



## I Know of a Sleep in Jesus' Name

**Text: Magnus Brostrup Landstad (1802-1880)**

**Tune: Christopher Ernst Friedrich Weyse (1774-1842)**

The “Death and Burial” section of our hymnal (hymns 585-602, besides the hymns of Good Friday and Easter, is one of the most comforting sections of the hymnal. Though it may sound morbid to sing about death, these hymns present the proper Christian focus of death: leaving this world to be with our Savior, Jesus Christ, in the heaven He has prepared for us. These hymns acknowledge that heaven is what the Christian life is all about. Also, they often take the form of prayers to God for a steadfast faith in Him and confidence in Jesus’ death and resurrection given to us freely through the Sacraments. In this way, the “Death and Burial” section should be one of the most familiar sections for all Christians.

One author who appears in multiple sections of the hymnal, but shines in the “Death and Burial” section is Magnus Brostrup Landstad. Perhaps his excellence in this section stems from his life, which was not a life of great comfort. In fact, he was motivated to write hymns after reading Philipp Nicolai’s work, *Mirror of Joy*, which he wrote in the midst of every chaos imaginable. From Nicolai’s work, he learned more about the comfort that comes only from Christ and His Gifts and was motivated to continue giving that hymnic comfort that Nicolai gave.

Landstad was born in Maaso, Norway on October 7, 1802, where his father was a Lutheran Pastor. His youth was shadowed by storms and famine, and because of that was never able to go school in his childhood. However, his father gave him the bulk of his education before he enrolled in university studies in theology in 1822. However, he had to take a year off shortly after beginning to take a job to pay for school. He eventually returned and graduated

with high honors in December 1827. In November 1828 he became the traveling pastor in Gausdal. He married Vilhelmine Lassen in 1829. After five more years he finally received a regular pastorate at the Lutheran church in Kviteseid, and five years later succeeded his father as pastor at Seljord. In 1849 he became pastor in Fredrikshald and worked there as a sole pastor until 1852, at which time he was given an assistant. After seven years there he moved to Sanherred, and spent the next seventeen years there, retiring in 1876. He and his wife celebrated their golden anniversary in 1879. He died on October 9, 1880.

As was mentioned before, buying a copy of Nicolai’s *Mirror of Joy* sparked Landstad’s interest in hymn writing. However, he did not begin writing them until his time spent in Gausdal. His writing continued on in Kviteseid when he wrote three hymns for the Reformation Festival in 1837. His hymns caught the attention of the officials of the Lutheran Church of Norway, and they approached him during his stay in Seljord, asking him to compile a new hymnal for the churches of Norway. He declined that offer. However, after he began his work in Fredrikshald he was approached again. After he was granted an assistant pastor he began work on what eventually became the *Kirke-Salmebog et Udkast* in 1861. In the end, it ended up being used by 70% of the Lutheran congregations in Norway.

“I Know of a Sleep in Jesus’ Name” can be best explained as an expansion of the phrase in the Third Article of the Creed, “And I look for the Resurrection of the Dead and the life of the world to come.” Stanza one acknowledges that death, for the Christian, is merely a slumber. The soul lives with Jesus while “earth folds in her arms my weary frame and shelters it till the morrow.” When life’s troubles press us, we wait all the more eagerly for our souls to be with Jesus and the resurrection of our bodies at the Last Day (st. 2-3). We know that Day when Jesus calls us from our graves will be a glorious day. It will be accompanied with great songs of joy (st. 4) as people from all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues heed the call of Jesus: “Ye dead, come forth!” and rise in glory to meet Him (st. 5). So we conclude the hymn by praying for Jesus to keep us until the day He takes us from this world (st. 6).