvation; 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 22A).

# A Multitude Comes from the East and the West

**Lutheran Service Book 510** | study by Marion Lars Hendrickson

## Introduction

In the Early Church, the believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). It is revealing within that description that the fellowship of the believers is found between the Word and the Lord’s Supper. This is true for the Christian congregation still today. Fellowship always springs forth from the Gospel of Christ and finds its fulfillment in the Sacrament of His body and blood. The whole

of the Christian fellowship lives between the Word and the Sacrament, anticipating with eager expectation the glorious wedding feast of heaven.

- The first man, Adam, was alone until God created Eve. Who has God created as the bride for the Second Adam, Jesus?
- Why is the Christian never alone?

## Exploring the Scriptures

This hymn is appointed for three different Sundays in the church year. While the Gospel Readings for each of these Sundays are different, the three also bear similarities.

Read Matt. 22:1–14 (for Proper 23A). In the banquet parable Jesus urges His listeners to repent. The generosity of the king’s invitation is matched with the severity of the king’s judgment.

- What does the king do in response to the rejection of his invitation (v. 7)?
- What made the initial recipients of the king’s invitation unworthy to attend (v. 8)?

Read Luke 13:22–30 (for Proper 16C). In this banquet parable Jesus speaks of the struggle of repentance. The struggle is not in getting through the narrow door itself, but rather

between faith and the sinful nature, a struggle that the Lord’s call produces in the human heart.

- What does the master of the house mean when he says, “I do not know where you come from” (v. 26)?
- A multitude joins the patriarchs in the kingdom of God, but some will be cast out (v. 28). Who are the first? Who are the last (v. 30)? Why?

Read Luke 14:15–24 (for Trinity 2). This is a banquet parable that begins with a blessing (v. 15) and ends with a warning (v. 24).

- In verse 17 the master’s invitation says, “Come, for everything is now ready.” Do the invited guests have any requirement to fulfill in order to attend?
- From his words in verse 23, what is the master’s desire for this banquet?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Magnus Brostrup Landstad (1802–80) knew human suffering and the trials of life by personal experience. He grew up in the far north of Norway, a place of solitude, storm and darkness. War, hunger and inflation added to the trials of his childhood. Not surprisingly, Landstad could long for heaven, as he writes in this hymn, when “all trials shall be like a dream that is past” (st. 3).

- How do times of trial change in faith, when we consider that Christ comes to share them with us?

Landstad also put into poetic expression the deprivations of sin that the faithful can see within themselves. Called a “penitential hymn poet,” Landstad could plumb the depths of repentance in a hymn such as “To Thee, Omniscient Lord of All” (LSB 613). Yet this hymn of repentance does not dwell so much on the sorrow of the repentant as on the joy

that comes in Christ to the penitent. It is because of Christ’s lavish grace that Landstad wrote how he was always eager to sing a penitential hymn with joy.

- St. Paul wrote, “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). What does he mean?

In many ways Landstad writes his hymns for a pilgrim on his or her way toward heaven. While he writes about storms and trials, it is not to use fear to drive the pilgrim onward. Rather, Landstad’s portrayal of the pilgrim way is one of an eager longing and a hopeful expectation for that which lies ahead.

- St. Paul wrote, “One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13–14). How is it only the grace of



God in Jesus Christ that allows us to say this along with the apostle?

### Text

While the three parables discussed above all have the elements of blessing and judgment, the hymn text focuses solely on the blessing of the Lord's invitation.

- In the distinction between Law and Gospel — the Law commands but cannot give; the Gospel bestows what it promises — how is this focus on the blessing in the parable a focus on the Gospel itself?

Read the closing refrain, "Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!" in light of the hymn's focus on the blessing of the invitation.

- Is this repeated refrain a confession of sin or a cry for help in need? What difference does this make?

Stanza 1 also draws upon Matt. 8:11–12. Commending the faith of the Roman centurion, Jesus includes this Gentile Roman among those reclining at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

## Making the Connection

The sick person, the one who endures persecution for his or her faith, the prisoner, the lonely and many other sufferers each see in a fellow Christian the presence of the gracious God. Both the one who visits and the one who is visited recognize each other as "little Christs" (Luther's term) of the Christ who is present with each and, more so, with both together.

- What does a Christian lose when he absents himself from the fellowship of believers in worship?
- Does the blessing of Christian fellowship deny a blessing to Christian solitude? Why or why not?

## In Closing

Jesus promised His fellowship of disciples "... that where I am you may be also" and "I will not leave you as orphans" (John 14:3, 18). So we Lutherans believe, teach and confess that one Holy Church will remain forever. The Church is the assembly of believers among whom the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered according to that Gospel (see AC VII).

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 510.

- Does the hymn limit saving faith to the New Testament saints? Read Hebrews 11.

Stanza 2 sings of God as the Shepherd of His people. Read Ps. 107:2–9 and compare the imagery with Psalm 23.

- What is the urgency described in stanza 2 ("while there is time")?

Stanzas 3 and 4 carry the singer to the communion of saints in glory, where "all trials shall be like a dream that is past," where "the blest" receive the crown of life. Read Rev. 7:9–17 and Rev. 2:10.

- Is the Sacrament of the Altar also a sharing in the eternal feast? Why or why not?
- How does the promise of life forever with Christ, given in the Lord's Supper, sustain us now in our times of trial?
- What would you say in response to the skeptic who understands these stanzas only as "pie in the sky"? Read St. Paul's response in 1 Cor. 15:12–34.

- What are some of the challenges when pondering the Christian fellowship on earth in light of the fellowship of saints in heaven?
- Stanza 4 says, "the heavens ... ring with an anthem more grand / Than ever on earth was recorded." Name two or three temptations to despair because of the weaknesses of the earthly fellowship of believers. In what way is the earthly fellowship the means to sustain one another in those temptations to despair?

### Prayer

Almighty God, You invite us to trust in You for our salvation. Deal with us not in the severity of Your judgment but by the greatness of Your mercy; 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 23).



# Holy God, We Praise Thy Name

Lutheran Service Book 940 | study by Randall P. Wurschmidt

## Introduction

“Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying ...” (*LSB* p. 208).

These words from the Divine Service remind us that we are never alone when we worship God. There is an unending song of praise around the throne of heaven, and we are

invited to join in when we sing the *Te Deum*, the *Sanctus* (“Holy, Holy, Holy”) and other hymns of praise.

- What comfort can Christians draw from knowing that they are not worshipping alone but are part of a great multitude of believers?

## Exploring the Scriptures

The Book of Revelation gives us a look into the ongoing reality of heaven and the music that accompanies the saints around the throne. We especially see this in chapters 4, 5 and 7. The picture here is one of constant praise and adoration. We praise God in response to what He has done. Read Ps. 105:1–4.

- What are some of the deeds and wondrous works that the psalm lists as reasons to give thanks?
- How does this compare to some other psalms? Read, for example, Ps. 30:1–4 and Ps. 111:2–9. Why do we praise Him?

Now read Rev. 7:9–12, one of a series of scenes set around the throne of God. Here we are privileged to be given a brief glimpse into heaven. In singing this hymn, we join with the great multitude worshipping the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne.

- In this passage, we are told everything about the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when* and *why* of worship. Can you answer each of those questions?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Christians have been singing the hymn *Te Deum laudamus* (Latin for “We Praise You, O God”) for many centuries.

