

Favorite Hymns July 26, 2020

Processional Hymn #362 **“Holy , Holy , Holy”** **Tune: *Nicaea***
A favorite of Jana Libby.

While you read of the story, enjoy this offering by the First Plymouth Church
Lincoln NE Choir and Orchestra

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0SHDNs7Dt5M>

The text was written by Reginald Heber (1783 – 1826), a bright youth, translating a Latin classic into English verse by the time he was seven, entering Oxford at 17, and winning two awards for his poetry during his time there. He was ordained and served a church in the west of England before serving as Bishop of all British India until his death. Two of his other well-known hymns are “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” and “Brightest and Best,”

The tune “Nicaea” was written by John Bacchus Dykes (1823-1876), who at the age of ten became the organist of St. John's in Hull, where his grandfather was vicar. After receiving a classics degree from St. Catherine College, Cambridge, England, he was ordained in the Church of England in 1847. In 1849 he became the precentor and choir director at Durham Cathedral, where he introduced reforms in the choir by insisting on consistent attendance, increasing rehearsals, and initiating music festivals.

Perhaps the most intriguing characteristic of the hymn is how the text does not initiate praise, but instead encourages the singer to join in an endless song. Both Isaiah 6:1-5 and Revelation 4:2-11 inspire this hymn, spanning the Testaments, reminding us that the Trisagion (thrice holy) has been uttered in worship for centuries. Isaiah received his vision in the eighth century B.C.; John the Apostle recorded his revelation in the first century C.E.; while Reginald Heber composed his in the 19th century.

What makes this hymn so special? First, the rhyme scheme is unique since all four lines of each stanza rhyme with the word “holy.” One won’t easily find another hymn written this way. Another reason why “Holy, holy, holy” is such a timeless hymn is its pairing with the well-known tune NICAEA. Named after the Council of Nicaea, where the nature of the Trinity was shaped theologically, NICAEA is also a classic example of Victorian hymn tune writing.

Heber is careful to describe the Trinity without encroaching upon its mystery. This is especially evident with the phrase, “though the darkness hide Thee” in stanza 3, and this separation between God and man is exacerbated by sin (“though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see”). Though we may not see or completely understand the Trinity in its fullness in this lifetime, Heber’s and Dykes’ collaboration reminds us those are not reasons that preclude our worship of God.

Heber intended for “Holy, Holy, Holy,” written for Trinity Sunday, to be sung between the sermon and the creed by his parish in Hodnet. This was iconoclastic at the time, since hymn singing was prohibited in Church of England liturgies. In contrast, the Methodist societies in the eighteenth century were known for their hymn singing, along with the dissenting churches that had been using the hymns of Isaac Watts for nearly one hundred years. Consequently, then, British hymnology scholar J. R. Watson notes Heber was a man who “helped to dispel the idea that hymns were associated with Methodists and extreme Evangelicals” (*Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology*). Unfortunately, he failed to persuade church authorities within the Church of England to grant permission for hymn singing during Sunday services while he was alive.

1 Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee:

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

2 Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

3 Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
though the sinful human eye thy glory may not see,
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
perfect in power, in love, and purity.

4 Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All thy works shall praise thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;

Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

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Sequence Hymn #671 “Amazing Grace” Tune: New Britain
A favorite of Bob Westerberg.

A video of the hymn’s story

<https://www.biography.com/news/amazing-grace-story-john-newton>

Irish bagpipers and orchestra

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsCp5LG_zNE

Judy Collins and the Harlem boys choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5NCyuRhoGY>

"**Amazing Grace**" is a Christian hymn published in 1779, with words written in 1772 by English poet and Anglican clergyman John Newton (1725–1807). Newton wrote the words from personal experience. He had grown up without any particular religious conviction, and was conscripted into service in the Royal Navy. After leaving the service, he became involved in the Atlantic slave trade. In 1748, a violent storm battered his vessel off the coast of County Donegal, Ireland, so severely that he called out to God for mercy. This moment marked his spiritual conversion but he continued slave trading until 1754 or 1755, when he ended his seafaring altogether. He then began studying Christian theology.

"Amazing Grace" was written to illustrate a sermon on New Year's Day of 1773. It is not known if there was any music accompanying the verses; it may have been chanted by the congregation. It debuted in print in 1779 in Newton and Cowper's *Olney Hymns* but settled into relative obscurity in England. In the United States, "Amazing Grace" became a popular song used by Baptist and Methodist preachers as part of their evangelizing, especially in the South, during the Second Great Awakening of the early 19th century. It has been associated with more than 20 melodies. In 1835, American composer William Walker set it to the tune known as "New Britain" in a shape note format. This is the version most frequently sung today.

With the message that forgiveness and redemption are possible regardless of sins committed and that the soul can be delivered from despair through the mercy of God, "Amazing Grace" is one of the most recognizable songs in the English-speaking world.

Here are two verses (verses 5 and 6 originally) that are no longer in use.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease;
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, who call'd me here below,
Will be forever mine.

