



Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne For the Life of the World

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Good Lent!

By Larry A. Peters

Sing His Bleeding Love: Hymns and Church Music for Lent and Easter

By Kevin J. Hildebrand

Easter: Life Overcoming Death

By Gifford A. Grobien

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Good Lent is time spent renewing our focus upon the Six Chief Parts, preaching and praying the small catechism and refreshing our faith. We spend the whole year doing more with less time; Lent offers us a chance to do more with a bit more time and latitude granted to us by the hearers in the pew.

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The church looks different in Lent, with violet paraments in the chancel and on the pastor's vestments. The church sounds different. We omit singing "Alleluia," and we hear music that we do not hear other times of the year. ... Easter, with its dazzling white paraments, plenty of lilies, and festive music from churches large and small, provides a feast for the senses beginning at the Easter Vigil and then magnifying on Easter morning.

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By Gifford A. Grobien

This hope of new life in Christ—this is how the Christians of old faced the wickedness of their time. Although the world seemed to be crumbling around them, they did not despair, for they knew that their lives and the world itself was being remade in Christ. For us, too, the resurrection of Christ gives us an indomitable hope, no matter the social or personal trials we suffer.

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Cover Photo: Luther Statue on Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne Campus. By Richard Woodward.



Sing His Bleeding Love:

Hymns and Church Music for Lent and Easter

By Kevin J. Hildebrand

A member of the seminary's Schola Cantorum choir told me that of all the services the choir leads, the Lenten vespers was her favorite. "I love Lent," she related. I love it too, and I suspect that many Christians share her sentiment. Part of the love for the seasons of the Church Year is rejoicing in the gifts of the church that are distinctive for each season.

The church looks different in Lent, with violet paraments in the chancel and on the pastor's vestments. The church sounds different. We omit singing "Alleluia," and we hear music that we do not hear other times of the year. When we hear tunes such as "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded," "My Song Is Love Unknown," "Christ, the Life of All the Living," we know it's Lent. And unlike the commercial backdrop of "holiday music" in pop culture during the month (or more!) before Christmas, there are no "Lenten Hits" music downloads from iTunes or Lenten music specials on TV. Instead, the Church's song for Lent is typically heard just there—in church. We are blessed when these tunes and texts surround us and fill us during this season.

Easter, with its dazzling white paraments, plenty of lilies and festive music from churches large and small, provides a feast for the senses beginning at the Easter Vigil and then magnifying on Easter morning. Even better is the feast for the soul which is given to God's people in Christ's body and blood and proclaimed in the Church's song: "This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia!"

"Come, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. Who, for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." These verses from Hebrews 12:1-2 form the Gradual for Lent and provide a framework for the Church's music during this season. As we sing and meditate upon the Church's hymns, especially in the season of Lent, our eyes (and ears, hearts, minds and voices) are fixed on Christ as we "sing His bleeding love" (*Lutheran Service Book [LSB]* 431:5, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, 2006). These hymns proclaim the faith, confess Christ as the Lamb of God, help us to learn of Christ and comfort us. And ultimately, the hymns of Lent wonderfully lead us to the hymns of Easter, which confess that same Lamb of God risen from the dead.

Lent—Christ, the Lamb of God, Who Takes Away the Sin of the World

Proclamation: Like all good hymns, the hymns of Lent are a sung confession of the faith. They proclaim the truths of what God in Christ has done for us. In particular, the hymns of Lent tell the story of Christ's life, suffering and death. The very title of "Sing, My Tongue, the Glorious Battle" tells the story of Christ's suffering and crucifixion by *singing* it. The first stanza confesses this story:

Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle;
Sing the ending of the fray.
Now above the cross, the trophy,
Sound the loud triumphant lay;
Tell how Christ, the world's redeemer,
As a victim won the day.
(*LSB*, 454, v.1)

Lamb of God: Singing of Christ, the Lamb of God (*Agnus Dei* in Latin), is not unique to Lent, but this imagery appears in sharper focus in the Church's song during this season. In Matins, the congregation sings, "Praise to You, O Christ, *Lamb of our salvation*," in place of "Alleluia."

Additionally, praying the Litany (*LSB* pp. 288-289) is a discipline that many individuals and congregations observe in Lent. In this Litany, a three-fold prayer to Christ, the Lamb of God, is included:

L Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,
C have mercy.

L Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,
C have mercy.

L Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,
C grant us Your peace.

Paul Gerhardt's magnificent hymn sings of Christ, the Lamb of God, in a very personal way:

A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth,
The guilt of sinners bearing
And, laden with the sins of earth,
None else the burden sharing;
Goes patient on, grows weak and faint,
To slaughter led without complaint,
That spotless life to offer,
He bears the stripes, the wounds, the lies,
The mockery, and yet replies,
"All this I gladly suffer."
("A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth," *LSB*, 438, v.1)

Congregations that regularly sing the Divine Service are familiar with various settings of the *Agnus Dei*, whether it begins "O Christ, Thou Lamb of God," "Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world" or in another translation. This hymn with its easy, repeating phrases, is simple enough for very young children to learn and remember. Another version appears as Hymn 434, "Lamb of God, Pure and Holy."

