



What Wondrous Love Is This

Text: Unknown

Tune: Unknown

In the introduction to *Lutheran Service Book* the editors wrote that “*Lutheran Service Book* delivers a rich feast of Gospel-centered hymns from every age and from many lands.” “What Wondrous Love Is This” does just that. This hymn is not only American in origin, but is also from a time and location far different from that of the typical hymn known by Midwest Lutherans steeped in Reformation-era German Lutheran chorales. In text and tune we are brought into the Christian tradition of early nineteenth century Appalachia. Though rugged, the simplicity of this hymn places before us the chief message of Christianity: Christ crucified for our salvation.

The origin of this hymn is unknown, but appears in two different hymnals published in 1811: *A Selection of hymns and Spiritual Songs from the Best Authors and Collections Extant: With a Number Never Before Published* from Starke Dupuy of Frankfurt, Kentucky, and *A General Selection of the Newest and Most Admired Hymns and Spiritual Songs Now In Use* by Smith Mead of Lynchburg, Virginia.

Both hymnals contain stanzas omitted from *Lutheran Service Book*.

From Smith Mead’s:

Ye winged seraphs fly, bear the news, bear the news, *(repeat)*

Ye winged seraphs fly like comets through the sky,

Fill vast eternity with the news, with the news. *(repeat)*

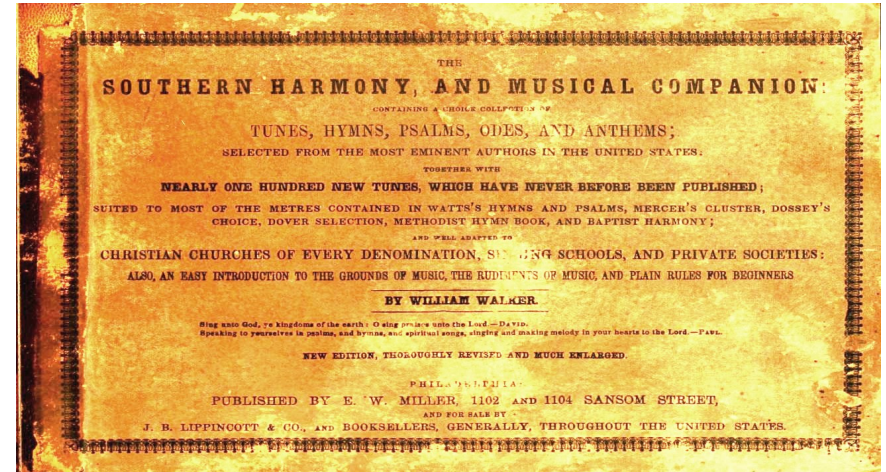
From Starke Dupuy’s:

And when to that bright world we arrive, we arrive, *(repeat)*

When to that world we go, free from all pain and woe,

We’ll join the happy throng, and sing on, and sing on. *(repeat)*

“What Wondrous Love Is This” is paired with the tune WONDROUS LOVE, first printed in William Walker’s 1835 *The Southern Harmony, and Musical Companion*. *Southern Harmony* was a part of the Colonial era’s musical instruction for children. Its goal was to give them fundamental



The cover of the 1847 second edition of *Southern Harmony*

instruction in singing, especially for church services.

“What Wondrous Love Is This” is an instruction on the stain of sin, the redemption of sinners accomplished by Christ, and our reconciliation with God, all of which make us of His “wondrous love.”

Stanza one puts on our lips the truth of 1 Corinthians 5:21 that He who knew no sin bore sin’s “dreadful curse” for us by “bring[ing] sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Jesus Christ taking on flesh to suffer and die is the ultimate expression of divine love (1 John 4:7-10).

In the second stanza we again praise this wondrous love of God. Bearing sin’s weight, we were “sinking down beneath God’s righteous frown” (Colossians 3:5-7). Not content to allow this weight to crush us, Jesus took on flesh to save us (John 3:17). Jesus endured not only God’s frown, but His abandonment (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34; Philippians 2:6-8;). This is the Great Exchange: Jesus takes our punishment and His righteousness is given to us (2 Corinthians 5:21). In this exchange our soul is freed from sin, death, and the devil.

This redemption, and our adoption into God’s family by Holy Baptism makes us heirs of heaven. “To God and to the Lamb” we sing for eternity “while millions join the theme” (Revelation 7:9-12). Not only in Lent, but at all times we exclaim for the death and resurrection of Jesus, “What wondrous love is this!”