Legend attributes it to St. Ambrose and St. Augustine on the occasion of the latter’s Baptism (in AD 387). It is said that they improvised it, each man contributing a line at a time. Its true origin remains obscure, but modern scholarship puts its composition in the fifth century. Later the text was expanded by adding two more stanzas to the end.

The *Te Deum* is commonly sung during the morning service called “Matins” (see *LSB*, p. 223), where its function is somewhat like a creed. The hymn “Holy God, We Praise Thy Name” is a version of the *Te Deum*; rather than being in chant form like the original, it is set as a typical hymn, with rhymes and a regular meter (see *LSB* 941 for another example). Like the creeds, this hymn makes a statement of faith. When we sing it, we are singing what we believe about God.

Looking at Divine Service, Setting One, read through the two Hymns of Praise options (*LSB*, pp. 154–55).

- How do these two hymns also function as a creed?

- What other parts of the liturgy similarly confess what Christians believe?

### Text

We have in this hymn all the imagery of the throne of heaven and its attributes. The angels, apostles, prophets and martyrs are singing in “unceasing chorus” (st. 2); we are invited to join this throng in their song of praise.

- How is the reign of God in heaven described in the first stanza?
- The second stanza repeats a scene from the Old Testament. Compare this stanza to Is. 6:2–3.

Read Rev. 5:9–10.

- What is meant by “a new song”? To whom is it sung?
- Keeping that in mind, what does it mean at the end of the third stanza that “Through the Church the song goes on”?

Stanza 4 is a key stanza in which we confess who Christ is.

- Compare the Second Article of the Nicene Creed with this stanza. See the footnote in your hymnal explaining the word “tributary.”

The following two questions apply to stanzas 6 and 7 of *LSB* 940, not found in your hymnal but printed in this study for your convenience:

- 6 From Thy high celestial home,  
Judge of all, again returning,  
We believe that Thou shalt come  
On that final judgment morning,  
When Thy voice shall shake the earth  
And the startled dead come forth.
- 7 Spare Thy people, Lord, we pray,  
By a thousand snares surrounded;  
Keep us without sin today,  
Never let us be confounded.  
Lo, I put my trust in Thee;  
Never, Lord, abandon me.

- Stanza 6 continues with a creedal statement about Christ's return. How does this compare to what we find in the Nicene Creed?
- Stanza 7 is quite different from all the others. How is it different?

The hymn closes with a doxological stanza, that is, one that praises the Holy Trinity. Some congregations stand for these (which is why there is a triangle marking this stanza). Because of its clear teaching on the Trinity, this would be an excellent hymn to sing on Trinity Sunday.

- Name some other occasions or days in the Church Year when this hymn might be especially appropriate.

## Making the Connection

"Holy God, We Praise Thy Name" is a strong hymn that reinforces for singers (and listeners) our salvation history; it doesn't just praise God, but tells us *why* we praise God. It also tells us *who* is praising Him, *what* such praise consists of, *where* it is happening and *when*. Especially, we confess that by His death and resurrection Jesus has "opened heav'n to faith" (st. 4).

The Lord's Supper similarly opens a window into heaven for us to see and join in (see *LSB* 639, "We Open Stand

the Gates," especially the third stanza). Notice that in the Sanctus, we sing some of the same words as we do in "Holy God."

The "white-robed martyrs" (st. 3) remind us of our Baptism, in which we are clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness that covers all our sin (see *LSB*, p. 271). As baptized children of God, we look forward to the day when we will stand with the rest of the throng around the throne of heaven.

## In Closing

Martin Luther considered the Te Deum to be a creed on the level of the Apostles' and Athanasian Creeds. He so admired it that he made his own translation into German, which was widely used. "Holy God, We Praise Thy Name" is possibly the most popular setting of the Te Deum: it is used by most denominations; it was sung at the funeral of John F. Kennedy. It binds us together with Christians who have sung it for hundreds of years, and it binds us together with all the company of heaven who sing it now.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 940.

### Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, You knit together Your faithful people of all times and places into one holy communion, the mystical body of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Grant us so to follow Your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living that, together with them, we may come to the unspeakable joys You have prepared for those who love You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for All Saints' Day).

# I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

Lutheran Service Book 411 | study by Charles Gustafson

## Introduction

Edith Wharton, Pulitzer Prize winner for fiction, once quipped, “There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it.”<sup>3</sup> Today’s hymn expresses the desire to be able to shine with a special light, the light of Christ Jesus.

## Exploring the Scriptures

The main text for this hymn is 2 Cor. 4:4–6. Take a moment to read the text. Paul talks about God and what He has done.

- How has “the god of this world” (Satan) kept people from seeing the light of the Gospel?
- What darkness is Paul referring to in verse 6, and what does it mean for you personally that God has power over cosmic darkness?
- According to verse 5, for whose benefit is it that God would allow His light to shine through us?

- What light has Jesus shed upon our world?
- Do you think that being a child of the light is the ability to reflect the light of Christ or the simple emanating of His light from within? Is there a difference?

Another Scripture noted as a basis for this hymn is 1 John 1:5. It states that God is light.

- What does it mean to you that God is light?
- Does the presence of light mean that there can be no darkness at all?

If you read further in 1 John 1, you will notice how the metaphors of light and darkness are being used.

- For what is light a metaphor?
- For what is darkness a metaphor?
- What determines with whom we have fellowship?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Often, in the confrontations with everyday living, we allow our minds to travel into realms of thought we call “meditation.” These periods can come at designated times or they can be given to us from the Spirit of God as we are attempting to achieve some goal or task.

Kathleen Thomerson, author of this hymn, was packing to take her mother and family to Houston, Texas, to get away from the heat and darkness caused by the rolling brownouts of St. Louis, Missouri. Once in Houston she would find air conditioning and comfort in the home of her mother. It was during the business of packing for the trip that her mind wandered and the words of the hymn text began to form. The completion of the text happened after they all arrived at the relief of familiar surroundings.

- Do you believe that God can speak to you at any time?
- Can you give any examples of God speaking to people in Scripture when they were least expecting any voice at all? (Cf. 1 Samuel 3.)

Brownouts can cause a sense of fear, especially at night when there is no natural light available. They can remind us of how all of life would be if we were always living in darkness.

- List several things that bother you when the lights go out.
- How does the appearance of light change those things, and how do you feel when things are changed because of the appearance of light?

### Text

The hymn text seems to have a very personal quality to it as each stanza begins with the first-person singular. There is a sense of personal desire captured in the words, “I want to” along with the constant references to “my” in the hymn writer’s poetry.

- Do you find your faith and its expression to be something quite personal, or is it public, or is it both? Explain how your faith can be both.

The very first stanza draws from 2 Cor. 4:6, which recalls for the reader Gen. 1:1–3, 14–19.

<sup>3</sup> “Edith Wharton Quotes,” Goodreads, accessed June 28, 2018, [goodreads.com/author/quotes/16.Edith\\_Wharton](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/16.Edith_Wharton).

- Why do you think that God gave light to the world?
- Is darkness something associated with chaos (“without form and void,” Gen. 1:2)?
- Is there a different type of darkness still causing chaos within our world today? What forms might the darkness take on?
- In John 8:12 Jesus calls Himself “the light of the world.” How does Jesus deal with different forms of darkness mentioned in your answer to the previous question?

