





LUTHERAN SERVICE BOOK

Devotional Edition



LUTHERAN SERVICE BOOK
Devotional Edition (031203)

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331 The Advent of Our King

- 1 The advent of our King
Our prayers must now employ,
And we must hymns of welcome sing
In strains of holy joy.
- 2 The everlasting Son
Incarnate deigns to be,
Himself a servant's form puts on
To set His servants free.
- 3 O Zion's daughter, rise
To meet your lowly King,
Nor let your faithless heart despise
The peace He comes to bring.
- 4 As judge, on clouds of light,
He soon will come again
And His true members all unite
With Him in heav'n to reign.
- 5 Before the dawning day
Let sin's dark deeds be gone,
The sinful self be put away,
The new self now put on.
- △6 All glory to the Son,
Who comes to set us free,
With Father, Spirit, ever one
Through all eternity.

This hymn, though useful throughout Advent, is especially appropriate on the first Sunday, the beginning of the church year, when the account of Jesus' Holy Week entrance into Jerusalem is read. Stanza 3 bids Zion's daughter rise; this refers to Zechariah 9:9, in which the ancient prophet exhorts Israel joyfully to greet her King, the Messiah, riding on a donkey and bringing salvation. In fulfillment of the prophecy, Jesus entered the Holy City on the Sunday before His death for the world's redemption. Because the true spiritual Israel is the Christian Church, stanza 3—with its Gospel invitation and its sober warning—urges all believers to guard against unbelief and receive by faith their lowly King. In stanza 5, the command to put away sinful deeds and to put on a new self brings to mind the Epistle for the First Sunday in Advent from the one-year lectionary (Rom. 13:12).

Other Advent themes are also present. Stanza 2 offers a straightforward confession of the two natures in Christ: He is the "everlasting Son" who becomes incarnate. He puts on "a servant's form" in lowliness and weakness to liberate His servants from all our spiritual enemies. As He came once, so will He come again as our judge, says stanza 4, and in His judgment, He will gather the elect that they might reign with Him eternally. Scattered throughout the hymn are hints of the admonition to watch and pray as the time for the King's return draws ever nearer (Matt. 25:13).

332 Savior of the Nations, Come

- 1 Savior of the nations, come,
Virgin's Son, make here Your home!
Marvel now, O heav'n and earth,
That the Lord chose such a birth.
- 2 Not by human flesh and blood,
By the Spirit of our God,
Was the Word of God made flesh—
Woman's offspring, pure and fresh.
- 3 Here a maid was found with child,
Yet remained a virgin mild.
In her womb this truth was shown:
God was there upon His throne.
- 4 Then stepped forth the Lord of all
From His pure and kingly hall;
God of God, yet fully man,
His heroic course began.
- 5 God the Father was His source,
Back to God He ran His course.
Into hell His road went down,
Back then to His throne and crown.
- 6 For You are the Father's Son
Who in flesh the vict'ry won.
By Your mighty pow'r make whole
All our ills of flesh and soul.
- 7 From the manger newborn light
Shines in glory through the night.
Darkness there no more resides;
In this light faith now abides.

△8 Glory to the Father sing,
 Glory to the Son, our king,
 Glory to the Spirit be
 Now and through eternity.

Stanza 1 is a call for the Virgin's Son to come and make His home among us and for all creation, heaven and earth, to marvel that the Lord of all "chose such a birth"; that is, He took on human flesh and became one of us except without sin. Stanza 2 proclaims that the Word of God, Christ the Lord, who was "in the beginning" (John 1:1), became flesh like us not through any human agency but "by the Spirit of our God." Stanza 3 continues the thought that while "here a maid was found with child," she remained a virgin and that the child in the mother's womb was God, who was "there upon His throne."

Stanzas 4 and 5 reflect the creedal statements of God sending His Son from His "kingly hall" into the world, and that this child was both "Lord of all" and "God of God," yet fully man. Sent from the Father, He will return to the Father, back to His "throne and crown" after He "in flesh the victory won" (stanza 6)—the victory over sin, death, and the devil—which the glorified Christ proclaimed to those in hell.

