



Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won!

Text: Christian Fürchtegott Gellert (1715-1769)

Tune: Johann Crüger (1598-1662)

Often Easter hymns make excellent hymns for times of distress, especially at death. "Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won" is one such hymn. Like all good hymns, it sings the hope we have: Jesus Christ is with us in all trials and is our only Confidence. He is with us by His Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacraments to keep this hope alive and active. This is what calms our trembling breath as we face death and look beyond it to our Savior and the heaven He has prepared for us.



Gellert

This outstanding Easter hymn was given to the Church by Christian Fürchtegott Gellert. He was the son of a Lutheran Pastor, born in Hainichen in the Saxon Harz on July 4, 1715. After obtaining his early education at St. Afra in Meißen, he entered the University of Leipzig to pursue theological studies. After he graduated he became his father's assistant, but was forced into another profession because of his poor memory. In that time it was highly frowned upon to preach from a manuscript, so Gellert was declared unfit as a preacher. Following this blow, he became the tutor for the sons of Herr von Lüttichau in 1739. After spending two years as their tutor, he returned to Leipzig to oversee the studies of his nephew, and to further his own education. In 1744 he graduated with his Masters degree in Belles-lettres (more artistic forms of literature, such as poetry, drama, fiction, etc.) and the next year was hired by the University to serve as a tutor and lecturer for the philosophical faculty. As a lecturer (and later, professor), Gellert was very popular with the students because he took a personal interest in their personal conduct and welfare. His lectures were favorites because of their engaging style and high

moral tone. Two of his better known students were Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, two of the most famous German writers of the nineteenth century. Gellert went on to write *Fabeln und Erzählungen* (Fables and Stories), which were remarked as "spirited" and "humorous," and won him fame and universal recognition as a prized German author. In 1751 he was appointed extraordinary professor of philosophy. Ten years later he was offered an ordinary professorship, but declined due to poor health. From 1752 until his death, Gellert suffered from, at times, crippling hypochondria. He died at Leipzig on December 13, 1769.

Though Gellert was not primarily a hymn writer, he did write some. His Christian poetry and hymns were collected in *Geistliche Oden und Lieder* (Spiritual Odes and Hymns) in 1758. Though he wrote few hymns, what he did write was well received by both Roman Catholics and Protestants of his day. One of his hymns, *Die Ehre Gottes aus der Natur* ("The Glory of God in Nature") was set to music by both Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and Beethoven.

"Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won" was first printed in Gellert's *Geistliche Oden und Lieder*. It has wide use, not only as an Easter hymn, but also for funerals. In Lutheran Agendas (books containing rites and blessings), this hymn has been appointed as the hymn to be sung at the consecration of a graveyard. It was originally published as a six-stanza hymn. The missing stanza comes between what we have as second and third stanzas. It reads:

Jesus lives!

Who now despairs spurns the Word which God hath spoken;
Grace to all that Word declares, Grace whereby sin's yoke is broken.
Christ rejects not penitence; This shall be my confidence.

The refrain "This shall be my confidence" points us back to Jesus stanza after stanza. We are reminded that our sufficiency is not of ourselves (2 Cor. 3:5), but all we have comes as a gift from Our Lord Jesus Christ. Because He has died for us, and we have been Baptized into that death and resurrection, we have no reason to fear anything in life or death. Nothing can separate us from His love, and our death will merely take us where He is gone to live and reign with Him in heaven. God grant it for Jesus' sake!