The second verse draws upon the image in Mal. 4:2, which reminds us that the “sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.” This image is also called upon in a popular Christmas hymn, “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.”

## Making the Connection

The refrain of the hymn is the unifying and foundational theme for the hymn. It points out the object of our faith as well as its substance. The hymn engages themes of Epiphany (the manifestation of Jesus), Advent (the coming of the Christ at the *parousia*) and justification and sanctification.

- Which of the themes speaks the loudest to you as you consider the hymn as a whole?

The refrain encourages us to confess the purity of Christ and the power of His perfect love, which is light to the world. The author calls upon imagery from Revelation that confirms the truth that this light never goes out but shines forever and ever. The refrain nuances in poetic form what St. Paul reminds the Ephesians, “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (3:17a).

## In Closing

It is said that the tune for this song has a childlike simplicity. There is another song which has been sung by children for years and has endeared itself to the hearts of many. It is called “This Little Gospel Light of Mine.”

- Take some time to remember the first verse of this childhood song, sing it and compare it to the refrain from the hymn being studied. Consider the differences and similarities between the two.
- Finally, write a list of the ways you are going to let the light of Christ shine through your heart today and through the days to follow until the next time you meet.

- How does the “Sun of Righteousness” show us the way to the Father? What healing must take place before we can come to the Father?

The final stanza speaks to the Last Day, the coming of Christ. Until that time comes, the letter to the Hebrews (12:1–2) reminds us to persevere in running the race of life before us. The hymn writer was reflecting upon this concept when she penned, “When we have run with patience the race” (st. 3).

- How do you show patience in running the race?
- How does looking to Jesus help you to persevere in running or continuing on instead of giving in or quitting?

- How does the one who separated the darkness, and the one who was at the beginning, who became flesh, bring His light into our lives? Is it through His Word? Is it through Baptism? Is it through the Eucharist? Is it through the consolation of the brethren? Are these Gospel tools meaningful to you?

In the Small Catechism, Luther reminds the Church that the Holy Spirit “has called me by the Gospel ... in the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith” (*LSB*, p. 323).

- Can you walk as a child of the light without “the Light” as a part of your life?
- In the end, is the desire to walk as a child of the light a response to God’s grace already at work in you and begun at Baptism?

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 411.

### Prayer

O God, You have commanded us to love You above all things and our neighbors as ourselves. Grant us the Spirit to think and do what is pleasing in Your sight, that our faith in You may never waver and our love for one another may not falter; 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 25A).

# The Law of God Is Good and Wise

Lutheran Service Book 579 | study by Shawn L. Kumm

## Introduction

People look in mirrors to make sure everything is in place — coiffed hair, straight tie, no spinach in the teeth. A mirror doesn't lie. It simply reflects back what is before it.

"Mirror, mirror, on the wall...." Well, you know how the rest goes. The answer from the mirror is honest, too honest in fact, for the person looking in. The message from the mirror is difficult to bear. It is brutal, disturbing — and true. So is the Law of God when it acts as a mirror before our sin. We are shown exactly what we look like — fallen, soiled, sinful. This is not good news.

- When has a mirror been helpful to you? When has it not?

## Exploring the Scriptures

The Gospel appointed for today and this hymn are suited well for each other. Read Matt. 22:34–46.

- In verse 36, does the lawyer ask a Law question or a Gospel question? How does Jesus do on the answer? In what way was the lawyer's question a "dead-end" question?
- Jesus always asks the perfectly timed and most fitting questions. In verses 42–45, does Jesus ask Law questions or Gospel questions?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Though born into an impoverished family, Matthias Loy (1828–1915) was not poor in the Christian faith. His father showed no interest to his Christian upbringing, but Loy's mother, in the way of Lois and Eunice with Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5), brought the riches of the Word of God to Loy's ears and heart. He also received instruction in "the Bible in miniature," that is, Luther's Small Catechism.

- If you were so blessed to learn God's Word at a young age, what have been some of the benefits to you?
- What challenges continue to exist in bringing God's Word to the ears and hearts of children?

The influence of the Small Catechism is later shown not only in the hymns Loy wrote but also the hymns he chose to translate from German into English (for those included in *LSB*, see p. 1000 of the hymnal). His apprenticeship in his early teen years to a printer, his studies in Latin and Greek, his bilingual skills in German and English and the

- Where in the liturgy does the Law do its "mirror" work?

"Law" in the broad, wide sense means the entire Word of God. In the proper, narrow sense, "Law" means God's perfect word of demand or requirement. Fallen humanity is incapable of keeping the Law.

"Gospel" in the broad, wide sense means the entire Word of God; the term also refers collectively and individually to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. In the proper, narrow sense, "Gospel" means the work of Jesus Christ especially upon the cross for the forgiveness of sins for all humanity, which is a free, unearned and undeserved gift.

- Jesus quotes these words from Ps. 110:1, "The Lord said to my Lord. ..." Who is the second "Lord" David writes about? Jesus answered the Pharisees' question. Why couldn't the Pharisees answer His?
- How does the third line from verse 44, "until I put your enemies under your feet," fulfill Gen. 3:15? How does the cross become evident in this?

encouragement of pastors prepared Loy for a distinguished career not only as a pastor himself, but as a writer, editor, professor and president of both a seminary and his church body, the Ohio Synod.

- In what ways is a pastor's encouragement to young men to become pastors important?

### Text

The Law is understood to have three purposes. The first three stanzas of *LSB* 579 follow this classic Lutheran understanding of the Law.

Stanzas 1 and 4 both describe the Law used as a *curb*. This is the Law that still exists, albeit imperfectly, in the hearts of all people. This use of the Law keeps society from disintegrating. See 1 Tim. 1:9 and Rom. 2:14–15.

- So, you're driving down the street. What benefit is the street curb to you?
- In what ways does the first use of the Law serve you?

Stanza 2 and 5 both describe the Law used as a *mirror*. This is the use described in the introduction above. See Rom. 3:20–26 and James 2:10.

- How does Loy use the words of stanza 2 to convey the Law as a mirror?
- With which words in stanza 5 does Loy use the language of Rom. 3:20–26?

Stanza 3 describes the Law used as a *guide*. Here, though, we need to remember that the proper keeping of the Law by God's people only comes after the forgiveness of sins, the clear and certain Gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, grounded in the fact that our Savior has done

what we could not and cannot do. See Heb. 11:6; John 15:5; and John 6:63.

- According to Rom. 7:20–8:14, upon whose help does St. Paul depend? In what ways do St. Paul's words describe your own baptismal life?

Even though Matthias Loy wrote a separate hymn to describe and teach the Gospel (*LSB* 580), in this hymn (*LSB* 579) he does not risk leaving you with only the Law.

- In what ways does stanza 6 bring you the clear Gospel?
- How clearly does this stanza reflect the following passages: Eph. 2:8–9; Rom. 10:4; and Ps. 32:1–2?

## Making the Connection

The person in the mirror who *is* perfect is none other than your Savior Christ Jesus. What is shown is disturbing and brutal in another way. We are shown the Son of God beaten, battered and crucified on a cross for us, *for you*. The demands of God's perfect Law were exacted upon the perfect Son of God, who kept the Law perfectly for you and for me. That is Good News; that is the Gospel.