Stanza 7 uses the image of light, the light that now shines from the manger into the night, the light of Christ, which shatters the darkness, and the light in which "faith now abides." The concluding stanza is doxological praise to the Father, who, in the context of this hymn, sent His Son into the world; to the Son, who fulfilled the Father's will in taking on our human flesh to rescue the world from sin, death, and the devil; and to the Spirit, by whose action Christ became "the Word of God made flesh—woman's offspring, pure and fresh" (stanza 2).

333 Once He Came in Blessing

- 1 Once He came in blessing,
All our sins redressing;
Came in likeness lowly,
Son of God most holy;
Bore the cross to save us;
Hope and freedom gave us.
- 2 Now He gently leads us;
With Himself He feeds us
Precious food from heaven,
Pledge of peace here given,
Manna that will nourish
Souls that they may flourish.
- 3 Soon will come that hour
When with mighty power
Christ will come in splendor
And will judgment render,
With the faithful sharing
Joy beyond comparing.
- 4 Come, then, O Lord Jesus,
From our sins release us.
Keep our hearts believing,
That we, grace receiving,
Ever may confess You
Till in heav'n we bless You.

The hymn begins by recalling to the hearer the importance of the first coming of Jesus. It proclaims that He once came in “blessing” to atone for the sins of a fallen race. As “Son of God most holy,” it says, Christ bore the cross “to save us,” and, with that, true hope and freedom “gave us.”

Stanza 2 underscores the importance of Christ’s presence in Christian worship now, how He gently leads us by offering Himself as food in the eucharistic meal. His peace comes to us as manna from above, and with that our souls are nourished “that they may flourish.”

Stanza 3 quickly directs attention to the fact that Christ is coming soon, as Revelation 22:20 proclaims. And when He comes, it will not be in lowliness or weakness, but in power and splendor to render the final judgment: a fearful judgment for the lost, but for the faithful a judgment that brings “joy beyond comparing,” a joy that He will share with them as their redemption is made complete.

The hymn ends with a moving prayer that bids our Lord to come, then to release us from our sins. Thus, a hymn that began in blessing ends in blessing, for He who once came and still comes will come again. Even now, His work continues. On that basis, all can be assured that He will keep faithful “hearts believing.” Thus, by His saving grace, Christians will continue to confess Him “till in heaven” they bless Him.

334 O Lord, How Shall I Meet You

- 1 O Lord, how shall I meet You,
How welcome You aright?
Your people long to greet You,
My hope, my heart's delight!
O kindle, Lord most holy,
Your lamp within my breast
To do in spirit lowly
All that may please You best.
- 2 Your Zion strews before You
Green boughs and fairest palms;
And I too will adore You
With joyous songs and psalms.
My heart shall bloom forever
For You with praises new
And from Your name shall never
Withhold the honor due.
- 3 I lay in fetters, groaning;
You came to set me free.
I stood, my shame bemoaning;
You came to honor me.
A glorious crown You give me,
A treasure safe on high
That will not fail or leave me
As earthly riches fly.
- 4 Love caused Your incarnation;
Love brought You down to me.
Your thirst for my salvation
Procured my liberty.
Oh, love beyond all telling,
That led You to embrace
In love, all love excelling,
Our lost and fallen race.

- 5 Sin's debt, that fearful burden,
 Cannot His love erase;
Your guilt the Lord will pardon
 And cover by His grace.
He comes, for you procuring
 The peace of sin forgiv'n,
His children thus securing
 Eternal life in heav'n.
- 6 He comes to judge the nations,
 A terror to His foes,
A light of consolations
 And blessèd hope to those
Who love the Lord's appearing.
 O glorious Sun, now come,
Send forth Your beams so cheering,
 And guide us safely home.

At its core, this text is about sin, forgiveness, and Christ's incarnation as a necessity for the salvation of sinners. Stanzas 1 through 4 are addressed to Christ, with singers engaging in a personal reflection in the first-person singular. Stanza 2 recalls Christ's Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem, and singers place their own adoration and praise of the Savior in the context of this scriptural precedent (Matt. 21:8–9), which is the traditional Gospel appointed for the First Sunday in Advent. Stanzas 3 and 4 are the heart of Gerhardt's hymn. Stanza 3 contrasts the sinner's bondage and shame with the freedom and honor given because God's Son was willing to become incarnate. In stanza 4, Gerhardt answers the question of why Christ would become incarnate for sinners—it is entirely a matter of His love (a word repeated five times in this stanza) for "our lost and fallen race" and of His "thirst for my salvation."

