

**The Christmas Hymns of Martin Luther**  
Holy Trinity Sunday School, Fall 2021

**I. Background and Major Events**

**a. Early Life and Religion** (Excerpts from Roland H. Bainton's "Here I Stand")

**b. Becoming a Monk**

**c. Crisis Again**

**d. Luther Encounters the Bible**

*49 I greatly longed to understand Paul's Epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in the way but that one expression, "the justice of God," because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant.*

*Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that “the just shall live by his faith.” Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the “justice of God” had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven...*

#### **e. Timeline**

1483 - November 10, born in Eisleben, Saxony (modern Germany)

1505 – July 17, lightning strikes near him. In terror of judgment, he vows to go to monastery and abandons law-school. Joins the Augustinian Order in Erfurt Monastery

1507 – May 2 celebrates his first Mass. This becomes a renewal of his crisis of conscience

1508 – Begins study of theology at Wittenburg University

1510 – Walks to Rome where he is disenchanted with the corruption and superstition

1512 – Receives his Doctorate of Theology – becomes to publish writings

1513-17 – lectures on the book of Psalms, Romans, Galatians

October 31, 1517 – posts the 95 theses on the door of the Wittenburg Cathedral in response to Tetzel, the seller of indulgences. These theses mark the beginning of the call of the reform of the church

1520 – Luther burns the Papal Bull, a document telling him to recant or be excommunicated.

1521 – Luther condemned as a heretic

April 17, 1521 – Diet of Worms – Luther publicly refuses to recant. Frederick II of Saxony has Luther “kidnapped” in order to hide him and protect him. Luther begins translating the New Testament into German. This is completed in 1522.

1524 – Peasants’ Revolt in Germany. In 1525 he publishes *Admonition to Peace Concerning the Twelve Articles of the Peasants* and *Against the Murderous and Robbing Hordes of the Peasants*

1524 – Publishes the First Wittenberg Hymnal. (writes *All Praise to Thee, Eternal Lord*)

1525 – June 13, Luther marries Katherine of Bora

1530 - Publication of *Confessio Augustana*: Edited by Luther's friend and associate Philipp Melancthon, these twenty-eight articles described the Lutheran beliefs and practices, and becomes their cornerstone of faith.

(1535 – writes *From Heaven High I Come to You*)

1546 – February 18, Luther dies after 11 years of declining health

## II. The historical context of “All Praise to Thee, Eternal Lord”

### a. The Peasants’ Revolt

### b. Preface to the Wittenburg Hymnal

(<https://www.lutheranchoragebook.com/sources/geystliche-gesangk-buchleyn/>)

That it is good, and pleasing to God, to sing spiritual songs is not, I think, unknown to any Christian, since not only the example of the prophets and kings of the Old Testament (who praised God with singing and music, with poetry and all kinds of stringed instruments), but also the like practice of all Christendom from the beginning, especially in respect to psalms, is known to everyone. Yea, even St. Paul instituted the same in 1 Cor. 14, and to the Colossians he gave the command to sing spiritual songs and psalms from the heart unto the Lord, that thereby God’s Word and Christian doctrine might be in every way furthered and practiced.

For this reason have I too, together with a few others, in order to make a good beginning and to give an incentive to others who can do it better, assembled a few spiritual songs, in order to further and to bring into full play the holy Gospel, which now by God’s grace is risen up again, that we too may boast, as does Moses in his song, Ex. 15, that Christ is our praise and our song, and that we should know nothing to sing or speak other than Jesus Christ our Savior, as Paul saith, 1 Cor. 2.

And furthermore, these songs have also been set in four parts, for no other reason than that I would fain that our youth, who at any rate shall be, and should be, instructed in music and other fine arts, should have something whereby they may rid themselves of amorous and carnal songs, and in their stead learn something wholesome, and so apply themselves to what is good with pleasure, as becometh the young. Also, because I am not of the mind that all arts should be beaten to the ground and made to perish by the Gospel, as some fanatics pretend; but I would fain see all the arts, especially music, in the service of Him who hath given and created them. Therefore I ask that every pious Christian be pleased with this and, according as God hath given him like or greater gifts, help forward my undertaking. As it is, the world is, alas, far too lax and forgetful in training and teaching our poor youth that one should not join in giving his all for the encouragement of the same. God grant us His grace. Amen.

Martin Luther, 1524

Translation based on Richard Massie, Martin Luther’s Spiritual Songs, London, 1854

Revised by Christopher J. Neuendorf, 2018



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# All Praise to Thee, Eternal Lord

*You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor. 2 Cor. 8:9*

1. All praise to thee, e - ter - nal Lord, clothed in a  
 2. Once did the skies be - fore thee bow; a vir - gin's  
 3. A lit - tle child, thou art our guest, that wea - ry  
 4. Thou com - est in the dark - some night to make us  
 5. All this for us thy love hath done; by this to

garb of flesh and blood; choos - ing a man - ger  
 arms con - tain thee now; an - gels who did in  
 • ones in thee may rest; for - lorn and low - ly  
 chil - dren of the light, to make us, in the  
 thee our love is won: for this we tune our

for thy throne, while worlds on worlds are thine a - lone.  
 thee re - joice now lis - ten for thine in - fant voice.  
 • is thy birth, that we may rise to heav'n from earth.  
 realms di - vine, like thine own an - gels round thee shine.  
 cheer - ful lays, and shout our thanks in cease - less praise.

Martin Luther, 1524  
 Tr. in *Sabbath Hymn Book*, 1858

CANONBURY L.M.  
 Robert Schumann, 1839; arr.

# From Heaven High I Come to You

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*The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Luke 2:10*

1. "From heav - en high I come to you, I bring you  
2. "To you this night is born a child of Mar - y,  
3. "This is the Christ, our God and Lord, who in all  
4. "These are the to - kens ye shall mark: the swad - dling

tid - ings good and new; glad tid - ings of great  
chos - en vir - gin mild; this lit - tle child, of  
need shall aid af - ford; he will him - self your  
clothes and man - ger dark; there ye shall find the

joy I bring, where - of I now will say and sing,  
low - ly birth, shall be the joy of all the earth.  
Sav - ior be from all your sins to set you free.  
in - fant laid by whom the heav'ns and earth were made."

5. 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.

6. Welcome to earth, thou noble guest,  
through whom the sinful world is blest!  
In my distress thou com'st to me;  
what thanks shall I return to thee?

Martin Luther, 1535  
Tr. by Catherine Winkworth, 1855, alt.  
All. 1961

VOM HIMMEL HOCH, L.M.  
Attr. to Martin Luther  
V. Schumann's *Geistliche Lieder*, 1539