- In addition to its place as the hymn of the day, where else in a worship service would be a good place to sing this hymn, “The Law of God Is Good and Wise?” Discuss the merits of singing this hymn as an opening hymn, a distribution hymn or as a closing hymn.
- Discuss this hymn in light of Baptism, Absolution and the Lord's Supper. What comfort do you receive from each of these Means of Grace when confronted with the Law?

## In Closing

The proper distinction of Law and Gospel is a most precious doctrine to Evangelical Lutherans. The Formula of Concord confesses:

“The doctrines of the Law and the Gospel may not be mixed and confused with each other. What belongs to the one may not be applied to the other. When that happens Christ's merit and benefits are easily hidden and the Gospel is again turned into a doctrine of the Law, as happened in the papacy.

For then Christians are deprived of the true comfort they have in the Gospel against the Law's terrors, and the door is again opened in God's Church to the papacy. Therefore, the true and proper distinction between the Law and the Gospel must be taught and preserved with all diligence” (FC SD V 27, p. 557).

And so it is taught, preserved — and reflected in this hymn!

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 579. Also consider singing Loy's “The Gospel Shows the Father's Grace” (*LSB* 580) as the complement to “The Law of God Is Good and Wise.”

### Prayer

O God, You have commanded us to love You above all things and our neighbors as ourselves. Grant us the Spirit to think and to do what is pleasing in Your sight, that our faith in You may never waver and our love for one another may not falter; 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 25A).



# Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide

**Lutheran Service Book 585** | study by Tim Pauls

## Introduction

Are you sure? How can you be sure?

Sometimes, uncertainty isn't a big deal. Suspense can even add a thrill, as in an overtime game or a well-crafted movie. But there are some times that doubt and uncertainty are no good at all. For instance, you want to be sure of the answers to the following questions:

- Am I certain that God has forgiven me?
- Am I certain that I am going to heaven?

- Am I confident that my church is teaching the right things?
- Am I sure that the Lord is with me?

In the centuries since Christ's death and resurrection, the Church has continued to survive through persecution, war, fallen empires and all sorts of uncertainties.

Throughout, however, Christians have always been confident of Jesus' grace and presence. How? That's the focus of our hymn.

## Exploring the Scriptures

The title for this hymn, and the comfort that fills all of its stanzas, finds its origin in Luke 24:13–35. Read that passage and consider the following questions.

- The two men were talking in verse 14 about “all these things that had happened.” What things had just happened (vv. 19–24)?
- Though the Bible doesn't specifically say, what would you suppose their mood to be?
- For what did Jesus admonish them in verse 25? What did He next interpret to them in verse 27?
- As they reached home, they asked Jesus to stay. When were they finally sure of His identity (vv. 30, 35)?

- While they were still on the road, what first affected their faith (v. 32)?

Though woven into the hymn, Luke 24:13–35 isn't this Sunday's Gospel lesson; Matt. 23:1–12 is.

- Read Matt. 23:1–12. Of what does Jesus accuse the scribes and Pharisees in verse 3? What about verse 4?
- Who is the one instructor (v. 10), and how does He instruct? Read Ps. 119:105.
- Is the ultimate goal of this instruction obedience or salvation? Read John 20:31.

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

The two authors of this hymn make for an odd couple that highlights the need for Christians to remain faithful to the Word of God.

Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) was a brilliant scholar whose studies and writings played an enormous role in the Reformation. He still bears the moniker “the teacher of Germany.” However, Melanchthon also displayed timidity and a willingness to compromise and Luther repeatedly had to encourage him to be strong and steadfast. As time continued, however, his weaknesses led him to publish documents which compromised scriptural doctrine. Notably, for our purposes, he altered the Augsburg Confession in 1540 to make it more agreeable to the Calvinists.

Nicolaus Selnecker (1532–1592) was one of Melanchthon's favorite students. He was ordained in 1558 and served as a court preacher in Dresden; however, his defense of Lutheran doctrine against the Crypto-Calvinists led to

his departure. Theological disputes led again to his exit from his professorship at the University of Jena, though he became a professor of theology at Leipzig University, where he assisted in preparing the Formula of Concord. In 1588, he was removed by a ruler who favored Calvinism; he was restored following the ruler's death, but died in 1592.

Our hymn was thus penned by a teacher and his pupil, by one who was willing to compromise doctrine and one who was not. In fact, Selnecker suffered at the hands of those whom Melanchthon tried to accommodate.

- Read Gal. 2:4–5. Paul refused to compromise with those who had different beliefs. What was at stake? What was he trying to preserve?
- Read 1 Tim. 6:3–5. When is it a good time to change one's beliefs, and what is the standard for doing so (v. 3)?

- What is always to be the basis for compromise or refusal to compromise? See Titus 1:9.

### Text

It is fitting to note that in this hymn, the same two words appear in each of the six stanzas: “Your” and “Word” (or “words”). Read stanza 1.

- For what do we pray in the first two lines, and then the last two?
- How are these two requests related? Read Rom. 10:6–9 and John 1:14. For which Word do you pray? Can they be separated?

Stanza 2 begins with the mention of “these last days of great distress.”

- Jesus mentions some of the causes of such distress in Matt. 24:4–13. What does He list?
- Reflecting on your own life, what causes distress for you?
- In Matt. 24:13, Jesus promises, “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” In stanza 2 of the hymn, for what purpose do we pray for “true steadfastness”? Why?

The Word of God is not just for believers as we await the Lord’s return, but for all those in “each dark and loveless place,” as stanza 3 declares. Furthermore, note that this Word delivers “saving grace.”

## Making the Connection

The gracious presence of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is the comfort and confidence of the Christian. Our Savior is not far away, rooting for us from the bleachers; rather, wherever the Word is, Jesus is there, too.

- Read Matt. 28:18–20. To what does Jesus add His Word, and what does He then promise in verse 20?

## In Closing

Furthermore, Christ speaks His truth, His Gospel, in His Word. Foes like the devil or your old sinful heart will constantly accuse you that you’re not forgiven, that Jesus would never come near a sinner like you. That is when you hear and speak Christ’s Word all the more, because He declares the truth that you are forgiven. Thus, in the words of 1 John 2:28, “And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming.”

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 585.

- What is the significance of tongues of fire and boldness? Read Acts 2:1–11. When were literal “tongues as of fire” given by God to Christians, and what did they next do?
- What was the response of those who heard in Acts 2:41–42? How is this like the two men of Emmaus in Luke 24:13–35? How is it like a Divine Service with Holy Communion?

Stanzas 4 and 5 mention some of the enemies of God’s Word.

- Who is the enemy in stanza 4?
- Read Eph. 6:14–17. Of the “armor of God” listed, what is the one offensive weapon? Don’t all of the other gifts listed come from this, too?
- What are the enemies in stanza 5?
- Read Heb. 4:12. How does the Word cut through these foes?

Finally, stanza 6 declares that the Word alone is “our heart’s defense” and “the Church’s glorious confidence.”

- Read John 8:31–32. Of what are we confident as we abide in His Word?
- Read 1 John 2:28. How long does this confidence last?

- Read 1 Cor. 11:23–26. To what does Jesus add His Word? How is He then present?