Stanza 5 is a gem of pure Gospel proclamation—Christ's first coming was for the purpose of "procuring the peace of sin forgiven." Stanza 6 then points singers to Christ's second coming to judge the nations—a terror to His enemies who reject Him in unbelief, but to those who love His appearing, "a light of consolations" and the "blessed hope" that will "guide us safely home." In this Advent hymn, Gerhardt masterfully proclaims the incarnation of Christ and its consequences for all who believe—the forgiveness and peace He won for humankind and the joyful hope of His second coming.

335 O Bride of Christ, Rejoice

- 1 O bride of Christ, rejoice;
Exultant raise thy voice
To hail the day of glory
Foretold in sacred story.

Refrain

Hosanna, praise, and glory!
Our King, we bow before Thee.

- 2 Let shouts of gladness rise
Triumphant to the skies.
Now comes the King most glorious
To reign o'er all victorious. *Refrain*

- 3 A humble beast He rides,
Yet as a King presides;
Though not arrayed in splendor,
He makes the grave surrender. *Refrain*

- 4 The weak and timid find
How meek He is and kind;
To them He gives a treasure
Of bliss beyond all measure. *Refrain*

- 5 Then go thy Lord to meet;
Strew palm leaves at His feet;
Thy garments spread before Him
And honor and adore Him. *Refrain*

This hymn text, fitting for the First Sunday in Advent, portrays the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem from Matthew 21:1–16. By employing this Gospel, the hymn illustrates the relationship between Advent and Christmas and between Jesus' birth in Bethlehem and His second coming: the expectation of the first is the promise of the second; that is, God's fulfillment of the hopeful expectation that awaited Christ's first coming points to the certainty of His promise to come a second time. Singing of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem during Advent, then, is not a chronological misstep, but an understanding of the eschatological significance of the death and resurrection for which Jesus has come into the Holy City; this is a promise already present at His birth.

336 Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending

- 1 Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
Once for ev'ry sinner slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of His train:
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
Christ the Lord returns to reign.
- 2 Ev'ry eye shall now behold Him
Robed in glorious majesty;
Those who set at naught and sold Him,
Pierced and nailed Him to the tree,
Deeply wailing, deeply wailing, deeply wailing,
Shall their true Messiah see.
- 3 Those dear tokens of His passion
Still His dazzling body bears,
Cause of endless exultation
To His ransomed worshipers.
With what rapture, with what rapture, with what rapture
Gaze we on those glorious scars!
- 4 Yea, amen, let all adore Thee,
High on Thine eternal throne;
Savior, take the pow'r and glory,
Claim the kingdom as Thine own.
Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!
Thou shalt reign, and Thou alone!

This hymn concerns the final return of Christ, bringing both judgment and redemption. In stanza 1, the fulfillment of the promise made at the ascension is in view, the promise not just to return, but to return in the same manner (via the clouds) in which Jesus ascended. In stanza 2, Jesus is the one who returns in the fullness of His exalted glory. Even those who despised and rejected Him in His humiliation will have no choice but to acknowledge Him as the true Messiah, the heaven-sent Savior of all (Rev. 1:7). And yet, as stanza 3 reminds us, the holy wounds marking His suffering and death remain to be seen by all. We recall Jesus' disciples, especially Thomas, who marveled at the Savior's post-resurrection appearances and who beheld His wounds for themselves (John 20:28).

Throughout the hymn, images from Revelation and the apocalyptic prophets abound; for example, the account in Revelation 7:9–12 of the great heavenly multitude singing the praises of the Lamb to whom salvation belongs. The hymn concludes with the confession that the day is near when what is not now visible to us, His glorious reign over all things, will finally be seen by all, and His elect children will receive it and rejoice in it.

337 The Night Will Soon Be Ending

- 1 The night will soon be ending;
The dawn cannot be far.
Let songs of praise ascending
Now greet the Morning Star!
All you whom darkness frightens
With guilt or grief or pain,
God's radiant Star now brightens
And bids you sing again.
- 2 The One whom angels tended
Comes near, a child, to serve;
Thus God, the judge offended,
Bears all our sins deserve.
The guilty need not cower,
For God has reconciled
Through His redemptive power
All those who trust this child.
- 3 The earth in sure rotation
Will soon bring morning bright,
So run where God's salvation
Glow in a stable's light.
As old as sin's perversion
Is mercy's vast design:
God brings a new creation—
This child its seal and sign.
- 4 Yet nights will bring their sadness
And rob our hearts of peace,
And sin in all its madness
Around us may increase.
But now one Star is beaming
Whose rays have pierced the night:
God comes for our redeeming
From sin's oppressive might.

