

Proper 24 (October 12, 2014)

“Holy God, We Praise Thy Name” (*Lutheran Service Book* #940)

The *Te Deum*, the magnificent 4<sup>th</sup> century Latin hymn of praise to the Creator God of our Salvation, has been paraphrased numerous times into metrical hymns for the benefit of God’s people. Ignz Franz’s *Großier Gott, wir loben dich*, written in 1771, and first published in 1776, is one of the finest examples. It was brought to America by German immigrants and translated into English in 1858 by Clarence A. Walworth under the title *Holy God, We Praise Your Name*. The original twelve verses were later amended to eight and then to the five in current use. Many Christian churches (of a variety of doctrinal persuasions) still sing it today. It is a faithful testimony to the true God of Scriptures.

WHY do we praise God? The hymn gives us the reasons—

Verse 1: He is Lord over all, all that we can see and even beyond what we can see, imagine, or comprehend.

Verse 2: All the hosts of heaven praise His name. The angels “see” in that realm of heaven, unseen by us, the reality of God’s greatness —His power, wisdom, and mercy.

Verse 3: All the faithful people of God throughout the ages praise His name. Here we get a fascinating overview. The Old Testament people who held the promise. The New Testament people who witnessed the promise revealed in Jesus. The martyrs who died clinging to the faith. And all the people since who have trusted in Christ. Even today saints around the world raise a continuous refrain of praise. As Christians in one part of the world close their eyes in sleep, Christians in another place awake to a new day of praise to their God. God has sustained all His saints in faith through every trial and temptation, by His gracious power to save and keep them for eternity.

Verse 4: Here is the clear gospel proclamation. Here is the reason above all reasons to praise our Holy God. Jesus Christ, God and Man, sacrificed for us sinners, paid the price of sin-bound death, shattered the bars of hell, and opened heaven to all believers.

Verse 5: What a wonderful, incomprehensible mystery is the Triune God who loves us so! What a dynamic mystery how this majestic God cared for us sinners, planned and accomplished our salvation. He gives this mystery to us so that by faith we might believe it, cling to it as our only hope, and embrace it as our own.

The much repeated “we” throughout the hymn invites us to join the song of praise. That we do with all reverence and enthusiasm. Not just because others praise Him. But because God is our God and He has given this very faith to each of us personally. That reality caused me to reflect on the hymn and my life’s song of praise. That reflection became a sonnet.

## MY SONG OF PRAISE

Could all Your vast creation voice the Name  
That brought them into being with a word,  
No detriment to Your eternal fame  
If this poor tuneless tongue could not be heard.

Your angels fill Your heavens with the sounds.  
The praises of Your saints surround Your throne.  
Your church throughout the earth the song rebounds.  
What voice have I to make Your glories known?

If I could only teach a child Your love —  
How Jesus died to set all children free,  
That simple note would ring in heav'n above —  
My song of praise. Lord, give that voice to me.

And I shall spend my years, my life, my days  
In chorus with creation's endless praise.

Rev. Lonie Eatherton  
Fenton MO

<photo of Pastor Eatherton>

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Holy God, we praise Thy name; Lord of all, we bow before Thee.  
All on earth Thy scepter claim, all in heav'n above adore Thee.  
Infinite Thy vast domain, everlasting is Thy reign.

Hark! The glad celestial hymn angel choirs above are raising;  
Cherubim and seraphim, in unceasing chorus praising,  
Fill the heav'ns with sweet accord: Holy, holy, holy Lord!

Lo, the apostles' holy train join Thy sacred name to hallow;  
Prophets swell the glad refrain, and the white-robed martyrs follow,  
And from morn to set of sun through the Church the song goes on.

Thou art King of Glory, Christ; Son of God, yet born of Mary.  
For us sinners sacrificed, as to death a Tributary,  
First to break the bars of death, Thou hast opened heav'n to faith.

Holy Father, holy Son, Holy Spirit, three we name Thee;  
Though in essence only one, undivided God we claim Thee

And, adoring, bend the knee while we own the mystery.

Text: Latin, c. 4<sup>th</sup> century; German version appeared in *Katholisches Gesangbuch* in Vienna 1774. English translation prepared by Clarence A. Walworth, 1820-1900, alt.

Tune: GROSSER GOTT appeared in the *Katholisches Gesangbuch*.

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[This devotion was prepared for the website of the Center for Church Music and may be downloaded and copied for local use.]