

Proper 17 (August 31, 2014)

“Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus” (*Lutheran Service Book* #531)

If a friend does you a big favor, you think a bit about how you are going to express your gratitude. So if you were going to speak directly to the one who has rescued you from the power of sin and the fear of death, what would you want to say?

“Hail” is how the soldiers greeted Jesus when they put a crown of thorns on him and mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” (Matt. 27:29) In this hymn the word is used not to mock Jesus, but to praise him as the stanzas assign titles to Jesus and spell out what he did that is so marvelous. These titles are used: “Jesus,” “Galilean King,” “universal Savior,” and “Paschal Lamb.”

Jesus is the name that the angel Gabriel told Mary to give to the son that she would bear (Luke 1:31); it is Hebrew for “Yahweh is salvation.” Gabriel also indicated that this Son of God would reign over the house of Jacob and that his kingdom would be forever (Luke 1:33). He is therefore a *King* from the Davidic line but also one who came from *Galilee*.

In the Old Testament Yahweh is called *Savior* for protecting and rescuing his people. In the New Testament it is used of Jesus already when the angel announced to the shepherds, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Matt. 2:11). Jesus was born to save all people (a “universal Savior”). Jesus told Nicodemus, “For God so loved *the world*, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

It was the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist, who clearly testified that here was God’s sacrificial lamb: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) At Easter and every Sunday the Christian church recognizes this Lamb whose blood saves us from eternal death. He is rightly called a paschal lamb (“Pasch” is Hebrew for *Passover*) as Luther does in his Easter hymn, “Here our true *Paschal Lamb* we see, whom God so freely gave us.”

To these praise-filled titles the poet adds phrases describing what Jesus did to earn them. (Actually, for this hymn there are two British poets: an anonymous poet who wrote all of stanza 1 and the first four lines in stanzas 3 and 4; the other lines were created by August Toplady, an 18th century Anglican cleric, author of “Rock of Ages.”) As we sing then we offer our praise to Jesus for bearing our sin and shame, giving us life, letting our sin be laid on him, making full atonement, forgiving us because of his blood, reconciling us to God, and opening the gate of heaven.

Finally, the hymn invites all the heavenly hosts to add their adoration, anthems, songs, and chants to our grateful greeting of the “once despised Jesus.”

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Hail, Thou once despised Jesus!
Hail, Thou Galilean King!
Thou didst suffer to release us;
Thou didst free salvation bring.
Hail, Thou universal Savior,
Bearer of our sin and shame!
By Thy merit we find favor:
Life is given through Thy name.

Paschal Lamb, by God appointed,
All our sins on Thee were laid;
By almighty love anointed,
Thou has full atonement made.
All Thy people are forgiven
Through the virtue of Thy blood;
Opened is the gate of heaven,
Reconciled are we with God.

Jesus, hail! Enthroned in glory,
There forever to abide;
All the heav'nly hosts adore Thee,
Seated at Thy Father's side.
There for sinners Thou are pleading;
There Thou dost our place prepare,
Ever for us interceding
Till in glory we appear.

Worship, honor, pow'r, and blessing
Thou art worthy to receive;
Highest praises, without ceasing,
Right it is for us to give,
Help, ye bright angelic spirits,
All your noblest anthems raise;
Help to sing our Savior's merits,
Help to chant Immanuel's praise!

Text: Hymns Addressed to the Holy, Holy, Holy, Triune God, London, 1757, sts. 1, 3a, 4a, alt;

A Collection of Psalms and Hymns, London, 1760, sts. 2, 3b, 4b, alt.

Tune: O DURCHBRECHER Geist-reiches Gesang-Buch, Halle, 1704, ed. Johann A. Freylinghausen

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