



This glorious anthem of Advent proclaims the great and final Advent of the Lord for His people! This Advent anthem has undergone an evolutionary process in its journey to present-day hymnals. It was originally written by John Cennick in 1752, modified by Charles Wesley in 1758, and finalized by Martin Madan in 1760 who also composed the lively and inspiring tune (*Helmsley*) to which it is most traditionally sung. Other tunes to which this great hymn is played are '*Bryn Calfaria*' (Wm Owen), '*Regent Square*' (Henry Smart), '*Rouen*' (Gounod), and '*St Thomas*' (by Webbe). These are all quite reverent and moving musical compositions, but they lack the vigor and awe that fits so perfectly with the glorious and awe-inspiring event described in the hymn. *Helmsley* rises to that expectation admirably by elevating the listener (as well as singer) to the majestic summits of heights of faith.

Lo, he comes with clouds descending

Lo! he comes, with clouds descending,
once for our salvation slain;
thousand thousand saints attending
swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!
Christ the Lord returns to reign.

Every eye shall now behold him,
robed in dreadful majesty;
those who set at nought and sold him,
pierced, and nailed him to the tree,
deeply wailing, deeply wailing, deeply wailing,
shall the true Messiah see.

Those dear tokens of his passion
still his dazzling body bears,
cause of endless exultation
to his ransomed worshipers;
with what rapture, with what rapture, with what rapture
gaze we on those glorious scars!

Now redemption, long expected,
see in solemn pomp appear;
all his saints, by man rejected,
now shall meet him in the air:
Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!
See the day of God appear!

Yea, amen! let all adore thee,
high on thine eternal throne;
Savior, take the power and glory;
claim the kingdom for thine own:
Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!
Thou shalt reign, and thou alone.

Though Christ holds all power in heaven and earth, He has given man discretion in his plundering politics and personal failures. But on this Second Advent, He returns to EXERCISE that power. Every eye shall behold this Second Coming, and every knee shall bow. *“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* (Phil 2:9-11, see also Romans 14:11) What a contrast to His First Coming! Not only will the living behold His Coming, but the ancient dead as well. A precious treasure of love bundled in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger, at His first coming; and riding a white charger leading the armies of Heaven at His Second Coming.

As you listen to the resounding notes of the trumpet, and the rich, deep echoes of the organ – coupled with scriptural words of such immense power – how can one remain seated at the presentation of the National Anthem of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending

Lo! he comes, with clouds descending,
once for our salvation slain;
thousand thousand saints attending
swell the triumph of his train:
Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!
Christ the Lord returns to reign.

This first stanza begins with the imperative exclamation “LO” which draws our immediate attention to some great and magnificent event. The heavens, that are His handiwork, will part at His coming. Nothing can hinder His promised return. The clouds will roll apart as a scroll, and the King of Kings shall descend with the fanfare due such a Majesty. *11 “And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. 12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. 13 And he was clothed with a*

vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. 17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; 18 That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.” (Rev 19:11-18) All of the massed forces about the Camp of the Saints shall melt away as the morning fog on a summer’s day – vanquished and relegated to their proper domain of eternal fires. There can be no intermediate return of Christ as His return signals only final and eternal triumph over Satan, sealed at Calvary.

Every eye shall now behold him,
robed in dreadful majesty;
those who set at nought and sold him,
pierced, and nailed him to the tree,
deeply wailing, deeply wailing, deeply wailing,
shall the true Messiah see.

The misery and betrayal of our Lord, which the world does as a matter of their natural depravity, must be the worst forethought of Hell imaginable. Can you comprehend the mortified grief and misery that drove Judas, who literally LOVED money, to go out and hang himself in the long, dark night after betraying our Lord? He finally had a bag full of money, yet the money did not matter at the moment of his damnation. What deep, uncontrollable wailing will emit from the same lips that ridiculed and vilified the Lord as He hung upon the cross. The same blasphemy is committed by the lips of all generations of men whose sin was responsible for the bloody sacrifice of the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. The pounding of the nails still echo down the corridors of Eternity. The eyes of the wicked shall behold the coming Christ just as the eyes of the false prophet Balaam saw him: *15 “And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: 16 He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: 17 I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.”* (Num 24:15-17)

Those dear tokens of his passion
still his dazzling body bears,
cause of endless exultation
to his ransomed worshipers;
with what rapture, with what rapture, with what rapture
gaze we on those glorious scars!

