

Hymn 52 – As with Gladness – 22 December 2015, Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)



When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

Matthew 2:10

This hymn/carol serves a dual role as a Christmas carol as well as an Epiphany hymn. Lyrics for the hymn were composed by William Dix in 1860 and written from his sick bed on the very day of Epiphany. Konrad Kocher composed the music, *DIX*, or *Stiemen aus dem Reiche Gottes*, in 1838. The tune is the same for *For the Beauty of the Earth*, and *Praise to God, Immortal Praise* (#140 in 1940 Hymnal). Though the coming of the Wise Men to the baby Jesus is most often depicted as a Christmas event, but it actually, in all probability, happened some months after the actual birth of Christ since the baby Jesus was lodged in a house when they arrived, *And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.* (Matt 2:11) It might be expected that the Star appeared to the Magi at the time of Jesus' birth, yet they would need to travel more than a thousand miles by camel to arrive at the scene.

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 glorious Lord, may we Evermore be led to Thee. Men who seek Christ are always glad at the sign of His coming. *I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.* (Psalms 16:8-9) Of course, these Wise Men erred in one respect. When they approached near to Jerusalem, they began to depend less on the Star and more on their human logic. They thought to themselves, Ah, we are near Jerusalem the capital city of Judea. It stands to reason that the King of Israel should be born there, and in the palace as well. So they ignored the Star and went into Jerusalem. There was no knowledge of Christ with Herod or the Jewish rulers, so the Wise Men went on their journey again. Once beyond the false lights of the city, they again saw the true Light of God in the Star, and followed on to Bethlehem. Of course, they were glad to see the star! ⁹ *When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.* ¹⁰ *When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.* (Matt 2:9-10)

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 Thy mercy seat. Here the author of the hymn makes a small error. It is unlikely that Christ was still in a manger since he was now lodged in a house according to the verse eleven of St. Matthew, chapter two. These were Wise Men and men of means. It would have cost a small fortune to journey from as far away as Persia, and the value of their gifts suggests great wealth. But these men were not too proud to bend the knee in worship and admiration of the Child Jesus, knowing who He was. It is true that both Heaven and earth adored the Baby Jesus. The heavenly host proclaimed His birth, the shepherds adored Him and so did the Wise Men from the East. It is a simple matter for us to adore Christ in our day. We do not need to leave our sheep unattended and go to seek Him. We do not need to travel over field and fountain, moor and mountain, to find Him. *Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.* (Heb 10:22) The mystery in all of this is thusly stated: We must seek Him if we are to find Him. ¹³ *And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.* ¹⁴ *And I will be found*

of you, saith the LORD. (Jer 29:13-14) We must possess the thirst of the wise Men in our seeking Him: **Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.** (Matt 7:7-8)

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. Yes, these Wise Men offered gifts suggesting royalty (Gold), and divinity (frankincense), and healing & death (myrrh) - all prophetic of the Person of Christ. The abode was necessarily a humble one that would be a sharp contrast to the wealth of the Wise Men, yet, they kneeled there nonetheless. Should we not have the same joy as the Wise Men after traveling from such a distant place. By the way, every sinner is far from God until He comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ! Sin is definitely an alloy. We may have many good works but all of those good works, when mixed with ONE sinful thought, is poison to our souls without Christ. We not only bring our costliest treasures to Christ, but ALL of our treasures. If He owns our hearts, He owns all that pertains to us. If Christ is our Heavenly King, He is also higher than any earthly ruler to us and takes preeminence among all rulers.

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. Jesus is Holy, and we should strive to be Holy as well. This holiness we can only attain through the imputed righteousness of Christ. *Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.* (1 Peter 1:16) After finding Christ, the Wise Men had no further need for the heavenly Star, for they had the light of the Holy Ghost to guide in future paths. **Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.** (Matt 7:13-14) Men always prefer the downward path just as running water seeks the lowest level: therefore the broad way leading to destruction is quite crowded. But the narrow path needs no great width to accommodate the few who will travel that path upward to Heaven.

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 forever may we sing Alleluias to our King! Just as the Wise Men left behind the Star of Bethlehem once they had found Jesus, yet, they had His light perpetually to light their hearts. The Christian has a light that is unseen to the world except for its natural goodness. But we process on to a light that is both unending and brilliant in our days of eternity future. IT IS WRITTEN: *And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. 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. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.* (Rev 21:22-25)