



15 Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. 16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. (Mark 16:15-16)

It is altogether appropriate we consider a missionary hymn as an Epiphany study since the Epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ was not only to His own Hebrew people, but to the Gentiles of the world as well. The Magi (priests of the Zoroastrian religion) probably traveled from the high desert city of Esfahan in old Persia (Iran). This was their traditional center of worship from the days of Cyrus the Great. I lived in sight of their holy mountain just north of the city (from which smoke continually rose from the Fire they kept burning in honor of Ahuramazda) for more than five years. Jesus did not only consider the Gentiles when His own people rejected Him as modern theologians aver. He came for all peoples – Jew, Gentile, red, white, black and yellow.

Today's hymn articulates the missionary and evangelical zeal that possessed the Church from the Great Reformation until the early 1900's while the fiery urging of the Holy Spirit predominated in that Church. Theirs was a faith worth dying for, and worth the dying in sharing with others as well. It was a faith that refused to compromise on the Holy Gospel once delivered to the saints.

This hymn has long held a mysterious appeal to my heart due to the nations mentioned. The tune (Calcutta, also known as Aurelia), too, is hauntingly beautiful. The author of the lyrics, Bishop Reginald Heber, died serving his diocese in Calcutta, India, in 1826. He wrote this hymn on Whitsun Eve of 1819. Lowell Mason composed the music for the hymn. He also authored the hymn, Holy, Holy, Holy.

From Greenland's Icy Mountains

From Greenland's icy mountains, from India's coral strand;
where Afric's sunny fountains roll down their golden sand:
From many an ancient river, from many a palmy plain,
they call us to deliver their land from error's chain.

What though the spicy breezes blow soft o'er Java's isle;
though every prospect pleases, and only man is vile?
In vain with lavish kindness the gifts of God are strown;
the heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone!

Shall we, whose souls are lighted with wisdom from on high,
shall we to those benighted the lamp of life deny?
Salvation! O salvation! The joyful sound proclaim,
till earth's remotest nation has learned Messiah's Name.

Waft, waft, ye winds, his story, and you, ye waters, roll
till, like a sea of glory, it spreads from pole to pole:
till o'er our ransomed nature the Lamb for sinners slain,
Redeemer, King, Creator, in bliss returns to reign.

From Greenland's icy mountains, from India's coral strand; where Afric's sunny fountains roll down their golden sand: From many an ancient river, from many a palmy plain, they call us to deliver their land from error's chain. The author of this hymn, Heber, was a widely well-traveled – not only in south Asia, but also in Scandinavia and central Europe. His interest was in people, and their souls. I have never been to Greenland, but it appears a land forsaken when viewed from the air. But it is no more a land forsaken than it is a home for approximately 60,000 living souls. It is living proof that the Holy Spirit of God works in the frozen wastes of the northland as well as in the tropical jungles of Africa and the Islands of the Sea. European settlers from Denmark were the first from that continent to make settlement on the great Island of Greenland. They built churches and conducted trade with their distant European homelands. The last recorded entry in the Hvalsey Danish Church in Greenland was of a wedding in 1408. Bishop Heber felt 'called' to go to distant lands armed with the Gospel. No man has a commission to go to such places without that sure 'calling.'

What though the spicy breezes blow soft o'er Java's isle; though every prospect pleases, and only man is vile? In vain with lavish kindness the gifts of God are strown; the heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone! Observe the poetic imagery of this stanza! One can sense those spicy breezes, or better recall them if having visited those faraway shores previously. The beauty of old pagan lands contrasted sharply with the unrestrained immorality of the people in their dark superstitions. The only ugly blotch on the landscape was the stone-cold heart of man. God has richly blessed many pagan lands only to have the people thereof turn to wood and stone immovable gods. But the cause of their superstitions and false religions has been, for the greater part, a blindness to the true God. When the primitive hearts of the jungle and desert plain are converted to true faith and religion, they then hold to it with greater tenacity and gratitude than their modern 'sophisticated' counterparts in mainline churches. While visiting in brush arbor churches in the bush country of Kenya, or the rugged mountains of northern Luzon, I found the people less willing to forsake the tried and proven King James Bible wherewith they were saved than their American counterparts. Once the Light of Christ is revealed to formerly blind eyes, they are no longer blinded in ignorance, but rather in brilliance of light.

Shall we, whose souls are lighted with wisdom from on high, shall we to those benighted the lamp of life deny? Salvation! O salvation! The joyful sound proclaim, till earth's remotest nation has learned Messiah's Name. A hymn was requested of Bishop Heber on short notice to be sung at a church service one very morning. It is said that Heber completed the hymn requested in thirty minutes. He was able to write about the souls lighted with wisdom from on high because his own soul was lighted with that wisdom. When we walk with the Lamp for our path shall we not share that Lamp with our fellows to spare them an untimely ruin? Salvation is truly a joyful sound to those scattered across the globe in harsh lands, and the islands of the sea. It is a new and beautiful sound heretofore unheard by their deprived ears. It is true that almost every nation is now recipient of the Christian religion; but to those who remain blind in those nations, the result is the same as if the Word had never reached their shores. It is becoming true of America as those who have been recipients of the Christian Faith have turned again to wallowing in the mud as the swine to the sty. The result is the same except more severe to those who have known and then turned away.

Waft, waft, ye winds, his story, and you, ye waters, roll till, like a sea of glory, it spreads from pole to pole: till o'er our ransomed nature the Lamb for sinners slain, Redeemer, King, Creator, in bliss returns to reign. *The wind sets forth the mysterious, but none the less effective operation of the Holy Spirit. It is invisible, mysterious, powerful, cleansing, purifying, mighty and rushing. Wind may also be an agent of destruction and death.* Dr. W. G. Heslop, (Gems from Genesis p 27), 1940. The wind can also be a means of God's judgment against the wicked. But those winds of which Christ spoke to Nicodemus, are saving winds. *The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* (John 3:8) Of course, we must not disregard, either, the overflowing rivers of life of which the believer is beneficiary through Christ. It is an overflowing Fountain of Life that is never exhausted but, instead, is replenished with greater volume with the flow of every stream of love. But we must turn not from that Fountain of Blessing, else we pay the most severe of penalties: *O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters.* (Jer 17:13) I fear for my fellow countrymen and women in that America seems to have turned away as well from that Fountain of Living Waters.

Not only are our souls redeemed by the blood of Christ, but the Nature itself, perverted by the corrupt and sinful nature of mankind, will also be redeemed at the return of Christ! *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.* (Rev 21:1-3) We no longer will look to temples of wood and stone, or to the trash-strewn streets of old Jerusalem; but we look to a new Heaven and a New Earth – a New Jerusalem and a new Temple made without hands – our Lord Jesus Christ!