

Hymn 52 – As with Gladness – 16 December 2014, Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)



Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. (Matt 2:1-2)

Though officially considered an Epiphany hymn, this hymn has just as much application to the Season of Advent and Christmas as it does Epiphany. In fact, I consider those three seasons to be so inter-related that there can be little in the way of separation of the spirit of each. Certainly, there is a progression of joy from 1<sup>st</sup> Advent to 3<sup>rd</sup> Epiphany, but the central theme of Christmas permeates in both directions, does it not?

This hymn carol was composed by William Chatterton Dix in 1860. The tune, *Dix*, was composed by Conrad Kocher and is the favored tune in modern times for "*For the Beauty of the Earth*." Its leading line properly sets the stage for the beauty and tradition surrounding this wonderful season – "*As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold*." It was the heavenly light for which men, sitting in ages of darkness, awaited to herald the promised Messiah. I have always paid certain deference to the wisdom of the aged men who wrote such beautiful and well-considered commentary on Scripture. The age in which these "men of old" lived gave them a deeper and fuller meaning of the Word that they expounded.

**As with Gladness Men of Old**  
William Chatterton Dix (1837-1898)

As with gladness men of old  
did the guiding star behold;  
as with joy they hailed its light,  
leading onward, beaming bright;  
so, most gracious Lord, may we  
evermore be led to thee.

As with joyful steps they sped  
to that lowly manger-bed;  
there to bend the knee before  
him whom heaven and earth adore;  
so may we with willing feet  
ever seek the mercy seat.

As they offered gifts most rare  
at that manger rude and bare;  
so may we with holy joy,  
pure and free from sin's alloy,  
all our costliest treasures bring,  
Christ! to thee, our heavenly King.

Holy Jesus! every day  
keep us in the narrow way;  
and, when earthly things are past,  
bring our ransomed souls at last  
where they need no star to guide,  
where no clouds thy glory hide.

In the heavenly country bright,  
need they no created light;  
thou its light, its joy, its crown,  
thou its sun which goes not down;  
there for ever may we sing  
alleluias to our King.

**"As with gladness men of old did the guiding star behold; as with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright; so, most gracious Lord, may we evermore be led to thee."** It is nearly impossible for those of us of the present age to comprehend the abject spiritual darkness that had existed over the past 400 years between the last prophetic utterance of Malachi and the Advent of Jesus Christ. That very last word of prophecy of the Old Testament was the condemnatory word, 'CURSE.' (Malachi 4:6) This long dark spiritual night, whose darkness was greatest just before the Dawn of the Gospel ministry, was suddenly vaporized by the brilliance of the rising of the Sun of Righteousness and Light of the World. The Light was blinding for two reason:

Those eyes that are deprived of light for extended periods are blinded by the most meager ray of light – *"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."* (Isaiah 9:2)

The Light that burst upon the world and penetrated centuries of darkness was no ordinary Light – it was the Light of the World in all of its brilliant and resplendent beams. *"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."* (John 1:4-5)

Not all hearts were joyful at the coming of the Light. Many, whose deeds were sinful and whose hearts were set on continuing in that sin, were perplexed and resentful of the Savior. The religious clerics (scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees) especially were covetous of power, prestige, and the upper seats at festivals. If many were drawn to the Son of God (and they KNEW He was just that) then their standing would become perilous indeed. In the end, those who seek the Light are drawn to it.

*“As with joyful steps they sped to that lowly manger-bed; there to bend the knee before him whom heaven and earth adore; so may we with willing feet ever seek the mercy seat.”* The Magi traversed desert sands and robber-infested hill country, and many hundreds of miles, following the Star. Their earnest faith made their journey one of joy and not wearisome. They came to find a King that was lying wherever the Star led. As they drew near Jerusalem, they, for a time, forsook the leading of God and leaned on their own understanding. Leaving off following the Star, they went to the Palace of Herod to inquire. But Jesus was not in a royal palace in Jerusalem. So they left Jerusalem and, once beyond the false lights of the city, they once more saw the Star that led to the Child after whom they sought. The Child was no longer in a manger, but rather a house when the Wise Men arrived. He who was placed in a wooden manger for the feeding of beasts would later be an artisan of wood and nails in the shop of Joseph, the carpenter. And He would also be placed on a rough-hewn wooden cross and fixed there with nine-inch nails. He was born of humble circumstances, and died a humiliating death; but those events had been ordained of God long before the world was made. Kings and Wise Men would bend the knee to this Child – and though His birth was humble, His coming was proclaimed by the highest order angels. If our feet are willing to follow, as were those of the Magi, we shall be led to the Mercy Seat of God.

*“As they offered gifts most rare at that manger rude and bare; so may we with holy joy, pure and free from sin's alloy, all our costliest treasures bring, Christ! to thee, our heavenly King.”* Those were gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They bear their own message of confession, worship, and redemption. The gold represents His role as King, and King of Kings. The Lord Jesus must be the Sovereign Ruler in our lives. The frankincense typifies the praise and worship due Him as Lord. The rising smoke of incense at the altar of the old Hebrew Temple represents the prayers of praise and worship rising to the ramparts of Heaven. Myrrh was an extract that was used for embalming and anointing the dead. This myrrh represented His death by which we are redeemed. We can present no more precious gift to God than our hearts whose coffers are filled with the gold of royal recognition, the frankincense of prayer and worship, and the myrrh of shed blood of the Lamb on God on its doorpost and lintels.

*“Holy Jesus! every day keep us in the narrow way; and, when earthly things are past, bring our ransomed souls at last where they need no star to guide, where no clouds thy glory hide.”* We are kept day by day in our walk with the Lord – there is no provision for a one-time worship in a year, month or week – but EVERYDAY! When the elements are consumed in fervent heat, the gold (good works) of our altars shall remain inviolate if we have made His Gold our own. But, I beg to differ with the carols author – we shall indeed continue to be led by that Bright and Beautiful Morning Star which is Christ in Paradise. *“And I will give him the morning star.”* (Rev 2:28) *“I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.”* (Rev 22:16) His Presence was hidden in a cloud that followed the Children of Israel in the Wilderness. He was veiled in a cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration. He was received into a cloud at His Ascension (Acts 1:9) and he will return in the same wise. But the cloud of unknowing that has veiled our eyes from deep and beautiful mysteries previously not permitted to mortal man shall become known to those who are His Elect at the last sound of the trumpet.

*“In the heavenly country bright, need they no created light; thou its light, its joy, its crown, thou its sun which goes not down; there for ever may we sing alleluias to our King.”* The cloudless Day of Heaven is a Day without end. The synthetic, man-made

lights of earth will not be worthy lights there for the Light of that place will be the Lord Himself. He will be ever-present there, and since He is the Day Star, darkness cannot exist in His presence. *"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until **the day dawn**, and the day star arise in your hearts."* (2 Peter 1:19) *"And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."* (Rev 21:23) There will be no doxology there, but an unending hymn of praise to the One whose Blood bought our heavenly dwelling place.

Do you have assurance of your Election in Christ?