We share this with the two on the road to Emmaus, as well as the newly baptized Christians at Pentecost: Christ makes Himself known to us in His Word and in “the breaking of the bread.”

### Prayer

Merciful and gracious Lord, You cause Your Word to be proclaimed in every generation. Stir up our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that we may receive this proclamation with humility and finally be exalted at the coming of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 26A).

# Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying

Lutheran Service Book 516 | study by Randy Wurschmidt

## Introduction

We all tend to be fascinated with the end times, what will happen on the Last Day. Every pastor knows that he will be asked to teach a class on Revelation at some point. Piles of books and movies fantasize about mayhem and destruction: obliteration by asteroid or earthquake, or maybe being left behind in a doomed airliner. The apostles were fascinated by this, too, so they asked Jesus, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3).

Our Lord is clear on this, and so at Augsburg in 1530, the reformers were able to state from Scripture, “Our churches teach that at the end of the world Christ will appear for judgment and will raise all the dead. He will give the godly and elect eternal life and everlasting joys, but He will

condemn ungodly people and the devils to be tormented without end” (AC XVII 1–3, 40).

Death and judgment weigh on the minds of almost all people; the hymn we will study focuses primarily on the joy and comfort that Christians look forward to, even in the face of catastrophe. For we hope in things to come, rather than in things present.

- From your experience in talking to others, what are some different beliefs that people have about death and judgment on the Last Day?
- Have you ever known anyone whose faith and calm in the face of death was an inspiration to you?

## Exploring the Scriptures

The Gospel for the Last Sunday of the Church Year is a familiar parable, one taught in the context of what is sometimes called the Little Apocalypse. For two whole chapters, Jesus answers the question the apostles asked above. Read Matt. 25:1–13.

- Who are the two groups of virgins and what makes some of them foolish?
- Verses 11 and 12 might sound harsh to our modern ears. But many times throughout the Bible, God’s judgment

is shown as being final and complete. What are some examples you can think of?

The parable is told in the context of a wedding: the ten virgins are waiting for the bridegroom to lead them to the banquet. Read Rev. 19:6–9.

- What does it mean that the Bride “has made herself ready”? See verse 8.
- How should you respond to the invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Philipp Nicolai (1556–1608) was a pastor in the town of Unna, Westphalia, in the western part of Germany. From July 1597 until January 1598, plague raged through the town, taking 1300 of his parishioners. During this terrible time, Pastor Nicolai presided over as many as thirty burials a day; in one particularly awful week, 170 perished. From the window of his parsonage, overlooking the church cemetery, Nicolai wrote a series of meditations for the comfort of the congregation. He called the collection *Freudenspiegel des Ewigen Lebens* (*Mirror of Joy of Eternal Life*), saying,

“There seemed to me to be nothing more sweet, delightful and agreeable than the contemplation of the noble, sublime doctrine of Eternal Life obtained through the Blood of Christ. This I allowed to dwell in my heart day

and night, and searched the Scriptures as to what they revealed on this matter.”<sup>4</sup>

He took this tragedy, and rather than preaching the Law to them, he gave them the Gospel. Surely they were scared — so was he — and he preached the comfort of Christ crucified for their sins and the promise of eternal life in heaven.

Along with the meditations, Nicolai wrote the two hymns for which he is most remembered, this one, and “O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright” (LSB 395). He appended them to the end of the collection, and they have remained in not only the Lutheran church since then, but also in the hymnals of many other denominations.

<sup>4</sup> “Philipp Nicolai,” Hymnary.org, accessed June 28, 2018, [hymnary.org/person/Nicolai\\_P](http://hymnary.org/person/Nicolai_P).

- Consider how such a disaster would affect this congregation. What resources would you turn to in such a time?

### Text

Prepare. Watch. Expect. The full title of the hymn reads: “Wake, Awake: Of the voice at Midnight and the Wise Virgins who meet their Heavenly Bridegroom.” Nicolai’s hymn is only about the wise virgins, the ones prepared with flasks of oil, the ones who, despite the delay of the Bridegroom, remained steadfast at their post and waited diligently for His arrival. At midnight came the voice at last, “The Bridegroom comes, awake!” (st. 1). Nicolai keeps his focus on this hope rather than on the fate of the foolish virgins who wandered off for more oil at precisely the wrong time. Read or sing the first two stanzas and consider the following:

- To whom are the watchmen calling?
- Who is meant by “Jerusalem”? Who is meant by “Zion”?

In *Lutheran Worship* 177, the last lines of the second stanza are translated as:

“We answer all  
In joy your call,  
We follow to the wedding hall.”

## Making the Connection

As we end one Church Year and prepare to begin another, our hymns reflect on both the second coming of our Lord and the first. The hymns for the end of the church year and for Advent are often interchangeable.

As we prepare for Jesus to return in judgment, we also prepare to remember Emmanuel, God born in the flesh to dwell among us. We have come full circle. God has come and He will come again.

## In Closing

In the Nicene Creed we confess, “He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead” (*LSB*, p. 158). We confess this not out of fear, but out of hope, in order to remember that our Lord has promised to return, to raise our bodies into heaven, to bring us around the throne and be with Him in eternity.

Without the forgiveness of sins, this would not be possible. Without Christ’s death on the cross, this would not be possible. For without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:22). And without the forgiveness of sins, there is no life. Thanks be to God that He has given us new life in Holy Baptism, in the Holy Supper and in the forgiveness of sins.

- How does the current translation (which reflects the German much better) change our understanding of this stanza?
- What is the “Supper” we are singing about?

Now sing or read the third stanza. The heavenly imagery in this stanza is especially rich. Read Rev. 7:9–17.

- What is the joy that awaits us in heaven?
- In which part of the Divine Service do we say that heaven and earth meet? How does this relate to the hymn?

Go to Nicolai’s other hymn, *LSB* 395, and scan through the second and third stanzas. Both hymns emphasize the coming of the Lord in glory as the Bridegroom. The two hymns together are often referred to as the King and Queen of the Lutheran chorales. Both in the majesty of their tunes (which were also composed by Pastor Nicolai) and in the comfort of their words, they outline for us the joy that awaits us in eternal life.

- What does this mean for the Christian then? Should we fear death? Why or why not?

- As we wait for Jesus to return, in what ways do we prepare, watch and wait? What is the danger of being unready?
- Even as Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, He is also present among us now. Name some ways in which that is true.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 516.

### Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, so govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your glorious return, we may persevere in both faith and holiness of living; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 29B).

# The Day Is Surely Drawing Near

Lutheran Service Book 508 | study by Allen D. Lunneberg

## Introduction

Whereas the Last Sunday of the Church Year will proclaim and celebrate the promised victory of eternal life for all who by faith confessed Jesus as their Savior, this next-to-last Sunday sounds a solemn warning to all who have not yet come to that faith and confession. Our hymn of the day describes the Last Day both as something to be feared for those who have neglected or rejected God's invitation of grace, and as a treasured promise and goal for those who

wait and pray in confident faith. In a day when so many are ignorant of or even reject God's plan revealed in His Word, the Bible, we point to Jesus who spoke plainly regarding His return, the Day of Judgment, and the deliverance available to all by faith in Him.