Most significantly, as we sing the *Agnus Dei* in the communion liturgy, Christ the Lamb of God is present on the altar to feed the Christian with His body and blood. Another more recent hymn by Rev. Stephen Starke sings of the *Agnus Dei* using Christ's own words:

Lamb of God, once slain for sinners,
Host, who spreads this meal divine,
Here You pledge our sins are covered,
Pledge received in bread and wine:
"Take and eat; this is My body,
Given on the cross for you.
Take and drink; this cup of blessing
Is My blood poured out for you."
("In the Shattered Bliss of Eden," v.4, Stephen Starke, 2002)

Discipline: The word discipline sometimes has a negative connotation, such as when parents admonish misbehaving children. But the root word of *discipline* is the same as *disciple*. To be disciplined is to learn, and the Church's Lenten hymns discipline us as we learn of Christ and "grow in holiness" (*LSB* 447:17). The Church's song gives us time and opportunity to ponder Christ's passion:

Jesus, I will ponder now
On Your holy passion;
With Your Spirit me endow
For such meditation.
Grant that I in love and faith
May the image cherish
Of Your suff'ring, pain, and death
That I may not perish.
("Jesus, I Will Ponder Now," *LSB*, 440, v.1)

In congregations where the rich choral tradition of the Church is cultivated, more opportunities exist to ponder and learn of the Passion of Christ. Settings of the Passion narratives and of the Seven Words of Christ from the cross abound for choirs and vocalists, as well as musical settings of other scriptural texts that help us ponder the Passion. The verses of Isaiah 52 and 53 have been set to music by various composers, and a new setting of these verses for choir and instruments by composer Kenneth Kosche will make its debut at CTS this spring (see page 10).

Comfort: In a sin-filled world marked with hopelessness, fear, guilt and anxiety, the hymns of Lent provide an alternative: hope, comfort, forgiveness and peace. These are not mere positive-thinking maxims; they are reality, based on the real presence of Christ in His Word and Sacraments, given for you. Johann Heermann's hymn, "Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing," speaks to the Christian with comfort and peace in all manner of affliction:

Jesus, grant that balm and healing
In Your holy wounds I find,
Ev'ry hour that I am feeling
Pains of body and of mind.
Should some evil thought within
Tempt my treach'rous heart to sin,
Show the peril, and from sinning
Keep me from its first beginning.
(*LSB*, 421, v.1)

As we "fix our eyes on Jesus" in the song of the Church during Lent, it is a comforting discipline that serves us our entire life; indeed, until life's end, when our eyes shall see our crucified, resurrected, ascended Lord face to face:



Be Thou my consolation,
 My shield, when I must die;
 Remind me of Thy passion
 When my last hour draws nigh.
 Mine eyes shall then behold Thee,
 Upon Thy cross shall dwell,
 My heart by faith enfold Thee.
 Who dieth thus dies well.
 ("O Sacred Head Now Wounded," *LSB*, 449, v.4)

Easter: The Lamb the Sheep Has Ransomed

Christians, to the Paschal Victim
 Offer your thankful praises!
 The Lamb the sheep has ransomed:
 Christ, who only is sinless,
 Reconciling sinners to the Father.
 Death and life have contended
 In that combat stupendous:
 The Prince of life, who died,
 Reigns immortal.
 ("Christians, to the Paschal Victim," *LSB*, 460, v.1)

Every year we teach the students at CTS this ancient hymn. The Seminary Kantorei sings it on their annual tours, and we use it in weekly communion services during parts of the Easter season. For in this season the Church continues to gather around and sing of Christ, the Lamb of God. Although in Easter the confession of Christ more often names Him as the Paschal Lamb, victorious over sin, death and the devil. As this ancient hymn begins, "Christians, to the Paschal Victim Offer your thankful praises!" we are reminded that *Paschal* comes from the Greek word for Passover and is used in connection with the celebration of Christ's resurrection.

When I taught in a Lutheran elementary school, some of our catechism instruction would include comparisons to the Passover lambs that were killed to save the Israelites, to Christ the Paschal Lamb who was sacrificed for our salvation. The students would learn Martin Luther's magnificent Easter hymn, "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands." The fifth stanza of Luther's hymn makes these same connections:

Here our true Paschal Lamb we see,
 Whom God so freely gave us;
 He died on the accursed tree—
 So strong His love—to save us.
 See, His blood now marks our door;
 Faith points to it; death passes o'er,
 And Satan cannot harm us.
 Alleluia!
 (*LSB*, 458, v.5)


Whether it's elementary school children, first year seminarians or aged saints in the parish singing this stanza, the freedom to sing that "Satan cannot harm us" is a truth that only the song of the Church proclaims.

Especially poignant and comforting is when the Church sings Easter hymns proclaiming the forgiveness in the blood of Christ during the distribution of the Lord's Supper. As the members of the body of Christ are gathered to receive the body and blood of Christ, the confession of faith in the church's song surrounds them as the church sings:

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!
 ("At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing," *LSB*, 633, v.1)

No wonder, then, that so many Easter hymns, including "At the Lamb's High Feast," are also sung at funerals. The reality of death is countered by the reality of Christ's resurrected body and His real presence with His saints now and in eternity. The final stanza of "O Sacred Head Now Wounded" speaks of the Christian dying in Christ. The hymns of Easter sing also of the saints rising in Christ to live in His presence forever:

Now no more can death appall,
 Now no more the grave enthrall;
 You have opened paradise,
 And Your saints in You shall rise.
 Alleluia!
 ("At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing," *LSB*, 633, v.6)

May the Lord bless your singing these Lent and Easter seasons, as you proclaim and confess the faith and are comforted by the Paschal Lamb: crucified, risen and given for you. 

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