

That Easter Day with Joy Was Bright

1062

Author Latin hymn, 5th century

Composer Michael Praetorius

Luke 24: 13-49

John 20: 11-30

Thoughts on the Text

This lovely Easter hymn originated in the 5th century, giving testimony that some of the best expressions of worship in Christianity are some of the oldest as well. We would do well to remember the witness of our forefathers and foremothers of the faith.

In this hymn, the scene is Easter morning, a day when a great miracle occurred. Naturally, we remember the mysterious reversal that took place in the tomb itself. No one knows for sure exactly what happened. The biblical narratives do not give us a glimpse into the hidden darkness behind the stone. What we do know is that on Friday Jesus was dead and buried. On Sunday morning he lived again. Resurrection. Many hymns, sermons, and meditations have reflected on the miracle of the resurrection.

The first stanza of this hymn in particular gives us a glimpse of the giddiness the disciples must have felt on Easter day, "when, to their longing eyes restored, the glad apostles saw their Lord." This is a delightful way to imagine the drama of seeing the risen Christ for the first time.

The third and fourth stanzas invite Jesus to return to be among us again, that we might take our place alongside those first disciples to see the Lord with our eyes. If that is not to be, then we are emboldened by the continual Eastertide in which we live and have our being. These are all Easter days as we live in the light of the resurrection. As such, we do not need to see Jesus with our physical eyes to have his presence near to us, "Come, risen Christ with us abide."

The presence of Christ is a comfort and guide to us. It is also the source of our defense against and salvation from death. The resurrection that Jesus experienced is the promise of resurrection and everlasting life to all who believe in him. When we sing and celebrate on Easter day we are surely remembering what happened back then and also we are celebrating the eternal life God has given to us. In this sense then Easter is not just one day per year or an event locked back in time. Eastertide is the time we live in. We live in the bright joy of resurrection faith and hope.