



*A Song of degrees.*

**I** WILL lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. <sup>2</sup> My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. <sup>3</sup> He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. <sup>4</sup> Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. <sup>5</sup> The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. <sup>6</sup> The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. <sup>7</sup> The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. <sup>8</sup> The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore. (Psalm 121)

Here is an old Anglican Church hymn that extols the virtue of solemn reverence in worship – a practice that has been abandoned by most churches of our day to the detriment of holiness. I am afraid the title itself conveys the state of the modern church in which the Light of Christ fades for a lack of serious commitment to biblical doctrine and church discipline. Entertainment for man has replaced the praises due only to God.

This grand old hymn, now almost extinct, was composed by the German-born St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, who was a valiant opponent of the Arian heresy which averred that Christ was created and not eternal with the Father. That heresy was rejected by the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD though it has reared its ugly head by insinuation in modern Bible versions. The English translation from the Latin is the work of the Anglican cleric, Richard Mant, (1776 -1848) The hymn is number 28 in the Church of England Hymn Book of 1880. This hymn is based upon the 121<sup>st</sup> Psalm.

### **Ere the waning light decay**

Ere the waning light decay,  
God of all, to thee we pray,  
Let thine angel-guards descend,  
Us to succour and defend.

Guard from evils that affright,  
Guard from sorrows of the night;  
Guard from foes, without, within,  
Outward danger, inward sin.

Mindful of our only stay,  
Duly thus to thee we pray;  
Duly thus to thee we raise  
Solemn hymns of grateful praise.

Hear our prayer, Almighty King!  
Hear our praises while we sing!  
Hymning with the heavenly host,  
Father, Son, and Holy ghost.

AMEN

1. *Ere the waning light decay, God of all, to thee we pray, Let thine angel-guards descend, Us to succour and defend.* Though our lives are only as a vapor before the expanse of eternity, they most often end in the sunset of old age when the light of the eye becomes dim, and the landscape of life grows silent. Just as surely as we anticipate the daily sunset, so do we know and anticipate the coming passage into eternity. An old childhood bedtime prayer comes to mind, "As I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep." Just as the angels of the Lord have stood watch over our sleeping hours on earth, we pray for the same attention in our last, mortal sleep on this green earth. To the Christian, that is a heavenly assurance.

2. *Guard from evils that affright, Guard from sorrows of the night; Guard from foes, without, within, Outward danger, inward sin.* That looming shadow of death which most often arises during times of disease, famine, war, and advanced age may give pause to the believer until he remembers the promise of God that it is, indeed, of no substance whatsoever – but only a shadow in which light is temporarily obstructed. During the long, dark night of our souls, every problem seems magnified in awful proportions; but when the sun rises and sheds her effulgent beams across the morning sky, how paltry those fears appear now. The Christian must face the enemy on two different battlefronts – those without (from which we pray the protection of God), and those within which are our own making. The latter is far more formidable than the former since it can destroy the soul. But in our Christian walk, we seek forgiveness daily for our dual sins of both omission and commission and we can know that God will forgive the sincere penitent.

3. *Mindful of our only stay, Duly thus to thee we pray; Duly thus to thee we raise Solemn hymns of grateful praise.* Are we mindful that our only hope, anchor and fortress is the Lord? That mind must be forefront in the mind of every saint of God. We pray with faith that God is our Fortress and Strong Tower – our Rock and the Ark of our Salvation. Our hymns should be solemn and honoring of God and not frivolous and complimentary of men. It is this solemn reverence that must be restored to Christian worship ere the Light can beam through the broken clouds once more.

4. *Hear our prayer, Almighty King! Hear our praises while we sing! Hymning with the heavenly host, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. AMEN* Our praises are to God and not to extol our virtues in following for we have none. We follow by the power of the Holy Ghost – not any virtues of our own. Yes, we have a plethora of hymns directly from God's Word, especially in the Psalms. And the ancient Church has given us a repository

of faithful and scriptural hymns by which we may honor our Maker and Redeemer. Why should we sing refurbished barroom ballads when the better and more Godly hymns may suffice to lift our souls in worship? The last phase of this hymn places honor and praise where it belongs – to the Triune Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! And quite appropriately, every Godly hymn will end with the AMEN.