5 God dwells with us in darkness
 And makes the night as day;
 Yet we resist the brightness
 And turn from God away.
 But grace does not forsake us,
 However far we run.
 God claims us still as children
 Through Mary's infant Son.

The hymn weaves together several themes: Christ's coming to redeem the world by taking God's whole judgment upon Himself, the Morning Star who shines today as He once shone in Bethlehem's stable, salvation for those who trust the child of Mary, and Christ's coming to judge the world. The oppressive night in which the world finds itself—that is, human “guilt or grief or pain” (stanza 1)—is juxtaposed with the “new creation” (stanza 3) entering the world in God incarnate.

Stanzas 4 and 5 express the drama of our salvation in the dynamic back-and-forth between the darkness of sin and the light of grace. While we find only darkness in us and around us, we are not without our saving God in our desolate place: the light of the redeeming Star, our incarnate God, pierces the night and dispels the darkness of our sin and sadness. Yet this redemption is not one from afar. God is our “Immanuel,” our “God with us,” precisely in our darkness. Such close divine attention is not only comforting; it might also be resisted (see John 1:9–11). Yet God's grace is faithful even as we stray, and it continues its claim on our lives in “Mary's infant Son.”

Clearly, then, this is an Advent and Christmas hymn in the best Lutheran tradition that does not gaze, as if in observation mode, at the glory of the incarnation, as many older and newer hymns for the season do, but that comfortingly proclaims the “for you” of that incarnation to those who, like Jochen Klepper, need to hear it so that they may sleep in peace.

338 Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

- 1 Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art,
Dear desire of ev'ry nation,
Joy of ev'ry longing heart.
- 2 Born Thy people to deliver;
Born a child and yet a king!
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all-sufficient merit
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Though brief at two stanzas of eight lines each, “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” reflects Charles Wesley’s passion for the preparatory season of Advent and is abundant in scriptural references. The text reflects the fullness of Advent as it recalls Christ’s first coming, asks for the gift of His gracious kingdom now, and prays for His return.

In stanza 1, Wesley deals primarily with the themes found in the messianic passages of the Old Testament, namely, freedom, release, rest, consolation, hope, desire, and joy. The reference to the “desire of every nation” comes from the King James Version of Haggai 2:7, “the desire of all nations shall come.”

Wesley expresses the mystery of the incarnation in stanza 2 in the phrase “born a child and yet a king!” Here Wesley acknowledges the kingship of this child, referring to the themes of deliverance, reign, kingdom, rule, and the final deliverance of His people to His throne. The Hebraic messianic expectations of long-expected freedom, release, consolation, and hope are brought to fulfillment in the birth of the child who brought, and continues to bring, freedom from the bondage of sin for all people. In the hymn as a whole, Christ’s rule as both Redeemer and Liberator is seen in completion—from prophecy through incarnation to His present reign and His second coming.

339 Lift Up Your Heads, You Everlasting Doors

- 1 Lift up your heads, you everlasting doors,
And weep no more!
O Zion's daughter, sing,
To greet your coming King;
Now wave the victor's palm
And sing the ancient psalm:
"Lift up your heads, you everlasting gates!"
Your King awaits!
- 2 Who is this King of great and glorious fame?
What is His name?
Lord God of Sabaoth,
Of whom the prophets wrote,
Whose chosen, humble steed
Declares Him king indeed!
Hosanna, Lord! Messiah, come and save
From sin and grave.
- 3 Who may ascend Mount Zion's holy hill
To do God's will?
The One whose unstained hands
Can meet the Law's demands,
Whose purity within
Reveals One free from sin.
Come, praise this King who claims the cross as throne—
Praise Him alone!
- 4 "Worthy is Christ!" The Lamb who once was slain
Now lives to reign.
He rules our earthly ways
As Lord of Ancient Days—
O join the endless song
Sung by the ransomed throng:
"Worthy is Christ!" The Lamb be praised again!
Amen! Amen!

