

Once in Royal David's City

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Author Cecil Frances Alexander

Composer Henry J. Gauntlett

Isaiah 9: 6-7

Revelation 7: 9-17

Isaiah 9: 2-7

Luke 2: 4-14

Matthew 2: 1-18

Thoughts on the Text

This is not just another version of "O Little Town of Bethlehem." The first stanza puts the nativity scene and story back into our heads, but then stanzas two and three try to bring the story "home" in a way that makes us face the reality of the poor around us.

Baby Jesus growing into the young boy Jesus growing into the young man Jesus experienced all that we have experienced. Some of us still live at some point in that process. Others of us have experienced some of those things, but moved on. This Christmas hymn will not allow us to forget, even if we have moved on. If we are still living with some of those hardships, this hymn will not allow us to feel alone.

Neither will this hymn allow us to stay in the stable or in life's oppression. This Christmas hymn pushes right on through the Second Advent. Singing this hymn, we end up in Heaven, seeing Jesus in all his glory. Royal David's City is Bethlehem in stanza one and it is the New Jerusalem in stanza four. In stanzas two and three, Royal David's city is our town... yours and mine. And every day is the new "once."

Jesus is born into our lives every day. Each day has its new glory and beauty. Each day has its new oppressions and disappointments and hardships. Each day has its Messiah. Once in stanza one becomes forever in stanza four. Then "once" happens over and over, every time we need the Savior in stanzas two and three.

This hymn is a Christmas gift that keeps...well, you know. We carry it with us throughout the year. Believers of every age can stick this hymn in their pocket and in their hearts. Long day, short day, long life, short life...they are all caught up in the "eternal now" of this hymn.

Gather around the tree at home, the manger at church, the sale table at the mall, but one day we shall "like stars His children crowned, robed in white" gather around His throne. That day is this day according to the eternal clock.

Christ is born today. Thanks be to God.

Terry W. York