

Hymn 54 - Alleluia, Song of Sweetness - 28 February 2017, Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)



3 But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice. 4 Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him. 5 A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation. 6 God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land. (Psalm 68:3-6)

1 And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: (Rev 19:1)

The first occurrence of the word, Alleluia, appears in Revelations 19:1 above. It is in the context of the highest form of praise recorded in Scripture – that of much people in Heaven. It comes at the moment of great celebration at the coming Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The Last Supper of our Lord was a prefiguration of that Wedding Supper to which all of the elect shall appear. But the same term is included in a number of the Psalms of David under a different expression – Praise Ye the Lord which is expressed in Hebrew as Alleluia.

The liturgy of the Mediaeval Church forbade the use of Alleluia from the Saturday before Septuagesima until Easter. *The Hymnal 1940 Companion, p 41*. This was more a matter of Roman superstition than of reason and biblical logic. It is appropriate we praise the Lord even in adversity and the contemplated sorrows of the approaching Lenten season.

This is a translation by John Mason Neale from the Latin, 11th century.
Tune: *Dulce Carmen*.

Alleluia, Song of Sweetness

Alleluia, song of sweetness,
voice of joy that cannot die;
alleluia is the anthem
ever raised by choirs on high;
in the house of God abiding
thus they sing eternally.

Alleluia thou resoundest,
true Jerusalem and free;
alleluia, joyful mother,
all thy children sing with thee;
but by Babylon's sad waters
mourning exiles now are we.

Alleluia cannot always
be our song while here below;
alleluia our transgressions
make us for awhile forgo;
for the solemn time is coming
when our tears for sin must flow.

Therefore in our hymns we pray thee,
grant us, blessed Trinity,
at the last to keep thine Easter,
in our home beyond the sky,
there to thee for ever singing
alleluia joyfully.

Alleluia, song of sweetness, voice of joy that cannot die; alleluia is the anthem ever raised by choirs on high; in the house of God abiding thus they sing eternally. Choirs on high do surely raise the anthems of praise. As the beggar Lazarus abode in blissful joy in the bosom of Abraham so do the peoples of Heaven abide in joy beyond the Gates of Splendor. The voice of joy is eternal and does not distill in the higher atmospheres of the Throne of God. 'Praise Ye the Lord' says enough to make the anthem immortal. When the soul is filled, brim-full, with joy; it is nigh impossible to suppress songs of praise. In the presence of God, there is no recourse but to remember the blessings of God in praise and the songs of the heart.

Alleluia thou resoundest, true Jerusalem and free; alleluia, joyful mother, all thy children sing with thee; but by Babylon's sad waters mourning exiles now are we. There is truly a kind of Heaven on earth that is precursor to that which is above. We catch glimpses of it in the beauty of a child's laughter, the budding of a rose, and the purring of a kitten. We know of it in moments of silent meditation upon new diamonds of truth from Scripture which we have discovered for the first time. That Jerusalem of present-day Judaea is not the Jerusalem of our final destination. That Jerusalem to which we pay homage is the New Jerusalem of God. *2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.* (Rev 21:2) We may feel disposed to do as Israel did in the Babylon of the world: *1 By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. 2 We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. 3 For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. 4 How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?* (Psalm 137:1-4) In the world, we are

pilgrims and strangers. Is it any wonder that the world should appear as a strange land to the people of God?

Alleluia cannot always be our song while here below; alleluia our transgressions make us for awhile forgo; for the solemn time is coming when our tears for sin must flow. Why can Alleluia not ALWAYS be our song here below? It is because we cannot remain on the spiritual mountaintop indefinitely. We must descend to the fertile plains where the fields are white for the harvest. In doing so, we come among the mundane attractions that sometimes deter us from a fixed compass on our True North. Sin, even that of the Elect, separates the believer from God. It needs repenting of as we do in every Morning & Evening Prayer, and the Holy Communion. Our firm faith and devotion are interrupted by sin. But even a magnetic compass, though it fluctuates with the storms and billows of the sea, will again return to its proper reading as the storm subsides. If our sins do not compel tearful repentance, it may be that we have not repented enough.

Therefore in our hymns we pray thee, grant us, blessed Trinity, at the last to keep thine Easter, in our home beyond the sky, there to thee for ever singing alleluia joyfully. Every believing heart has a Christmas Season and an Easter. There is a new birth in which our hearts are born anew at the coming of Christ into the formerly vacant chambers of the heart. That moment is the Bethlehem of our pilgrimage. Then comes the Easter of our Joys in which our calling and election are made steadfast by the completed work of Christ – not only at the cross – not only in the Garden Tomb – but in the glorious resurrection of our Lord. It is by this wise that we come into a full communion with the Trinity of God having become ONE with Christ as He is ONE with the Father and the Spirit. The true Christian has a veritable joy of eternal bliss as his prospects in the Eternity of God and His Heaven. Does this not cause you to want to break out in songs of praise and joy?