In producing the text, Stephen Starke crafted the words in the outer stanzas so that they would convey the triumphant tone of the tune, while he meant for the words of the second and third stanzas to be in dissonant counterpoint with the tune as they point the way to the cross. The hymn travels from prophecy to fulfillment, from palms to cross to heaven, acknowledging Christ as the King from beginning to end.

The opening words echo the familiar theme of Psalm 24:7, “Lift up your heads, O gates!” as the first stanza weaves together imagery from that psalm with the prophecy of Zechariah, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!” (Zech. 9:9). Even as the season of Advent begins and the Church anticipates the celebration of the King’s birth, she already looks ahead to the solemnities of Palm Sunday and the Lord’s procession to the cross.

Toward the end of the third stanza, Starke deftly moves us from the cross to the throne in heaven. Using imagery from Revelation 5 and Daniel 7, the last stanza invites the congregation to join with the saints in heaven singing, “Worthy is Christ!”

340/341 Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates

- 1 Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates!
Behold, the King of glory waits.
The King of kings is drawing near;
The Savior of the world is here.
Life and salvation He doth bring;
Therefore rejoice and gladly sing.
To God the Father raise
Your joyful songs of praise.
- 2 A righteous Helper comes to thee;
His chariot is humility,
His kingly crown is holiness,
His scepter, pity in distress.
The end of all our woe He brings;
Therefore the earth is glad and sings.
To Christ the Savior raise
Your grateful hymns of praise.
- 3 How blest the land, the city blest,
Where Christ the ruler is confessed!
O peaceful hearts and happy homes
To whom this King in triumph comes!
The cloudless sun of joy is He
Who comes to set His people free.
To God the Spirit raise
Your happy shouts of praise.
- 4 Fling wide the portals of your heart;
Make it a temple set apart
From earthly use for heav'n's employ,
Adorned with prayer and love and joy.
So shall your Sov'reign enter in
And new and nobler life begin.
To God alone be praise
For word and deed and grace!

5 Redeemer, come and open wide
 My heart to Thee; here, Lord, abide!
 O enter with Thy grace divine;
 Thy face of mercy on me shine.
 Thy Holy Spirit guide us on
 Until our glorious goal is won.
 Eternal praise and fame
 We offer to Thy name.

This text focuses primarily on the present coming of the Lord to His people. The gifts that the Incarnate One purchased He bestows upon us in rich measure: “life and salvation He doth bring” (stanza 1); “the end of all our woe He brings” (stanza 2); “the cloudless sun of joy is He who comes to set His people free” (stanza 3). He comes with His blessing here and now to the land and city “where Christ the ruler is confessed” (stanza 3).

Psalm 24 repeatedly asks, “Who is this King of glory?” The hymn’s answer is that it is the triune God: the first three stanzas end “To God the Father / to Christ the Savior / to God the Spirit raise your joyful songs / grateful hymns / happy shouts of praise.”

In the last two stanzas, Georg Weissel leaves no doubt that God’s advent is *pro nobis* (for us). These stanzas invite us to prepare our own hearts as the place where “your Sovereign [shall] enter in and new and nobler life begin” (stanza 4). We respond by recognizing that we cannot even open our own hearts to such a loving God; He must do it: “Redeemer, come and open wide my heart to Thee” (stanza 5). The whole life of sanctification retains the nature of a gift, as the grace of God and the guiding of the Holy Spirit will one day result in our reaching our “glorious goal” (stanza 5).

342 What Hope! An Eden Prophesied

- 1 What hope! An Eden prophesied
Where tame live with the wild;
The lamb and lion side by side,
Led by a little child!
- 2 A shoot will sprout from Jesse's stem,
A branch from David's line,
A Prince of Peace in Bethlehem:
The fruit of God's design.
- 3 As banner of God's love unfurled,
Christ came to suffer loss,
That by His death a dying world
Would rally to the cross.
- 4 Come, Jesus, come, Messiah Lord,
Lost Paradise restore;
Lead past the angel's flaming sword—
Come, open heaven's door.

The themes of this Advent hymn are rather neatly summarized by its first line: hope, Eden, and prophecy. It takes as its biblical center Isaiah 11 and its various prophecies that point to the coming of the Messiah. Hope permeates these passages as the restoration of Israel, the restoration of creation, and the banishment of sin and its effects are portrayed. The hymn takes up this theme and focuses on the restoration of the innocence of paradise as the goal and effect of the birth and finally the Passion of Jesus. But in keeping with its Advent theme, the hymn's "prophecies" also look forward to the ultimate eschatological fulfillment of Isaiah's word at Christ's second coming.