What are the dear tokens of Christ’s passion? Not just the cross He bore on the Via Dolorosa! Not just the stripes He suffered for us! Not just the crown of thorns He wore! Not just the nails that were mercilessly driven into His tender flesh! Not just the sword that finally pierced His heart – and that of His dear Mother Mary! His entire life of love and sacrifice are His tokens of passion and love. Yes, He will return with a

gleaming and glorified body, but that Body will still bear the scars of Calvary. The Body of Christ may be the only scarred body in all of Heaven when we join Him there. The famous old black preacher (a former slave), John Jasper, was asked what he hoped to see first when he got to Heaven. He responded, "Yes, it is true, I want to see them golden slippers the Lord has for me, but not first. I do want to see that crown of righteousness that has been reserved for me, but not first. I do want to wear that resplendent White Robe with which my Father will adorn me, but not first. First, I want to see the loving face of my dear Savior who died for me. I want to gaze upon the nail prints that purchased my soul, and the wound in His side that released His last drop of blood for John Jasper. That is what I want to see FIRST!

Now redemption, long expected,
see in solemn pomp appear;
all his saints, by man rejected,
now shall meet him in the air:
Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!
See the day of God appear!

Most Americans of my age remember precisely where they were when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. They may even remember precisely where they were when the radios across the nation announced the cessation of hostilities and surrender of Germany and Japan. I remember clearly though I was only a toddler at that time. Why do we remember those dates? Because they constitute significant emotional events of profound meaning to us and everyone. We may project that principle into the future and ask, "Where will your soul be on the return of Jesus Christ? He is only coming ONCE, so it is of profound importance that you soul be either in the bosom of Abraham, or standing in the Ark of Salvation at the coming of Christ. If you have enjoyed a cordial friendship with the world, it is unlikely that you will be considered one of those saints that *man has rejected*. The Lord Jesus Christ will return as a great and powerful magnet that recognizes only the metal of its own nature. That metal will be lifted up and drawn to Christ in the air. The baser metals of lead and sodium will be left in place to suffer the fervent fires of the end.

Yea, amen! let all adore thee,
high on thine eternal throne;
Savior, take the power and glory;
claim the kingdom for thine own:
Alleluia! alleluia! alleluia!
Thou shalt reign, and thou alone.

There is vigor of confirming and vocalizing assent given in most black churches at any time scripture, or a scriptural truth, is declared. The manner of rendering that resounding assent is by a loud and common, "AMEN." We may feel a bit too sophisticated to participate in that way, but we should be ready to render AMEN whenever AMEN is due. Sophistication will not gain us Heaven, but fervor of passionate faith will. Yes, His is elevated above every throne, and His Kingdom is without end. In fact, His will be the only Kingdom that prevails the latter fires and end of all time and space. What possible response can we make to this great and marvelous event destined to dawn on the world at the end of her days? Alleluia is the only fitting verbalization we can make - "Praise ye the Lord." If we are unable to praise the Lord now and at His Coming, there will not be a privilege to do so after His coming. When the last trump (trumpet) sounds, and the Lord descends, it will be a "come as you are" Wedding Feast. If you have no wedding garment at that moment, you shall not be admitted. If you have no oil for your lamp, regardless of the merits of your works, you

will not be accepted at the door.

As we contemplate the First, and Second, coming of the Lord, let us examine our hearts in that Greatest of all mirrors – the Word of God! Have we come to know ourselves as the most despicable of sinners (as Paul claimed himself)? Have we seen the wickedness of the adulterous murderer – David – in our own hearts? Have we seen the cowardly denial of the Lord Jesus typified by Peter on the night of His betrayal, in our own souls? Have we observed that the light and frivolous view of God evinced by Esau has also been found deep in our own hearts and minds? If not, we need to look more closely. In knowing what depraved and wicked people we have been, we can more readily appreciate the greatness of the forgiveness and redemption made available to us through the sacrifice of this Great and Awesome Lord whom we have claimed as our Savior. Christmas is coming yet again!