- How do you imagine most people think about the end of the world or the end of their lives? Or do they think about it at all? Why or why not?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Read Matt. 25:31–46.

Angels show up at every major step forward in God's plan of salvation. Here they will accompany the return of Jesus on the Last Day as the last major step in God's plan. "All the nations" will be gathered, that is, everyone who ever lived will be raised with their bodies. Then "he will separate people one from another ... the sheep from the goats" (v. 32).

- When does "the judgment" actually happen? See 2 Cor. 6:2.

The proceedings begin with the sheep, the righteous. A summary of their good works is listed.

- How is this not to be interpreted as salvation by works? Why are the works mentioned? Hint, see James 2:18, 22, 26.
- What detail here shows that the good works of a Christian's active faith are almost automatic and certainly not kept record of by the Christian?

To the "goats" (unbelievers) on His left the King says, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). Sin results in separation. Unrepented sin results in eternal separation. What makes the judgment of hell most agonizing and fearful is that "the eternal fire" was not prepared for people to be there in the first place; a detail that supports the universal

claim of John 3:16, that God so loved the whole world, not just part of it.

Next, read 1 Thess. 4:13–18.

The question was, "When the Lord returns, when will the dead be raised, and will we who are still alive have to die first in order to be raised?" St. Paul uses the word "sleep" to describe the death of a Christian. His goal is "that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope" (v. 13). "Encourage one another with these words" (v. 18).

If you have a King James Bible (KJV), you need to know that the word "prevent" in v. 15 is a literal translation of the Latin *praevenio*. Whereas today the word prevent means to stop something, this word originally meant to precede, or go before. This is how modern translations have it. The point is that we who are alive when the Lord returns will not precede, or go before, those who have fallen asleep. It all happens at once, in the "twinkling of an eye." The dead are raised first, then we who are alive will be changed (1 Cor. 15:52).

- Describe what it means to grieve the death of a loved one but not "as others do who have no hope."
- Do you think the warning of hell and eternal punishment for unbelievers is necessary?
- Do you think the return of Christ is coming soon? See Rev. 22:7, 12, 20.
- What is the difference between the day of the death of a Christian and the Last Day?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

This hymn appeared first as an anonymous text in 1565. In 1586, however, a Lutheran pastor, Bartholomäus Ringwaldt (1532–1599), revised it, calling it "a hymn about Judgment Day." It quickly became increasingly popular and sung

frequently, especially as the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) caused many to think that the Last Day was presently at hand.



- Is church attendance larger during wartime or peacetime? Why?
- What causes people these days to think that the world is coming to an end?

### Text

The original seven stanzas have been restored to *LSB*. Only four of the seven stanzas, however, appeared in *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978) and in *Lutheran Worship* (1982), namely, stanzas 1, 2, 6 and 7.

- What do the formerly missing stanzas (3–5) have in common?
- Why do you think these stanzas were removed in the 1978 and 1982 hymnals?

In stanza 1, that “fright shall banish idle mirth” almost goes without saying as the very “powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Luke 21:26). No one will be ignorant of what is happening when the Lord returns (1 Thess. 4:13–18; Mark 14:62; Matt. 16:27; Rev. 1:7).

Stanza 2 begins with the sounding of “the final trumpet,” the sound that accompanies the Lord’s return (Zech. 9:14; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16). The resurrection of those who have died and the instant change of those who are still alive is described.

“The books” of stanza 3 refer to the record of human activity. See Matt. 25:31–46; Rev. 20:12–15; Dan. 7:9–10; Matt. 16:27; and Rev. 22:12.

## Making the Connection

With its sobering imagery and words of warning for all who would ignore, neglect or reject God and His gracious plan of salvation, this hymn helps us sing with calm confidence in God’s promise of salvation by simple faith in Christ and reliance on His Word and grace. In this faith we remain vigilant and ready for our Lord’s return and the culmination of our deliverance from sin, the devil and death.

## In Closing

With thanksgiving and faith in the whole story of God’s grace in Christ, which we have reviewed in the past liturgical year, we sing with confidence and joy of our final deliverance and hope of eternal life.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 508.

- Will a person have to “wait and see” what the verdict will be? Why or why not?
- What is the purpose of “the books”?

Stanza 4 is devastating Law describing the biblical truth for those who “scorned” the Lord and “despised His precious Word,” preferring “carnal pleasures” and “earthly treasures.” The “delivery” to Satan is described in Matt. 25:41 and Rev. 20:15.

- What “tool” or procedure does the Church have to call a Christian back from falling away and despising God’s Word? See Matt. 18:15–20; 1 Cor. 5:1–5; and 2 Cor. 2:6–11.

Stanzas 5–7 spring from the Gospel. Stanza 5 describes the confidence of faith in the gift of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. For the Christian there is no more condemnation possible (Rom. 8:1–2) because of Jesus’ salvation (Heb. 2:14–15; Gal. 3:13; 1 Peter 1:18–19; 2:24). Since Baptism, our names have been recorded in the Lamb’s “Book of Life” (Rev. 3:5; 20:12; Dan. 12:1).

The confidence of faith begins to turn to prayer in stanza 6, relying on Jesus’ promise to intercede for us before the Father’s throne (Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1; Is. 53:12; Luke 23:34; Heb. 9:24). We are saved by the “blood and merit” of Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19) and numbered with “all His saints in that blest place” (Rev. 7:9–17) where “we shall see Him face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12).

Finally, stanza 7 is a prayer for Jesus’ return and our endurance.

- Do you think the return of Christ and our final endurance should occupy our attention and our prayers more than it does?
- Our receiving the Lord’s body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar is a proclamation of His death until He comes (1 Cor. 11:26). How does it also speak of His resurrection, ascension and coming again?

### Prayer

O Lord, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Your just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with You forever hereafter; 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 the Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Trinity).



# The Head That Once Was Crowned with Thorns

Lutheran Service Book 532 | study by Scott R. Schilbe

## Introduction

Royalty intrigues us. The lives of kings and queens fascinate us. Though the United States has no royalty of its own, Americans do keep a close watch on Britain's royals. But in the absence of an official royal family, Americans tend to view celebrities and some government leaders as a type of "royalty."

- How would you react if you saw your favorite movie star?

- Why do you think Americans are enthralled with the homes, clothing and behavior of royalty and of celebrities?

While we do not live in a monarchy, today's hymn reminds us that we do claim a royal figure. We claim the "King of kings" as our own. Our King isn't a political king and He hasn't always been an exalted one. His head was once crowned with thorns.

## Exploring the Scriptures

Today's hymn describes Jesus' position sitting at the Father's right hand. In other words, the hymn refers to the ascended Jesus Christ.

- According to Eph. 1:20–23, what privilege does Jesus presently enjoy?
- How does Rev. 5:1–14 describe Jesus' ascension from heaven's view?

The Gospel appointed for today points us to Judgment Day, the day when Jesus will return to "judge the living and the dead" (*LSB*, p. 159).

- Read Matt. 25:31–46. What clues in the reading indicate that the parable's context is the final judgment?
- What is the inheritance that those who trust in Christ receive at Christ's second coming? Read Matt. 25:34 and Rev. 21:6–7.
- How does Paul relate the events of the Last Day in 1 Cor. 15:20–28, the appointed Epistle?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Thomas Kelly (1769–1855) was ordained in the Church of Ireland (Anglican). Kelly had many talents, especially the talent of hymn writing. Regarded as one of the best writers of hymns in English, Kelly wrote over seven hundred hymns, four of which are in *LSB*. Kelly included today's hymn, "The Head That Once Was Crowned with Thorns," in his fifth edition of *Hymns on Various Passages of Scripture* (1820).

