



## Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain

**Text: St. John of Damascus (670-787)**

**Tune: Jan Roh (1487-1547)**

As we celebrate the season of Easter, one of our joys is sharing the praise of Our Risen Lord with the Church of all ages. In our hymnody we use hymns from all centuries and languages of the Church to celebrate Christ's resurrection. The hymn "Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain" is part of a series written by St. John of Damascus to celebrate Easter.



John of Damascus

St. John of Damascus was one of the last Fathers of the Greek Church, but was one of her greatest poets. John was born into the Mansour family, a prominent family in Damascus. His father was interested in his education and insisted that he be instructed in both the writings of the Greeks and Muslims. It is in this time that John became well-acquainted with the Quran, which he condemns, along with the Islamic religion, in his writings. However, his education was not limited to theology, and he became well-known for his skills in music, astronomy, mathematics, and geometry. Theology was his greatest interest, and he eventually became a monk at Mar Saba and was ordained a priest in 735.

During his retirement, which was spent near Jerusalem, he wrote the majority of his theological works and hymns. His works can be divided into three distinct categories: philosophical summaries, defenses against heresies, and a defense of the orthodox Christian faith. One of his more notable works dealt with the topic of *iconoclasm*, which was a practice of seeing all holy images (paintings, crucifixes, etc.) as sinful and inappropriate for Christians to have.

To defend holy images he wrote *Apologetic Treatises Against Those Decrying Holy Images*. This writing also played a role in the Second Council of Nicaea (held in the year 787), which was convened to deal with the issue of images.

In terms of hymnody, John wrote pieces known as *Canons*, pieces of poetry set to the eight Gregorian modes. His most notable are for Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, though he wrote them for all the Feasts of Christ. The hymn "Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain" is a metrical translation of Ode One of his Paschal (Easter) Canon.

The tune to which we sing this hymn, GAUDEAMUS PARITER, was written by Jan Roh (who also used the pseudonym Johann Horn). Roh was a part of the Bohemian Brethren community, a sort of offshoot of Lutheranism. Though similar to Lutheranism in many doctrinal points, they place a higher importance on how one lives their life over what Christ has done for them. In addition to his musical work, Roh was also a hymnwriter. He has one hymn included in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, "Once He Came in Blessing."



Jan Roh

"Come, You Faithful, Raise the Strain" relies heavily on Exodus 15 and other exodus and Passover imagery. Stanza one sings of God bringing His people through the Red Sea on dry ground. However, the rest of the hymn teaches that these Old Testament events were only foreshadowing what Christ would do for His people by His death and resurrection. This same theme carries into Christ's resurrection. The resurrection isn't about Jesus only, but because Christ has burst His prison, Easter is now the promised resurrection for all the faithful (st. 2). Because of this great joy, Easter is not only the "Queen of Seasons," but is also the "Feast of Feasts" (st. 3). Easter is our confidence because it proves the Father accepted Christ's sacrifice on the cross and guarantees our own resurrection. Because Christ is not a mere mortal, but is fully God and fully man (st. 4), death has no dominion over Him. Because of that, we raise the strain of triumphant gladness (st. 5). We, the true Israel, have been brought into joy from gladness because Christ has destroyed death, and we will live with Him forever.