

Hymns Luther Wrote for Christmas, Easter and Pentecost

Ah, Dearest Jesus, holy Child

This hymn was first used by Martin Luther who set the text to a German folk melody. The text is based on Luke 2:7 making this a popular Christmas Eve song for centuries! "*While they were there the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in swaddling cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*"

The lyrics also appear in the last three verses of the longer hymn of 15 stanzas Luther wrote in 1535, *From Heaven Above to Earth I Come*.

Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled
Within my heart, that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for Thee.

My heart for very joy doth leap,
My lips no more can silence keep;
I, too, must sing with joyful tongue,
That sweetest ancient cradle song.

Glory to God in highest heaven,
Who unto man His Son hath given,
While angels sing with tender mirth,
A glad new year to all the earth.

From Heaven Above to Earth I Come

This hymn was written by Martin Luther for his family's Christmas Eve devotions and was first published in 1535. It is a long hymn of 15 stanzas and Martin Luther originally intended for it to be sung in two parts - verses 1-7 sung by a man dressed as an angel and verses 8-15 by children. The words were originally sung to the tune of the German folk song, *Aus Fremden Landenkommich hier*. This hymn is based on the words of Luke 2:10-14.

*From heaven above to earth I come
To bear good news to every home;
Glad tidings of great joy I bring,
Whereof I now will say and sing:*

*To you this night is born a child
Of Mary, chosen virgin mild;
This little child, of lowly birth,
Shall be the joy of all the earth.*

*This is the Christ, our God and Lord,
Who in all need shall aid afford;
He will Himself your Savior be
From all your sins to set you free.*

*He will on you the gifts bestow
Prepared by God for all below,
That in His kingdom, bright and fair,
You may with us His glory share.*

*These are the tokens ye shall mark:
The swaddling-clothes and manger dark;
There ye shall find the Infant laid
By whom the heavens and earth were made."*

*Now let us all with gladsome cheer
Go with the shepherds and draw near
To see the precious gift of God,
Who hath His own dear Son bestowed.*

*Give heed, my heart, lift up thine eyes!
What is it in yon manger lies?
Who is this child, so young and fair?
The blessed Christ-child lieth there.*

*Welcome to earth, Thou noble Guest,
Through whom the sinful world is blest!
Thou com'st to share my misery;
What thanks shall I return to Thee?*

*Ah, Lord, who hast created all,
How weak art Thou, how poor and small,
That Thou dost choose Thine infant bed
Where humble cattle lately fed!*

*Were earth a thousand times as fair,
Beset with gold and jewels rare,
It yet were far too poor to be
A narrow cradle, Lord, for Thee.*

*For velvets soft and silken stuff
Thou hast but hay and straw so rough,
Whereon Thou, King, so rich and great,
As 'twere Thy heaven, art throned in state.*

*And thus, dear Lord, it pleaseth Thee
To make this truth quite plain to me,
That all the world's wealth, honor, might,
Are naught and worthless in Thy sight.*

*(v. 13) Ah, dearest Jesus, holy Child,
Make Thee a bed, soft, undefiled,
Within my heart, that it may be
A quiet chamber kept for Thee.*

*My heart for very joy doth leap,
My lips no more can silence keep;
I, too, must sing with joyful tongue
That sweetest ancient cradle-song:*

*Glory to God in highest heaven,
Who unto us His Son hath given!
While angels sing with pious mirth
A glad new year to all the earth.*

The power of verse 13 is that the place for Jesus is in my heart. The opportunity of verse 14 is to sing and speak the Good News of verse 15!

Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice

Some believe this is Luther's first hymn because it is filled with about 50 biblical quotations. The hymn gives us a clear understanding of God's plan for our salvation. In these verses we see how God gave birth through the Virgin Mary to Jesus Christ. Clearly, this is the story of the Christian church.

Dear Christians, one and all, rejoice,
With exultation springing,
And, with united heart and voice
And holy rapture singing,
Proclaim the wonders God hath done,
How His right arm the victory won;
Right dearly it hath cost Him.

Fast bound in Satan's chains I lay,
Death brooded darkly o'er me,
Sin was my torment night and day,
In sin my mother bore me;
Yea, deep and deeper still I fell,
Life had become a living hell,
So firmly sin possessed me.

My own good works availed me naught,
No merit they attaining;
Free will against God's judgment fought,
Dead to all good remaining.
My fears increased till sheer despair
Left naught but death to be my share;
The pangs of hell I suffered.

But God beheld my wretched state
Before the world's foundation,
And, mindful of His mercies great,
He planned my soul's salvation.
A father's heart He turned to me,
Sought my redemption fervently:
He gave His dearest Treasure.

He spoke to His beloved Son:
'Tis time to have compassion.
Then go, bright Jewel of My crown,
And bring to man salvation;
From sin and sorrow set him free,
Slay bitter death for him that he
May live with Thee forever.

This Son obeyed His Father's will,
Was born of virgin mother,
And God's good pleasure to fulfill,
He came to be my Brother.
No garb of pomp or power He wore,
A servant's form, like mine, He bore,
To lead the devil captive.

We Praise, O Christ, Your holy name

The first two verses of this hymn date back to 1370. It was one of the first Latin hymns translated into German. Luther added the last five stanzas about the incarnation of Jesus Christ and it was first sung at the Christmas worship in 1523 and published a year later in Luther's first hymn book.

