



The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us

Text: Johann Walther (1496-1570)

Tune: *Musae Sioniae*, vol. 7, Wolfenbüttel

Although Advent often has as its focus the coming of Christ as the baby in Bethlehem, a major focus is also Christ's second Advent, His return "to judge both the quick and the dead." However, Advent's focus is not that Christ comes in stern judgment, but that He comes to take His redeemed children to their promised kingdom where He will "wipe away our tears."

"The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us" was written around 1552 by Johann Walther. Walther was born in 1496 in a small village in Thuringia. Friedrich the Wise, Elector of Saxony, hired Walther in 1524 to be the bassist in his court orchestra and by 1526 was appointed *Kapellmeister* (orchestra master). In 1534 he became Kantor in Torgau. When Elector Moritz went to Dresden he took Walther with him to be his *Kapellmeister* there. By 1554 Walther was ready to retire and was pensioned and returned to Torgau where he served as *Sengermeister* (choirmaster) until his death in 1570.



Michael Praetorius

Although Walther was a more distinguished musician than hymnwriter, he did spend a great deal of time with Martin Luther helping him with his hymns. In 1524 Walther spent three weeks with Luther in Wittenberg helping him adapt his hymn tunes and historic Church music, writing them in five part harmony for the *Geistliche gesang Buchlein*, published in Wittenberg that same year. Walther was also present the first time Luther's *Deutsche Messe* was used on October 29, 1525.

Most of Walther's hymns were published in his hymnal, *Das christlich Kinderlied D. Martini Lutheri*, in 1566. Of

Walther it was said that he, "together with Luther laid the foundation for evangelical church song."

The hymn's tune, although of unknown authorship, was edited by Michael Praetorius, who was born in Thuringia the year after Walther's death. Praetorius began his musical career as organist in Frankfurt, and later in Lüneburg. From 1604 until his death he served in the court of Duke Brunswick of Wolfenbüttel. Praetorius was a serious student of music and undertook many ambitious projects. One of his largest was a complete encyclopedia of the art and practice of music, a three-volume work entitled *Syntagma Musicum*. He worked on several hymnals, one of the most notable being his *Musae Sioniae*, a nine-volume work.



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When Walther wrote "The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us" he authored a 34-stanza hymn. However, in his lifetime the hymn was very rarely sung in its full form. The seven-stanza version published in *The Lutheran Hymnal* is the adaptation that was widely used in Walther's day, which is stanzas 31, 8, 9, 16, 18, 17, and 13 (in that order) of his original hymn. Walther titled it "A Beautiful Spiritual and Christian New Miners' song of the Last Day and Eternal Life."

In this hymn, Walther extols the joy that will be ours at the second Advent of Christ. He captures the Christian joy at Christ's return, noting that His voice should not appal us as He returns. When Christ comes to take us to His heaven prepared for us, we will be greeted by the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs (st. 2), language which Walther borrowed from the *Te Deum laudamus*. Together with the Faithful who have gone before us, we will "come before Him Who for us man became," remembering Christ's Incarnation (st. 3). We all will join in endless praise of the Lamb, joining the angels in the song they sing (st. 4), praising Christ as He spreads the Feast and bestows His bounty on us (st. 6). Forever we will be free from sin, death, and evil, always in Christ's heavenly gladness won for us (st. 7).