



## Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty

**Text: Reginald Heber (1783-1826)**

**Tune: John B. Dykes (1823-1876)**

This great Trinity hymn is a metrical paraphrase of Revelation 4:7-11: “The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: ‘You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.’”



Reginald Heber

Reginald Heber was born in Malpas, Cheshire, England, on April 21, 1783. Versification (taking normal writing and turning it into rhymed poetry) was a part of his life from early on, his father supervising his translation of Phædrus’ Latin writings into verse. His childhood was spent in various prestigious schools. In 1800, he began attending Brasenose College, Oxford, his father’s *alma mater*. In his first year there, he earned the Chancellor’s prize for the best Latin verse. At age 17, he wrote another prize-winning poem, entitled *Palestine*. In 1807, Heber became the Vicar (travelling Pastor) of Hodnet, where his family had moved after his father’s death. In April 1809 he married Amelia Shipley. His first hymns were published in 1811-12 in *the English Christian Observer*. In December 1818, his only child died, for which he wrote a hymn, “Thou Art Gone to the Grave.” The next year, Heber began a concerted effort to publish his hymns, and

encouraged his poet friends to contribute laudable hymns for the project, but it was not published until 1827, one year after his death. The released volume of hymns was entitled “Hymns Written and Adapted to the Weekly Service of the Year.” However, before his death, Heber travelled to India. On June 1, 1823 he was consecrated Archbishop at Lambeth and left for India, arriving in October. In India, he ordained the first native Pastor of the Episcopal Church. Heber’s hymns included in *the Lutheran Hymnal* include “Hosanna to the Living Lord,” “Brightest and Best of the Stars of the Morning,” “The Son of God Goes Forth to War,” and “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” in addition to “Holy, Holy, Holy.”

The hymn’s tune, NICAEA, named thus after the Council of Nicaea in 325, at which the Doctrine of the Trinity was firmly established as a necessary article in the Church, against the Arian heresy. John B. Dykes wrote it specifically for Heber’s hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy.” By age 10, Dykes was a church organist, in addition to his skills on piano and violin. During his time at Cambridge University, he co-founded the Cambridge University Musical Society. In 1861 he was awarded the award of Doctor of Musical Arts by the University of Durham. Dykes, with a few other composers, is said to have crystallized the Anglican style hymn tune, a style “restrained, yet appealing to the taste of the people,” as described by *the English Hymn*. During his life, Dykes wrote over 300 hymn tunes, seven of which are used in *the Lutheran Hymnal*.



John B. Dykes

Heber’s hymn captures the scene of worship in heaven. Revelation 4-5 shows the worship that now occurs before God, and the new song sung by the redeemed saints in heaven. Not only does it capture the doctrine of the Trinity in stanzas one and four, but it highlights the honor due our God. Stanza three says that our God is “perfect in power, in love, and purity,” which love and mercy (stanzas 1, 4) He showed to us in Christ’s Crucifixion, and in our Baptism which makes His purity ours. For this, we will join all His works “in earth and sky and sea” to praise His Name to all eternity.