

Devotion on Hymns of the Church - Hymn 431 – *O Word of God Incarnate* – 1 August, Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)



I*N the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 The same was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. 8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. 11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. 12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: 13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14 AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-14)*

This is a solemn hymn of reverence that reinforces in the hearts of the worshippers the biblical doctrine of the Incarnation of Christ. The lyrics are the composition of the Anglican priest, William How, in 1867, to which the favored musical score is *MUNICH* by Felix Mendelssohn (1847) - one of the last works of composition by that great composer who died shortly after the writing of this piece. Alternate tunes are *AURELIA* (Samuel Wesley), *BERNO* (Arthur H. Mann), and *LANCASHIRE* (Henry T. Smart).

O Word of God Incarnate

O Word of God incarnate, O Wisdom from on high,
O Truth unchanged, unchanging, O Light of our dark sky:
We praise You for the radiance that from the hallowed page,
A Lantern to our footsteps, shines on from age to age.

The Church from You, our Savior, received the Gift divine,
And still that Light is lifted over all the earth to shine.
It is the sacred Vessel where gems of truth are stored;
It is the heaven drawn Picture of Christ, the living Word.

The Scripture is a banner before God's host unfurled;
It is a shining Beacon above the darkling world.
It is the Chart and Compass that over life's surging tide,
Mid mists and rocks and quicksands, to You, O Christ, will guide.

O make your Church, dear Savior, a lamp of purest gold,
To bear before the nations Your true light as of old.
O teach your wandering pilgrims by this their path to trace,
Till, clouds and darkness ended, they see You face to face.

O Word of God incarnate, O Wisdom from on high, O Truth unchanged, unchanging, O Light of our dark sky: We praise You for the radiance that from the hallowed page, A Lantern to our footsteps, shines on from age to age. In order for us to know God, He must come to us and be with us in the same human condition as we live. That is the Lord Emmanuel (God with Us) always. Our Lord is both perfectly God, and perfectly Man. He is Omniscient in Wisdom, and unchanging throughout all of eternity. He is the same Lord and Son of God that stood with the Father ere the worlds were made (see Hebrews 13:8). There are days when our skies seem to be made of brass and our prayers bounce back to us even as we utter them. ²³ *And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron.*" (Deut 28:23) It may be a result remission of faith in Bible study; or some cherished wedge of gold we have yet to surrender to God. WE create our own darkness by blocking the Light out when we allow worldly possessions to eclipse the Light Source. But the Light is always within our grasp through the pages of Holy Writ. It is our Lamp to guide our steps.

The Church from You, our Savior, received the Gift divine, And still that Light is lifted over all the earth to shine. It is the sacred Vessel where gems of truth are stored; It is the heaven drawn Picture of Christ, the living Word. There is a great painting by Warner Sallman of Christ standing at a door knocking. There is a warm light emanating from His Person – it is not a lamp, but the very Light of His presence. I have seen less inspired artists duplicate the painting but, in order to help the Lord out, they have transposed a lamp in to the hands of Christ. These latter artists miss the whole point of Sallman's painting – Christ IS the Light and needs no artificial light source.

The Church is the second entity instituted by Christ. The first was marriage which was to foreshadow and stand as a model for that which was to come in the Church. The Church should be the Beacon of Light to the world, but it has sorely failed in our day. Yes, it is to be a sacred Vessel; but that Vessel has been emptied of the "gems of truth" for which it was the guardian. I like the term, "Living Word" for that best describes our Lord. There is another stunning pencil drawing by the Korean Elder Gwang Hyuk Rhee entitled JESUS CHRIST NEW TESTAMENT WORD PRINT (84"x59") Looking upon the drawing, one would at first believe it was simply a charcoal line-drawing of Christ surrounded by many angels; but on closer examination, one discovers that the drawing is produced by the text of the entire New Testament in the Korean alphabet. The lines and shades are produced by darker and lighter print of the alphabet. It is the most inspiring of charcoal drawings I have ever witnessed.

The Scripture is a banner before God's host unfurled; It is a shining Beacon above the darkling world. It is the Chart and Compass that over life's surging tide, Mid mists and rocks and quicksands, to You, O Christ, will guide. The banner the Word represents is the Ensign of our battle lines. ¹⁰ *And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.* (Isaiah 11:10) Need I say that the Ensign represents the Word of God in Jesus Christ. He the rallying Guidon leading our embattled columns. That shining Beacon is the Light of the World! *I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.* (John 8:12) A Chart (map) and Compass will point the way in perilous seas and reveal the shoals and reefs that our vessels must avoid. It also points to the safe harbor of our souls, and we must heed the readings if we will arrive safely. *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.* (John 14:6) It is not enough to own the Chart and Compass (Bible) – we must heed its directions to gain an intimate knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

O make your Church, dear Savior, a lamp of purest gold, To bear before the nations Your true light as of old. O teach your wandering pilgrims by this their path to trace, Till, clouds and darkness ended, they see You face to face. Be not deceived, there is a proliferation of false churches in our day. There are beacons of false light in the swamps of the southland that lead the lost traveler hopelessly deeper into the swamp and pits of quicksand called Will-o-the-Wisp. Today we have many such false lights that originate from the voice of false prophets who claim extra-biblical revelations, or who deny the power of God and His Word. They do not usually do so openly, but with subtle subterfuge. There is a story from Arabian Nights entitled, Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp. Aladdin had gained possession of a magic lamp that contained a Genie who would grant anything Aladdin demanded. But there was a brigand and a thief who sought to gain possession of the lamp. He pushed a cart before the home of Aladdin and his beautiful princess wife who had no knowledge of the lamp's powers. He shouted out as he went, "New lamps for old! All who wish to trade old lamps for new please come forth." The princess traded the old magic lamp for a new and shiny lamp. But it had not power at all.

Although this is a fairy tale, it nonetheless expresses the sense of our modern day spiritual depravity. We have traded the True Light of Christ for false lights of the swamp. They are created by noxious sewer gases arising from the swamp and they are but a mirage. We follow them at our own peril. Let our churches once again become beacon lights of truth and salvation. Let us return to a reliance on the Holy Gospel alone and reject the dimming and artificial lights of man that are truly from the darkest chambers of the swamp of immorality.