

Hymn Spotlight: "Savior of the Nations, Come"

Savior of the nations, come;
virgin's son, make here your home.
Marvel now, O heav'n and earth:
God has chosen such a birth.

Not by human flesh and blood,
but the mystic Breath of God,
was the Word of God made flesh,
fruit of woman, blossom fresh.

Wondrous birth—oh, wondrous child—
from his throne, a virgin mild!
Very God, and Mary's son,
eager now his race to run!

From God's heart the Savior speeds,
back to God his pathway leads;
out to vanquish death's command,
back to reign at God's right hand.

Now your manger, shining bright,
hallows night with newborn light.
Night cannot this light subdue;
let our faith shine ever new.

Praise we sing to Christ the Lord,
virgin's son, incarnate Word!
To the holy Trinity
praise we sing eternally!

ELW #263
attr. Ambrose of Milan, 340-397
Martin Luther, 1483-1546
tr. composite

This hymn is one of the longest-running hymns in the church. The hymn text scans the entire story by taking us to the manger while assuming the victory of the cross and resurrection. The result is to make the "Come" refer to Advent's paradox: Christ's first coming, second coming, and coming to us here and now.

In the Fourth century Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, penned the source of this in, in Latin, "Veni, Redemptor gentium." Ambrose is called the "father of church song," not necessarily because he was the first to write hymns, but hymn texts were some of the first that the church found worth keeping for nearly two centuries.

Martin Luther later translated Ambrose's hymn into German: "Nun komm, der Heiden Heiland," probably for Advent in 1523. Luther, possibly with the help of his musician Johann Walter, crafted the original Latin chant melody into the hymn chorale we know today. Our English translation uses seven of Luther's eight stanzas, and is a composite of the work of several Lutheran translators through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This hymn is an example of how the language of our faith continues to evolve and renew through time.

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