The restoration of creation is the dominant subject of the hymn. The beautiful pictures from Isaiah 11 of the wild, devouring beasts settling peacefully with weak lambs and goats is offered in the first stanza as a concrete portrait of a prophesied Eden. The phrase "an Eden prophesied" brings the innocence of Genesis 2 to mind and yet sets it as a future event. The hymn points both back to the garden and forward to a peace still to come through the leading of a little child, Jesus, in both His first and His second comings.

343 Prepare the Royal Highway

- 1 Prepare the royal highway;
The King of kings is near!
Let ev'ry hill and valley
A level road appear!
Then greet the King of Glory
Foretold in sacred story:

Refrain

Hosanna to the Lord,
For He fulfills God's Word!

- 2 God's people, see Him coming:
Your own eternal king!
Palm branches strew before Him!
Spread garments! Shout and sing!
God's promise will not fail you!
No more shall doubt assail you! *Refrain*

- 3 Then fling the gates wide open
To greet your promised king!
Your king, yet ev'ry nation
Its tribute too should bring.
All lands, bow down before Him!
All nations, now adore Him! *Refrain*

- 4 His is no earthly kingdom;
It comes from heav'n above.
His rule is peace and freedom
And justice, truth, and love.
So let your praise be sounding
For kindness so abounding: *Refrain*

Frans Mikael Franzén employs textual imagery to great effect in this hymn. The first stanza is built on an image from Isaiah 40:3: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” The great leveling of hill and valley prophesied here is used by Franzén to illustrate the upheaval of the Lord’s coming. Stanza 2, however, immediately ties the imagery of the opening stanza to Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem, to the shouts of “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matt. 21:9). Here the upheaval centers on the image of the whole city stirred up by Jesus’ arrival and asking “Who is this?” (Matt. 21:10).

Stanza 3 continues the joy of Palm Sunday, uniting it with the prophetic words of Psalm 24: “Lift up your heads, O gates!” (Ps. 24:7) and “Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty!” (Ps. 24:8). Still, this particular King is not a king according to the pattern of this present world, as the final stanza is quick to add. The prophet’s voice closes the hymn with an allusion to Isaiah 9:7: “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness.”

344 On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry

- 1 On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings of the King of kings!
- 2 Then cleansed be ev'ry life from sin;
Make straight the way for God within,
And let us all our hearts prepare
For Christ to come and enter there.
- 3 We hail Thee as our Savior, Lord,
Our refuge and our great reward;
Without Thy grace we waste away
Like flow'rs that wither and decay.
- 4 Lay on the sick Thy healing hand
And make the fallen strong to stand;
Show us the glory of Thy face
Till beauty springs in ev'ry place.
- △5 All praise, eternal Son, to Thee
Whose advent sets Thy people free,
Whom with the Father we adore
And Holy Spirit evermore.

Advent is often misunderstood as a time of preparation for Christmas only, but the season also gives us a chance to reflect on Christ's second coming. The hymn begins with John the Baptizer. The first two stanzas convey his message of preparation and repentance, which was foretold by the prophet Isaiah: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Is. 40:3). His words ring true for the Church today as it awaits Christ's second coming, when He will return to judge the living and the dead.

Without Christ, we wither and fade like grass (Is. 40:7–8), but in Him, "our refuge and our great reward," we are safe and secure (stanza 3). God promised the same to Abram in Genesis 15:1: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." This promise was confirmed continually by the Lord through His prophets, and in these last days by His Son (Heb. 1:2), without whose "grace we waste away."

Stanza 4 echoes the psalmist David, "Stretch out Your hand from on high; rescue me and deliver me" (Ps. 144:7). The Old Testament is filled with prayers such as this and with promises of blessing and healing. These prayers and promises are fulfilled in no greater way than in Jesus Christ, for it is in Him that the world sees the glory of God, the light that shines out of darkness (2 Cor. 4:6). When Christ first came to earth, He healed the sick, forgave sins, and raised the dead. But when He comes again, all sickness will be destroyed, sin will be no more, and all who believe in Christ will be raised never to die again.