



*6 Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. 7 Then said I, **Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me,** 8 I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. 9 I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. 10 I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.* (Psalms 40:6-10)

The hymn of today's devotion is a children's hymn though most adults will profit measurably from it. We tend to forget the purpose of the church calendar and need reminding from time to time. Amazingly, one hundred years ago, most children had a better understanding of the Church Year than most adults do today. There were no multiple-choice questions offered by the catechist whom all must satisfy ere confirmation. Baptism, Confirmation, Worship, and Holy living were matters of far greater import to those former generations.

The lyrics for this hymn were written by Miss A. Katherine Hankey in 1888 for the Sunday School of St. Peter's Parish, Eaton Square, London. The accompanying music is (*Innocents*) *Keine Schön-heit Hat die Welt*, composed in 1657 by Johann Scheffler. The hymn informs us of the sequence of the Church Calendar from Advent to Trinity - a subject well worth our consideration at this beginning of a new church year. The Church Calendar and Lectionary are a rich heritage of the ancient church which opens up the entire plan of God in His Word to His people. Unfortunately, many churches today have no familiarity with this important asset; but it represents the Cycle of Life of the Church Militant.

Advent Tells Us, Christ is Near

*Advent tells us, Christ is near:
Christmas tells us Christ is here!
In Epiphany we trace
All the glory of His grace.*

*Those three Sundays before Lent
Will prepare us to repent;
That in Lent we may begin
Earnestly to mourn for sin.*

*Holy Week and Easter, then,
Tell who died and rose again;
O that happy Easter day!
"Christ is risen indeed," we say.*

*Yes, and Christ ascended, too,
To prepare a place for you;
So we give Him special praise,
After those great forty days.*

*Then, He sent the Holy Ghost,
On the day of Pentecost,
With us ever to abide:
Well may we keep Whitsuntide!*

*Last of all, we humbly sing
Glory to our God and King,
Glory to the One in three,
On the Feast of Trinity.*

"Advent tells us, Christ is near: Christmas tells us Christ is here! In Epiphany we trace All the glory of His grace." ADVENT Season is a time of preparation - preparation for the coming Son of God. When visitors are coming, especially important ones, how we plan and labor to make all things just right to receive them. The same is true of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have had centuries to prepare the Way prior to His first Advent, and only God knows the years, days, or minutes we have remaining to prepare for His second Advent. The Wise Men began their journey in Advent, and Mary and Joseph made the perilous journey over rugged mountain and rocky road to Bethlehem during that Advent - all in preparation for the realization of promised Light from old time in the Person of God's only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. The expectations and hopes of Advent were comprehended in that fateful night more than two thousand years ago - a night which we call CHRISTMAS - such an august date that the whole world measures her calendar from before and after it.

Christmas concluded a period of four hundred years during which there was no light from Heaven - not a word, nor an angelic message, was received by Israel from Malachi to John the Baptist. But God is faithful to His Word so that in the fullness of time, God sent us a Savior. "*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*" (Gal 4:4-5) The preceding four centuries of darkness in Israel contrasted mightily with the brilliant Light of His Coming and added to the great glory of it. Sometimes God conceals Himself in the darkest moments of our day in order

to make more glorious the Light which He is preparing to give us. We are in an extended ADVENT Season today awaiting the glorious return of our Lord. His royal entry into Jerusalem on the Passover Week of His Passion foreshadows that glorious return of Christ spoken of by John the Revelator in Rev. 19:11-21. The Christmas Season of the Reformation Church extends for twelve days until EPIPHANY. Epiphany refers to the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles and is most admirably exemplified in the coming of the Magi, following the Star of Bethlehem, bearing gifts from the East - gifts of prophetic merit, GOLD (royalty), Frankincense (worshipful), and myrrh (healing and death).

"Those three Sundays before Lent Will prepare us to repent; That in Lent we may begin Earnestly to mourn for sin." The life of the Church is always one of preparation and hope. Our work is never done on earth. After Epiphany comes a period of three Sundays of repentance and preparation for the great sorrow during Lent for our sins and, more importantly, the great price our Savior paid in our redemption of them. The fasting observance of Lent instills a necessary discipline to the Christian life. The things that we value highly may be placed aside as a sign of our grief, and love, for the Savior who died in our stead. Quite often, our bodies (and souls) are made stronger for the abstinence from foods and drinks which are almost always excess.