Kelly's hymn is based on Heb. 2:10, but it's also based on a lengthy poem by the English clergyman John Bunyan (1628–1688). In fact, the hymn's first stanza is nearly identical to a section included in Bunyan's poem entitled *One Thing Is Needful, or Serious Meditations Upon the Four Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell*.

### Text

Using Bunyan's thoughts for stanza 1, Kelly combines two images of Jesus into one line: suffering Jesus and victorious Jesus.

- Read Matt. 27:29. What did the soldiers twist together that served as a symbol of Jesus' suffering?
- Read again Revelation 5:1–14, noting especially verses 11–13. How do the "myriads of myriads" confess Jesus' victory over sin and death?
- How does Kelly describe the "perfect" founder of salvation (Heb. 2:10) in stanza 1?

Stanza 3 describes the exalted Jesus as our joy.

- What do you think Kelly means when he writes that Jesus is the "Joy of all who dwell above, / The Joy of all below"? Who dwells above and below?
- Read 1 John 4:9 and John 17:6. How does God manifest His love to us? And who are the recipients of this manifestation?
- Why is God's name so precious? What does God's name convey? Read Matt. 1:21; Matt. 28:19; 1 Kings 8:29, 50; Acts 4:12; and Acts 10:43.

The hymn's mood changes in stanzas 4–6. Here, Kelly poignantly depicts reality for Christians. True, the ascended Jesus is “Joy” for Christians. Yet Christians also follow Jesus’ example of suffering.

- According to John 15:18–21 and 1 Peter 4:13–14, why should Christians not be surprised with the idea that they will suffer?

## Making the Connection

Grasping the image of our crucified but now ascended Jesus helps us in times of our own suffering. For we know that the one whom the Father has made perfect through suffering (Heb. 2:10) will perfect us in the life of the world to come.

## In Closing

Royalty does captivate our attention! The royalty of our King of kings and Lord of lords who claims authority over all things should most definitely claim our attention throughout life. His cross is our everlasting theme and the means by which we will reign with God forever and ever (Rev. 22:5).

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 532.

- What is the benefit of suffering? Read Phil. 3:10–11 and 1 Peter 3:14.
- Yet the time of suffering is brief compared to eternity. Comment on 2 Cor. 1:5 and Rom. 8:17.

- How does Christ’s life as explained in Phil. 2:5–11 give us motivation to focus on our “King of kings” and “Lord of lords” (st. 2) during our present problems?
- When Jesus descends to earth for the final judgment, in what do we place our hope (st. 6)?

### Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Palm Sunday/Sunday of the Passion).

# A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

Lutheran Service Book 656/657 | study by Marion Lars Hendrickson

## Introduction

Martin Luther (1483–1546) wrote a poem to serve as the preface to Joseph Klug’s *Geistliche Lieder*, revised and published in Wittenberg in 1543. In his poem, Luther wrote, in part, “Of all the joys that are on earth / Is none more dear nor higher worth, / Than what in my sweet songs is found / And instruments of various sound. / Where friends and comrades sing in tune, / All evil passions vanish soon. ... The heart grows still when I am heard, / And opens to God’s Truth and Word.”

Luther’s own hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” has captured these very sentiments over the five centuries since he wrote the text and composed the tune.

- What are some of the feelings you have when you sing this hymn? How do the text and music together contribute to these feelings?
- Describe the image that comes to mind when you think of the word “fortress” in this hymn.

## Exploring the Scriptures

Luther’s famous hymn is inspired by the words of Psalm 46 and the comfort Luther himself found in this psalm. Read Ps. 46:1–3.

- In the opening verse, the writer states his confidence. What do you think is the basis for his confidence? If your answer is “experience,” what sorts of experiences might they have been? If your answer is “faith,” what is the source of such faith?
- Verses 2–3 use parallel thoughts to emphasize a major point. If the writer has events in Israel’s history in mind, what might some of them be? Although written long before the New Testament era, what are some events in the Gospels or in Acts in which these words of Psalm 46 could come to mind?
- Read Ps. 46:4–7. Jerusalem, Israel’s capital and the site of the temple, had springs of water supplying the city but no river flowing through it. What could the writer have in mind with verse 4? The prophets wrote of such a stream in Jerusalem. Read Joel 3:18 and Zech. 14:8. What

do the prophets have in mind? See also Rev. 22:1–8. In what ways are these images of the Holy Spirit? What does God’s Spirit have to do with the confidence within this psalm? Based on Ps. 46:4–7, what sort of fortress is God?

- Read Ps. 46:8–11. In the third part of the psalm, the writer invites the reader to meditate, “Come, behold the works of the LORD.” In this psalm, the writer points to the end of war and conflict as an act of God. What are some other possible “acts of God” on which a person could meditate beneficially?
- Verse 10 suggests the outcome of such meditation. Do you agree? Are the words of verse 10 words of fear or of praise? Or both? Why? To whom is God saying, “Be still” — the noisy world or the person of faith in the noisy world? Why? Read Mark 4:35–41. Notice any similarities?
- The final verse repeats the theme. After all has been said, what sort of fortress is God?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

While Luther’s hymn has been employed in triumphal ways — the Swedish Lutheran king Gustavus Adolphus made his army sing this hymn before the Battle of Leipzig in 1631; the 19th-century German literary figure Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) called it the Marseillaise of the Reformation — Luther himself called it a hymn of comfort. In the period 1527–31, when the hymn began to appear in a number of hymnals, Luther was surrounded by troubles. In 1527, 10 years had passed since Luther posted his 95 Theses in Wittenberg. During this time and after, he was buffeted by theological and political storms. His own life was in danger

from the empire, from Rome and from outbreaks of the plague. The darkness of depression often closed in on him.

- What are some major cataclysms of the present day that could send a person to seek the comfort expressed in Luther’s hymn?
- What sort of personal troubles — physical, emotional, spiritual — could also find comfort in this hymn?

Whenever Luther’s world would “roar and foam” like the waters in Ps. 46:3, he would invite his friends to join him in singing this hymn. In 1530 at Coburg, while awaiting

the outcome of the Diet of Augsburg, Luther sang his hymn often, perhaps daily.

- What is the comfort in the phrase “He’s by our side” (*LSB* 656:4)?
- Luther mentions “weapons of the Spirit” (*LSB* 657:4). What might these be?

What phrases in the hymn are helpful when a person’s troubles are of long duration or an end to them is not in sight? What difference does it make, do you think, singing the hymn rather than simply reading the text?

### Text

While Luther found inspiration for his hymn in the words of Psalm 46, he did not confine himself to that text alone. Read Rev. 19:11–16, where St. John sees a vision of a conquering rider on a white horse, who “in righteousness ... judges and makes war” (v. 11).

- According to stanza 2 of the hymn, who is this rider?
- What other clues to the rider’s identity do you find in Rev. 19:11–16?
- Although the imagery of warfare is violent in this text, how does the rider’s identity interpret that violence? Hint: Think about the crucifixion of Jesus.