Another verse was first recorded in Harriet Beecher Stowe's immensely influential 1852 anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Three verses were emblematically sung by Tom in his hour of deepest crisis. He sings the sixth and fifth verses in that order, and Stowe included another verse, not written by Newton, that had been passed down orally in African-American communities for at least 50 years. It was one of between 50 and 70 verses of a song titled "Jerusalem, My Happy Home", which was first published in a 1790 book called *A Collection of Sacred Ballads*:

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise,
Than when we first begun.

Newton joined forces with a young man named William Wilberforce, the British Member of Parliament who led the Parliamentary campaign to abolish the slave trade in the British Empire, culminating in the Slave Trade Act 1807. But Newton did not become an ardent and outspoken abolitionist until after he left Olney in the 1780s; he is not known to have connected writing the hymn known as "Amazing Grace" to anti-slavery sentiments.

In recent years, the words of the hymn have been changed in some religious publications to downplay a sense of imposed self-loathing by its singers. The second line, "That saved a wretch like me!" has been rewritten as "That saved and strengthened me", "save a soul like me", or "that saved and set me free".

The transformative power of the song was investigated by journalist Bill Moyers in a documentary released in 1990. Moyers was inspired to focus on the song's power after watching a performance at Lincoln Center, where the audience consisted of

Christians and non-Christians, and he noticed that it had an equal impact on everybody in attendance, unifying them.

Moyers interviewed Judy Collins, Johnny Cash, opera singer Jessye Norman, Appalachian folk musician Jean Ritchie and her family, white Sacred Harp singers in Georgia, black Sacred Harp singers in Alabama, and a prison choir at the Texas State Penitentiary at Huntsville. Gospel singer Marion Williams summed up its effect: "That's a song that gets to everybody".

The *Dictionary of American Hymnology* claims it is included in more than a thousand published hymnals, and recommends its use for "occasions of worship when we need to confess with joy that we are saved by God's grace alone; as a hymn of response to forgiveness of sin or as an assurance of pardon; as a confession of faith or after the sermon".

Here are the words from the 1982 Hymnal:

1 Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

2 'Twas grace first taught my heart to fear
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!

3 The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

4 Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'tis grace that brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.

5 When we've been there ten thousand years
bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise
than when we first begun.

Recessional Hymn #594 “God of Grace, God of glory” Tune: Cwm Rhondda
A favorite of Annie Dolber and Judy Atkinson.

While you read the hymn’s story, enjoy this rendition by the Virtual Choir Grosse Pointe (Michigan) Memorial Church Virtual Choir, James Biery, organ
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9rWrw3XBO8>.

TEXT: The words were written by Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878 – 1969), who was one of the most prominent liberal ministers of the early 20th century. Although a Baptist, he was called to serve as pastor, in New York City, at First Presbyterian Church in Manhattan's West Village, and then at the historic, inter-denominational Riverside Church in Morningside Heights, Manhattan. This prompted a Time magazine cover story on October 6, 1930 in which Time said that Fosdick:

“...proposes to give this educated community a place of greatest beauty for worship. He also proposes to serve the social needs of the somewhat lonely metropolite. Hence on a vast scale he has built all the accessories of a community church—gymnasium, assembly room for theatricals, dining rooms, etc. ... In ten stories of the 22-story belltower are classrooms for the religious and social training of the young...”

In 1918 he was called to First Presbyterian Church, and on May 21, 1922, he delivered his famous sermon *Shall the Fundamentalists Win?*, in which he defended the modernist position. In that sermon he presented the Bible as a record of the unfolding of God's will, not as the literal "Word of God". He saw the history of Christianity as one of development, progress, and gradual change. Fundamentalists regarded this as rank apostasy, and the battle-lines were drawn.

Fosdick outspokenly opposed racism and injustice. Ruby Bates credited him with persuading her to testify for the defense in the 1933 retrial of the infamous and racially charged legal case of the Scottsboro Boys, which tried nine black youths before all-white juries for allegedly raping white women (Bates and her companion Victoria Price) in Alabama.

Fosdick reviewed the first edition of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* in 1939, giving it his approval. AA members continue to point to this review as significant in the development of the AA movement.

He was a major influence on Martin Luther King Jr, who said that Fosdick was "the greatest preacher of this century."

Tune: Cwm Rhodda was composed by John Hughes (1873 - 1932), a Welshman, who received little formal education; at age twelve he was already working as a doorboy at a local mining company in Llantwit Fardre. He eventually became an official in the traffic department of the Great Western Railway. Much of his energy was devoted to the Salem Baptist Church in Pontypridd. Hughes composed two anthems, a number of Sunday school marches, and a few hymn tunes, of which CWM RHONDDA is universally known; the tune was composed in 1905.

1 God of grace and God of glory,
on thy people pour thy power;
crown thine ancient Church's story;
bring her bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour, for the facing of this hour.

2 Lo! the hosts of evil round us
scorn thy Christ, assail his ways!
From the fears that long have bound us
free our hearts to faith and praise:
grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the living of these days, for the living of these days.

3 Cure thy children's warring madness,
bend our pride to thy control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal, lest we miss thy kingdom's goal.

4 Save us from weak resignation
to the evils we deplore;
let the gift of thy salvation
be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
serving thee whom we adore, serving thee whom we adore.