

## Easter 5

“At the Lamb’s High Feast We Sing” (*Lutheran Service Book* #633)

The old is often new again. Here is a hymn written somewhere between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries, but one which did not become well known among Lutherans until forty years ago. It has taken its place as one of the premier Easter hymns of faith. The images within the text draw upon the familiar Easter Vigil. Baptismal candidates were received into the Kingdom and catechumens received their first communion as the Easter sunrise lit up the day.

The foretaste of the Marriage Feast of the Lamb is the Easter Holy Communion in which the faithful gather in the joy of our Lord’s triumph over sin and death. From His side blood and water flow—images of both baptism and the Eucharist. His “blood for wine” and his “body for the feast” remind us that this Sacrament not only looks back to Passover and the Upper Room but forward to the heavenly banquet. Christ is the priest offering and the victim or the offering itself.

“The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin” says St. John (1 John 1:7). Here the paschal blood causes death to retreat and delivers victory to the people of God. The passing through the Red Sea by our forefathers prefigures the baptismal water that kills and gives life.

“Pascha” is Greek for “pesach” which is Hebrew for “Passover”. One small word has so much meaning and power compacted into it! With this the manna of the Israelites is tied to the new manna of Christ’s body in the Sacrament.

Christ the Mighty Victim is also the conqueror who vanquishes hell’s power and delivers the Kingdom of life and light to God’s people. Death can no more make God’s people cower in fear nor can the grave claim the victory. This Easter day Christ has opened Paradise and the saints of God emerge from their tombs to acknowledge what He has done and will do.

On Easter we sing as those newborn by grace and set free from sin’s power to love and serve the Lord with gladness. In the culmination of our song, we sing to the Father who gives the crown, the Son whose death gives us life, and the Spirit who leads us through all the days to present us holy and blameless before the Triune God forevermore.

Christ the Victor not only basks in the light of His triumph but turns that victory over to those for whom He died and rose again. That is Easter’s joy and glory—His victory has become ours. We sing it in the Queen of Seasons (Easter); we sing it as the baptized whom He has made alive; we sing it as those who feast upon the Crucified and Risen Lord’s body and blood; and we sing it in anticipation of the great and eternal day when He will come again—at the Lamb’s high feast!

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At the Lamb's high feast we sing praise to our victorious King,  
Who has washed us in the tide flowing from His pierced side. Alleluia!

Praise we Him, whose love divine gives His sacred blood for wine,  
Gives His body for the feast—Christ the victim, Christ the priest. Alleluia!

Where the paschal blood is poured, death's dread angel sheathes the sword;  
Israel's hosts triumphant go through the wave that drowns the foe. Alleluia!

Praise we Christ, whose blood was shed, paschal victim, paschal bread;  
With sincerity and love, eat we manna from above. Alleluia!

Mighty Victim from the sky, hell's fierce powers beneath You lie;  
You have conquered in the fight, You have brought us life and light. Alleluia!

Now no more can death appall, now no more the grave enthrall;  
You have opened paradise, and Your saints in you shall rise. Alleluia!

Easter triumph, Easter joy! This alone can sin destroy;  
From sin's power, Lord, set us free, newborn souls in You to be. Alleluia!

Father, who the crown shall give, Savior, by whose death we live,  
Spirit, guide through all our days: Three in One, Your name we praise. Alleluia!

Text: *Lutheran Service Book* #633. Latin, "Ad regias Agni dapes", c. 5<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century; translated by Robert Campbell (1814-68), altered. The text is in the public domain.

[This devotion was prepared for the website of the Center for Church Music, Concordia University Chicago. It may be downloaded and printed for local use.]