



Hosanna to the Living Lord

Text: Reginald Heber (1783-1826)

Tune: Martin Luther (1483-1546)

As we enter the season of Advent, our thoughts turn to the preparation of our hearts for Christ's coming. We pray that, by the Holy Spirit, He would cleanse us from sin, strengthen our faith, and keep us steadfast in it until this life comes to its close. The hymn, "Hosanna to the Living Lord" perfectly captures these prayers and this attitude of our hearts in this Advent season and beyond.



Reginald Heber

This hymn was written by Reginald Heber. He 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 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," and the favorite for Trinity Sunday, "Holy, Holy, Holy."

The hymn's tune, VOM HIMMEL HOCH, is a familiar one, borrowed from Martin Luther's great Christmas hymn, "From Heaven Above to Earth I Come."

The version of "Hosanna to the Living Lord" printed in *The Lutheran Hymnal* is missing one of Heber's original stanzas. Between what we have as stanzas one and two should be this stanza:

Hosanna, Lord, Thine angels cry;
Hosanna, Lord, Thy saints reply:
Above, beneath us, and around,
The dead and living swell the song.

This missing stanza captures some of the imagery of Philippians 2:10-11, that at the Name of Jesus every knee bows, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.

The four stanzas which we will sing today are a fitting prayer for this Advent season. Stanza one addresses the Lord with the Hebrew cry, *Hosanna*. The basic meaning of this word is "to save." It functions as a plea to God to have mercy on us and save us from our lost condition. Stanza two tells us where God does this saving, namely, in the Church in the Divine Service. We implore God to abide in His "house of prayer" by the means of Word and Sacrament. Through these Gifts we receive His forgiveness and the strengthening of faith that we need for life in these latter days. But we also need the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to keep that planted seed of faith nourished. When the Holy Spirit makes His home in our "cleansed breast" we become a "temple pure and worthy Thee," Our Lord Jesus Christ. Because we are a living temple of the Lord, when "earth and heaven shall melt away" on the Last Day we will have nothing to fear. We are a part of the Lord's flock, "redeemed from sinful stain," and will eternally swell the sound of His praise with all the redeemed in heaven.