

Hymns of the Church – *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* – 6 October 2015, Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)



Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O LORD, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. (Isaiah 26:8)

Though suitable to serve as an Advent hymn, today's great masterpiece can be enjoyed at every season of the Church calendar - just as Christmas Hymns may be. .It is a favorite number at weddings and other formal affairs. This hymn choral arrangement represents the biblical perspective of its composers as well as the Word of God itself. The greatest name associated with the hymn is that of Johann Sebastian Bach, but this great and Godly composer is not the only musical genius whose hands labored to produce this masterpiece of Christian musical composition. Though the words are essentially a paraphrase of scriptural truths and promises, they were first recorded (in 1661) by Martin Janus. The first musical composition was by Johann Schop in 1664. However, the genius of Bach gave the music and the words a deepening reverence that has made this hymn a living work of the people of God. Bach arranged this piece as a finale to his Cantata 147 in 1723.

Almost everyone hearing this great hymn will attribute it alone to Bach, but it is the product of more than one heart devoted to God. What do you suppose Bach would say about sharing the glory of this musical creation? He would consider it of no consequence whatsoever for Bach gave God the glory for all of his work in music; in fact, he always appended the words, *Soli Deo Gloria*, (Solely to the glory of God) to each of his works. He took no credit for his compositions because he, rightly so, believed God inspired the words and music.

Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring

Jesu, joy of man's desiring,
Holy wisdom, love most bright;
Drawn by Thee, our souls aspiring
Soar to uncreated light.

Word of God, our flesh that fashioned,
With the fire of life impassioned,
Striving still to truth unknown,
Soaring, dying round Thy throne.

Through the way where hope is guiding,
Hark, what peaceful music rings;
Where the flock, in Thee confiding,
Drink of joy from deathless springs.

Theirs is beauty's fairest pleasure;
Theirs is wisdom's holiest treasure.
Thou dost ever lead Thine own
In the love of joys unknown.

Jesu, joy of man's desiring, Holy wisdom, love most bright; Drawn by Thee, our souls aspiring Soar to uncreated light. When I read the words of this hymn, I feel that I am reading the Gospel itself and, frankly, I am truly reading the Word of God in paraphrase. Jesus (pronounced YESU) is a more accurate rendering of the name of Jesus than our English since the Hebrew has no 'J'. It is short for *Yeshua* (or Joshua in English) which means the *Salvation of God*. Isaiah prophesied truly when he said: *the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee*. All wisdom comes from God. *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* (James 1:5,17) We did not draw ourselves to Christ - He drew US! All who come to Christ are drawn there. ***And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*** (John 12:32) Soaring to the Mercy Seat of God, we soar to 'UNCREATED' Light! Christ is our Light of the world, and in Him is no darkness. He was not created, but has lived with the Father from Eternity past. He is our Sun. (Malachi 4:2, 2 Peter 1:19), and the Beautiful Morning Star which first appears in the heavens as the Evening Star and abides until the sun of Righteousness arises and vanquishes every other star.

Word of God, our flesh that fashioned, With the fire of life impassioned, Striving still to truth unknown, Soaring, dying round Thy throne. Our Creator and Redeemer was Jesus Christ - the WORD. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* (John 1:1-3) The mysteries of God have not been revealed to man completely. We can only learn new and hidden mysteries through mastering the simple ones of our youth, and growing on the meat of God's Word. We can only learn, as mortals, from the known to the unknown, and not the other way around. If we are to live in Christ, we must first take up our cross and DIE in Christ that we may arise in Him as He did at the Garden Tomb.

Through the way where hope is guiding, Hark, what peaceful music rings; Where the flock, in Thee confiding, Drink of joy from deathless springs. Jesus is the Light of Life (John 1:4) and our Guiding Light through every dark valley - even that valley of the mere shadow of death. *I call to remembrance my song in the night: I commune with mine own heart: and my spirit made diligent search.* (Psalm 77:6) *Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the LORD, to the mighty One of Israel.* (Isaiah 30:29) Those who place their trust in the Lord shall never die - they are deathless springs of living waters. The Church is that Flock of Christ which follows where He leads to green pastures and still waters.

Theirs is beauty's fairest pleasure; Theirs is wisdom's holiest treasure. Thou dost ever lead Thine own In the love of joys unknown. Who can love and appreciate beauty if not those who love the Lord and His pristine art in nature. This hymn, *Yesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*, is a classic work of the inspired work of an artist who listened intently

to the whispers of God deep in His soul. It is classic because it has enduring value and harbors God's immutable truth and beauty in word and music. Five hundred years from now (if the Lord tarries) good Christian men and women will still be inspired by this masterpiece while the little cheap, Gospel ditties of our own time are long forgotten. Only a faithful Christian can understand and appreciate the Treasures of the Snow to which God refers in the book of Job (Job 38:22). The hidden wisdom of God is reserved for those who will treasure them and not for the common fare of swine. Only a Devout Christian can walk into the early dews and roses of the Garden at dawn and hear that voice 'calling on their ear.' The joy of Christ cannot be defined or described in scientific terms for that love transcends science and logic. In fact, the love of god never dies, and when we have that love in our hearts, neither shall we!

I append as a postscript some select quotes of Johan Sebastian Bach:

The aim and final end of all music should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul. Music is an agreeable harmony permissible for the honor of God and the delights of the soul. I play the notes as they are written, but it is God who makes the music.

Johann Sebastian Bach

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; (Eph 5:18-20)