Read Eph. 6:10–17. In this epistle, St. Paul uses the imagery of a Roman soldier.

## Making the Connection

In the preface to the Wittenberg edition of his writings, Luther wrote, “I want to point out to you a correct way of studying theology, for I have had practice in that. ... This is the way taught by holy King David ... in the one hundred nineteenth Psalm. There you will find three rules, amply presented throughout the whole Psalm. They are *Oratio* [prayer], *Meditatio* [meditation], *Tentatio* [affliction, trial]” (AE 34:285).

- In what ways is Luther’s hymn a prayer? What is it asking? What hope does it express?

## In Closing

As Luther said in his hymnal preface for Klug’s *Geistliche Lieder*, where people of faith sing hymns, there is joy, “all evil passions vanish soon” and hearts are stilled and open to God’s Word.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 656 or 657.

- How is such imagery helpful and comforting?
- How can military imagery be misused within the Church?

For Martin Luther, the devil was no fictitious figure, but very real and troublesome. Read stanza 3 of the hymn.

- How is the devil portrayed?
- Luther writes in *LSB* 656:3, “This world’s prince may still / Scowl fierce as he will.” What do you think Luther means by “still”? Jesus’ crucifixion is judgment upon Satan. What does this mean for us who live in the world?

Read Rom. 8:31–39. St. Paul’s answer to his list of questions is verse 37: “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

- As the Small Catechism asks, what does this mean?
- Is this an answer based upon experience or on faith?
- Must a Christian have experiences similar to those listed by the apostle in this passage to express the same confidence? Why? Why not?
- If “the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (v. 39) does not eliminate all of our troubles, what does it do? What sort of fortress does this make of God?

- Luther sang this hymn often. What is gained by the repetition? Does singing the text make a difference for meditation?
- Do you think Martin Luther would have expressed the confidence of the Gospel as boldly and forcefully as he did if he had not endured the troubles he faced? How have your own troubles thrown you back onto the promises of God in Christ?

### Prayer

Almighty and gracious Lord, pour out Your Holy Spirit on Your faithful people. Keep us steadfast in Your grace and truth, protect and deliver us in times of temptation, defend us against all enemies, and grant to Your Church Your saving peace; 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 Reformation Day).

# For All the Saints

**Lutheran Service Book 677** | study by Shawn L. Kumm

## Introduction

“Saints alive!” someone exclaimed in surprise. Yes, indeed, saints alive. Saints alive here on earth; saints alive also in heaven. Certainly the people of God believe that saints are alive!

All Saints’ Day, which falls on the first day of November, stirs up all kinds of thoughts, memories and ideas about saints.

- What are some common thoughts people have when they hear the word “saint?”

Turn to page xi in the front of *Lutheran Service Book (LSB)*. Here is a list of the saints associated with the life of Christ and the time of the apostles.

- What do we learn about the lives of these saints from the letters “R” and “W” beside their names?

Now turn to pages xii–xiii. Here is a list of saints who span the beginning of time up to recent history.

- Scan through the lists on these two pages. Which names surprise you? Which names are unfamiliar?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Hebrews 12:1–3 is the chief Scripture upon which this hymn is based, but before you read these verses, scan the New Testament list of saints in Hebrews 11.

- Which words are repeated throughout this chapter?

As is true of the people in the lists above, these saints also lived in a tension. That tension is described by the Latin phrase *simul justus et peccator*, simultaneously justified (saint) and sinner.

- Choose two names from Hebrews 11 and discuss how each person was at the same time a sinner and a child of God.

Now read Heb. 12:1–3. The author of Hebrews sees us continuing in the same list of chapter 11.

- Who and what is the focus of faith?
- How is it the writer of Hebrews speaks as if your name is included in this list of believers?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

William Walsham How (1823–1897) was born into a solicitor’s family and grew up in the historic market town of Shrewsbury, England. He spent his years of ministry in rural areas and the impoverished East End of London. In such challenging places How became known as the “children’s bishop.” This title of endearment reflected his great love and attention shown to an often-overlooked group of God’s kingdom. His published works include sermons, poetic verse and a still used volume on Holy Communion. How’s most well-known work, is the hymn “For All the Saints.”

- If you were to write a hymn about saints, what important points would you need to include? Which particular Bible passage would you want to use as the hymn’s foundation?

Originally this hymn was eleven stanzas long, but the three stanzas which reflected the ancient *Te Deum* are traditionally omitted. The remaining eight stanzas of “For All the Saints” give to the worshiper a well-developed theology of both the Church Triumphant, which is comprised of the

saints now gathered into heaven, and the Church Militant, the saints still fighting here on earth.

### Text

Though at first glance this hymn seems to begin with the saints of God, careful observation shows the hymn writer rightly begins by addressing the first two stanzas to the Lord Jesus.

- What comfort do you look forward to in enjoying rest from your labors? See Rev. 21:1–4 for a fuller description of rest.
- In stanza 2 Jesus is called “captain.” Read 1 Tim. 6:12. What is the battle about? See Eph. 2:1–3 for a description of the enemy. Why is it necessary to have Jesus as your captain?

Stanzas 3 and 4 turn our focus from the saints who have gone before us to the saints here on earth and it is among the earthly saints that we are included.

- What caution do we need to keep when considering “the victor’s crown of gold”? Consider what Paul writes in 2 Tim. 2:1–5.
  - Why do we “feebly struggle”? In what ways do you need help? Turn to Is. 35:3–4 and rejoice in God’s promises to you.
- Stanza 5 speaks of the earthly fight of faith as “fierce” and “the warfare” as “long.”
- What makes you weary as you follow your captain, Jesus?

- What are the things of God that embolden and strengthen the saints here on earth? On what basis can St. Paul say what he does in 2 Tim. 4:7?

Stanzas 6–8 draw our eyes to the same rest that began the hymn. The setting of the sun on the lives of those who have died in Jesus is contrasted with the rising of the dead, the resurrection to come, all following the “King of Glory.” Finally, in stanza 8, the “countless host” of heaven are seen gathered around the Triune God.

- What is it about “the calm of paradise” (st. 6) that appeals to you most?

## Making the Connection

Read the appointed Gospel for this day, Matt. 5:1–12. Here Jesus describes your baptismal life centered in His suffering, His death, His resurrection and His ascension.

- At which points does this hymn connect with the Beatitudes? In what ways do these both sing and speak of the same realities?

The important distinction is made that we do not pray *to* the saints nor do we pray *for* the saints, but we do *sing* with the saints and our prayers are joined with theirs. Especially on All Saints’ Day do we also *give thanks* for the saints. For examples see *LSB*, pp. 250–251.

## In Closing

“Our churches teach that the history of saints may be set before us so that we may follow the example of their faith and good works, according to our calling. ... [T]he Scriptures do not teach that we are to call on the saints or to ask the saints for help. Scripture sets before us the one Christ as the Mediator, Atoning Sacrifice, High Priest, and Intercessor [1 Timothy 2:5–6]” (AC XXI 1–2, p. 44).

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 677.

### Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, You knit together Your faithful people of all times and places into one holy communion, the mystical body of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Grant us so to follow Your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living that, together with them, we may come to the unspeakable joys You have prepared for those who love You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for All Saints’ Day).