



Considering Homeschooling Blog of the Week: Hymn Studies

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Each week Considering Homeschooling recognizes the faithful service of someone getting the message out about homeschooling. This week we recognize Wayne Walker for his blog Hymn Studies, "studies of hymns that can be used in your homeschool as part of your devotions, Bible curriculum, or music study." "All the Heavens Adore Thee" Dec. 13, 2008 on Hymn Studies "And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Matt. 25.6) INTRO.: A hymn which applies the thought of this parable to us is "All the Heavens Adore Thee." The text was written and the tune (Wachet Auf or Sleepers Awake) was composed both by Philipp Nicolai, who was born on Aug. 10, 1556, at Mengershausen in Waldeck, Germany, where his father, Dieterich Nicolai, was a Lutheran minister. After an early education at Mengershausen under Ludwig Helmbold and Joachim von Burgk, in 1575 Philip entered the University of Erfurt and in 1576 went to the University of Wittenberg, where he graduated in 1579. Living for some time at Volkhardinghausen near Mengershausen, he frequently preached for his father. In 1583, he was appointed Lutheran preacher at Herdecke in Westphalia, where his father had been minister earlier, but found many difficulties there and resigned his post. In 1586 he became minister at Niederwildungen near Waldeck, and in 1588 moved to Altwildungen, where he also served as court preacher to the widowed Countess Margaretha of Waldeck and tutor to her son, Count Wilhelm Ernst. In 1596, he became minister at Unna in Westphalia. It is believed that he produced these words there in 1597 during a pestilence of bubonic plague which claimed some 1,400 victims. The song was first published, with the tune, along with two other hymns in the appendix to his devotional work Frewden-Spiegel dess ewigen Lebens, printed at Frankfurt-am-Main in 1599. In 1601, Nicolai was selected minister of St. Katherine's Church at Hamburg, where he married at age 44 in 1606 and died of a fever two years later on Oct. 26, 1608. It is possible that this hymn is based on the Wachter-Lieder (Watch Songs), a form of lyric poetry popular in the Middle Ages and introduced by Wolfram von Eschenbach (1170-1220). However, while in the Watch Songs the voice of the watchman summons the workers of darkness to flee from discovery, with Nicolai it is a summons to the children of light to awaken to their promised reward. The translation was made by Catherine Winkworth (1829-1878). It was first published in her 1858 Lyra Germanica, Second Series, and revised in 1863 for her Choral Book for England. Several alterations, especially in the third stanza, have been made to Miss Winkworth's original translation, various ones attributed to William Cooke, Edward A. Dayman, Philip Pusey, and Frances E. Cox, which appear in the 1872 edition of the 1871 Hymnary. It is possible that the melody is based on the "Silberweisse," c. 1513, by Hans Sachs (1494-1576). The tune was sometimes ascribed to Jacob Praetorius, the music director of the St. Katherine's Church in Hamburg where Nicolai was minister. However, it is now known that Nicolai was the composer and Praetorius only arranged it. The modern harmonization was made by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). It was done for the concluding chorale, "Gloria sei dir gesungen," in his Cantata 140, Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme of 1731, based on this hymn. The hymn has been called "The King of Chorales" (chorale being the name for hymns used in the German Lutheran church of that day). John Julian calls the text, "A beautiful hymn, one of the first rank," and Winterfeld says, that the tune "is the greatest and most solemn melody of evangelical Christendom." Among hymnbooks published by members of the Lord's church during the twentieth century for use in churches of Christ, the first one in which I have seen the song was the 1963 Christian Hymnal edited by J. Nelson Slater, where only the third stanza is used. The entire song appears in the 1986 Great Songs Revised edited by Forrest M. McCann, the only other book among us that I know of to use it. This is not an easy song to sing. Believe me, I know because we sang it when I was in high school chorus. However, it is an important hymn historically. The message is good and the tune, while difficult, is majestic and inspiring. The song encourages us to wake, to watch, and to worship. I. Stanza 1 is a call to awake "Wake, awake, for night is flying: The watchmen on the heights are crying, 'Awake, Jerusalem, arise!' Midnight's solemn hour is tolling; His chariot wheels are near rolling; He come! O church, lift up thine eyes! Rise up, with willing feet; Go forth, the Bridegroom meet: Hallelujah! Lo, great and small, We answer all; We follow where Thy voice shall call." A. Christians are to awake out of the sleep of darkness: Rom. 13.11-12 B. God's watchman, through the written word, is calling us to be alert: Isa. 52.8, Ezek. 3.17 C. Therefore, like the five wise virgins, we need to be vigilant: Matt. 26.7-13 II. Stanza 2 is a call to prepare "Zion hears the watchmen singing; Her heart with deep delight is springing; She wakes, she rises from her gloom. For her Lord comes down all glorious, In grace arrayed, by truth victorious; Her star is risen, her light is come! Ah, come Thou blessed One, God's own beloved Son, Hallelujah! We haste along, An eager throng, And gladsome join the advent song." A. We need to remember that someday the Lord will come down all glorious: Acts 1.11 B. He who will come is the bridegroom, God's own beloved Son, for whom we wait: Jn. 1.29, Phil. 3.20-21 C. And we must be prepared so that we can join Him in the marriage feast of heaven: Rev. 19.6-9 III. Stanza 3 is a call to praise "Now let all the heavens adore Thee! Let men and angels sing before Thee! All praise belongs to Thee alone! Heaven's gates with pearl are glorious; We there shall join the choir victorious Of angels circling round Thy throne. No mortal eye hath seen, Nor mortal ear hath heard The wonders there; But we rejoice and Thee adore, And sing Thy praise forevermore." A. All the heavens, both men and angels, will adore Christ: Rev. 5.8-14 (the original third line read, "With harp and cymbal's clearest tone," but Christian Hymnal uses a different version to eliminate the reference to instrumental music) B. This will be the primary activity in that eternal city where the gate is made of pearl: Rev. 21.1-21 C. As yet, no mortal eye or ear has experienced this: 1 Cor. 2.9 CONCL.: The latter passage is not talking about heaven, but the language can still be used in this regard to remind us that while we as yet have not been to heaven, it should be our desire, both here and in eternity, to let "All the Heavens Adore Thee."