"Holy Week and Easter, then, Tell who died and rose again; O that happy Easter day! "Christ is risen indeed," we say." The days of the week preceding Easter might be compared to those four hundred years of darkness without light of the intertestamental period from Malachi to the Coming of Christ. The betrayals and horrors of this week would make all seem hopeless to the disciples concluding in the death of our Lord. Anguish of soul for sins that have led to the crucifixion of the Lord of Glory is keenly felt by all who love and obey God. Even on the cross, from the 6th hour until the ninth (noon until 3 P.M.), a pervasive darkness covered the land until Christ surrendered His Spirit unto His Father. Christ was buried very near the beginning of Sabbath at sunset. He rested in the tomb over Sabbath, and rose at the dawn of the third day (sometime past sunset on the Sabbath and before Sunrise on Sunday. But at the moment of darkness surrounding the Garden Tomb, such a blinding and effulgent Light as was never before seen burst through the stone door of the Tomb, and the guards were struck unconscious by it. It was the glorious Easter we celebrate in our Church Year, and the Passover for all who know and love the Lord and His Father. Easter has been said to be the most important day in the Church Year, but, remember, there could have been no Easter without a first Christmas!

"Yes, and Christ ascended, too, To prepare a place for you; So we give Him special praise, After those great forty days." ASCENSIONTIDE begins the continued work of our Lord in Heaven in preparing a place for us, His Church and Bride. *"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."* (John 14:2-3) It was customary in those days in Judea for a young man betrothed to His Bride to go away and prepare a place for the Bride under the supervision of the Father. When the accommodations were satisfactory, the Father would send the Son to receive His Bride for the Wedding Feast - sometimes a period of one to two years; but in our biblical wait for the return of Christ, the period is without stipulation. He was received, appropriately, by a cloud at His ascension. Perhaps the same cloud which covered Him as He followed Israel across the Red Sea Waters, or that same cloud that covered His Presence atop Sinai at the giving of the Law, or even that glory cloud that covered His

appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration. But, ascend to the Father, He did, and there remains at the right Hand of the Father to intercede on our behalf as our High Priest.

"Then, He sent the Holy Ghost, On the day of Pentecost, With us ever to abide: Well may we keep Whitsuntide!" Pentecost occurs on the seventh Sunday after Easter. It symbolizes the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the disciples (all disciples of Christ) and is based on the old Jewish holy day of *Shavuoth*, the spring Harvest festival. The Spring Harvest was the first harvest of the year and the Holy Ghost came to seal the first harvest of the Church. In the Anglican tradition, this day is called Whitsuntide.

"Last of all, we humbly sing Glory to our God and King, Glory to the One in three, On the Feast of Trinity." In the ages before Christ, we only knew God as our Father. The Son remained veiled in the clouds and mist of our unknowing; but at Easter, we came to know Father and Son. At the falling of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostolic Church, we came to know the fullness of the Divine and Holy Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We observe Trinity Sunday on the Sunday following Pentecost and the season usually extends for at least twenty four Sunday's until Sunday next before Advent. Trinity Season is the longest season in the Church Year and is a product exclusively of the English Church. Other churches, not taught by English missionaries, refer to the Sunday's in Trinity as the number of Sunday's '*after Pentecost.*' We gather the name of TRINITY from the Gospel for the day of Trinity Sunday of our Lord's midnight meeting with Nicodemus. The greater subject of that meeting was conversion and baptism whose formula has always followed in the Name of the Father, and of the son, and of the Holy Ghost.

So in this sweet little children's hymn we have the comprehension of the full Church Year. The purpose of the Church Year is to keep the Church centered on the whole life of Christ to include the Law and prophets of the Old Testament period. It forces the clergy and laity to focus on all of the Scripture concerning Christ (and all Scripture concerns Christ) and not to focus only on those passages that have become our favorites in time past. I have found in preaching the Lectionary, my favorites have become whatever text the lectionary calls for on a given Sunday. I been forced to grow in understanding from the preaching of the Church Year. We all may be so blessed if we study all Scripture with serious intent and hope.