We praise, O Christ, Your holy name.
Truly human child You came,
From virgin born; this Word is true.
Your angels are rejoicing, too. Kyrieleis!

Now in the manger one may see
God's Son from eternity,
The Gift from God's eternal throne
Here clothed in our poor flesh and bone. Kyrieleis!

The virgin mother lulls to sleep
Him who rules the cosmic deep;
This Infant is the Lord of day,
Whom all the turning worlds obey. Kyrieleis!

The Light Eternal, breaking through,
Made the world to gleam anew;
His beams have pierced the core of night,
He makes us children of the Light! Kyrieleis!

The Prince, God's very Son, came here,
Guest among the sons of fear.
His banner leads us out of woe,
And to His royal hall we go. Kyrieleis!

To earth He came so poor to bring
Great compassion as our King
That rich in glory we might stand
With angels in the heav'nly land. Kyrieleis!

Such grace toward us now fills with light
Length and breadth and depth and height!
O endless ages, raise your voice;
O Christendom, rejoice, rejoice! Kyrieleis!

Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands

The text of this Easter hymn is based on the words of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:55:

*"Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"
The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
But thanks be to God!
He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"*

In the final two stanzas, Luther invites us to join with Church of all ages in celebrating this great festival of Easter - the Day of Resurrection! This song is all about Jesus Christ - His grace, His victory, His gift of eternal life to us!!!! Our faith lives and is sustained through our communion with Jesus Christ!

Jesus was in the prison of death for our crimes - and He paid the price for our temptations, sins against holiness, coveting, prejudice, greed, selfishness, and more, The crucifixion and death of Jesus involved a terrible struggle because He is innocent and we are guilty. But it was impossible for death to hold Him, and the reason we sing *Alleluia* (Praise the Lord!) is because we are redeemed and forgiven. When we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior, we receive eternal life!!!

Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands,
for our offenses given;
but now at God's right hand he stands,
and brings us life from heaven;
wherefore let us joyful be,
and sing to God right thankfully
loud songs of Alleluia! Alleluia!

It was a strange and dreadful strife
when life and death contended;
the victory remained with life;
the reign of death was ended.
Stripped of power, no more it reigns,
and empty form alone remains;
death's sting is lost forever! Alleluia!

So let us keep the festival
where to the Lord invites us;
Christ is himself the joy of all,
the Sun that warms and lights us.
By his grace he doth impart
eternal sunshine to the heart;
the night of sin is ended! Alleluia!

Then let us feast this Easter day
on the true bread of heaven;
the Word of grace hath purged away
the old and wicked leaven.
Christ alone our souls will feed;
he is our meat and drink indeed;
faith lives upon no other! Alleluia!

Ah God, from Heaven Look Down and See

Martin Luther wrote this hymn in 1523 at a time when he was faced with the problem of Reformation preachers calling for social reform, the killing of tens of thousands of peasant farmers, and the expansion of the Muslim faith into Eastern Europe by the Ottoman Empire. Luther's words about the precious Word of God assured the people of God's promise, mercy, and grace! The hymn assures people that lying and deceiving are doomed to destruction and faithfulness and truth are protected by God!

This has been a popular hymn for the past 500 years because the text speaks directly to the existence of God! The words in the last verse are the answer to the questions asked by David in the opening verses of Psalm 13.

Ah God, from heav'n look down and see,
And let compassion move Thee,
How few, alas! Thy servants be,
How helpless those who love Thee.
Thy Word is suffer'd not to stand,
And Faith seems quench'd on ev'ry hand
In this dark time of trouble.

False teachings now men spread abroad,
Mere schemes of men's invention,
Not grounded on God's own true Word,
And so they breed dissension;
Their outward seeming may be fair,
But one goes here, another there,
And tends the Church asunder.

Therefore, saith God, I will arise,
These men my poor are wronging,
I hear my people's bitter sighs,
And I will grant their longing;
My striving Word shall take the field,
Shall be the poor man's strength and shield,
And all my foes shall conquer.

As silver that through fire hath passed
Is pure from all its drosses,
So shall God's Word shine forth at last
The brighter for these crosses;
Through trial is its power made known,
Till all men far and near shall own
How pure and strong its glory.

Therefore, O God, preserve it pure
From all that would abuse it,
And in the Faith our hearts secure,
That we may never lose it;
For trouble and rebuke shall be
Among the people,--when we see
Ungodly men exalted.

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and every day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Come, God Creator, Holy Ghost

The origins of this hymn are important because they can be traced back to Charlemagne around the year, 800. The Latin for this text is *Veni Creator Spiritus* (Come, Holy Ghost) and the hymn was translated from Latin to German by Martin Luther in 1524. It is based on Luke 4:18-19. and Isaiah 61:1,2. These verses follow the temptation of Jesus in the desert and are the words Jesus read from the scroll of the prophet, Isaiah at the synagogue in Nazareth.

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor,
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

*Come, God Creator, Holy Ghost,
And visit thou these souls of men;
Fill them with graces, as thou dost,
Thy creatures make pure again.*

*For Comforter thy name we call.
Sweet gift of God most high above,
A holy unction to us all
O Fount of life, Fire of love.*

*Our minds illumine and refresh,
Deep in our hearts let love burn bright;
Thou know'st the weakness of our flesh;
And strengthen us with thy might.*