

Jesus, Once of Humble Birth

Just as picturesque scenes can bring peace and calmness to the soul, so does beautiful music

The Hymn



"Jesus, Once of Humble Birth" is a fitting hymn for the Easter season as it speaks of events that Christians commemorate at this

time: the Savior's rejection by his own people, including his disciples forsaking him, his suffering and bleeding in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross.

The hymn uniquely embeds these events in the past tense amid descriptions of future events in the present tense. The reference to his birth in humble circumstances contrasts with the glory of His Second Coming. The hymn text broadens our perspective and helps us see the Savior's suffering, death and resurrection as part of our Heavenly Father's overall plan of salvation.

The author of the hymn text, Parley P. Pratt, was a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), and the text reflects the LDS belief that the pre-mortal Jesus Christ was the Lord Jehovah of the Old Testament, through whom God the Father created the earth, who spoke to Moses and whom Isaiah refers to as "... my salvation."

As Moses learned in the Biblical account of the burning bush, one of the names of the Lord is "I Am." The author uses this name in identifying the Savior at His Second Coming, which links the Old and New Testament accounts of Him.

As we note in our celebrations at Christmastime, Jesus Christ was the

The Author



Parley Parker Pratt was the third of the five sons of Jared and Charity Pratt, born at Burlington, Otsego County, New York in April of 1807.

Burlington is a small town located in northwestern New York about eighty miles west of Albany. The Pratts traced their family among the founders of Hartford, Connecticut.

In his autobiography, Parley stated that his father was engaged in agriculture and although not highly educated, sometimes taught school. Opportunities for formal education as a youth were limited as the farm work required most of their time. Parley loved to read, however, and stated that he had a book in his hand at every opportunity. His mother began giving him lessons from the Bible at the age of seven, and he learned to love the Savior. By the time he was twelve, he felt a great desire to be associated with those who would partake of the first resurrection.

The family did not associate exclusively with any particular church, but were of high moral standards, and the children were taught to revere their Father in Heaven, and the Savior, Jesus Christ, and to venerate the scriptures and the Apostles who wrote them.

At the age of fifteen, Parley left home to do farm work as a hired hand, and spent the next two years at various farms. His last formal schooling occurred the winter of his sixteenth

The Composer



Giacomo Meyerbeer was born Jakob (or Yaakov) Liebmann (Meyer) Beer in September of 1791 at Vogelsdorf (or Tasdorf), Germany, near Berlin. His

parents were understood to be Judah Herz Beer, a wealthy sugar refiner, and Malka Liebmann Meyer Wulff, the daughter of a wealthy banker and merchant. The family was Jewish and were believed to be descended from famous rabbis.

The oldest of three sons, Jakob was said to be a child prodigy on the piano. He was privileged to study composition in Berlin and at Darmstadt. It is said that he studied with masters such as Muzio Clementi, Abbe Vogler and Antonio Salieri. By the age of twenty-four he had composed several operas and oratorios in German. He went to Italy at the suggestion of Salieri in 1816 for further study and adopted the Italian form of his name, Giacomo. It is believed that he added "Meyer" to his surname in recognition of an inheritance from a rich relative.

Giacomo found success in Italy, composing after the style of Rossini. His sixth opera, 'Il Crociato in Egitto,' was very popular and was performed in London and Paris.

In 1826 it is understood that Giacomo married his first cousin, Minna Mosson. In the next few years a son and a daughter were born to them, however, neither survived infancy.

In 1831 Giacomo wrote his first French Opera, in association with Eugène Scribe,

literal Son of God, and as noted in our celebrations at Easter, he was the figurative Lamb of God, pure and sinless, offered as an infinite sacrifice. Having purchased our salvation with his atonement, He has the right to rule as our King. Exalted to a heavenly throne with the cloud figuratively as his chariot, He has promised to come in glory to rule on the earth. In his resurrected, glorified state, no physical suffering can affect him again.

Inherent in the poetic text is more than one meaning. A description of the universal reign of the Savior at his future Second Coming can be easily discerned, also the unseen personal reign of the Savior here and now in our individual lives can be understood. If we acknowledge His divinity, accept His atonement, give him the allegiance of our hearts and the obedience of our hands, and experience a spiritual glimpse of His glory appearing, then He does indeed reign as our King.

The text of "Jesus, Once of Humble Birth" is believed to have first been published in England in the 1840 LDS "Manchester Hymnal." The author was one of the editors of the Hymnal and many of his other texts are included. He is reported to have said that his poems came one by one as occasions called them.

The hymn was published under the tune name "DELIVERANCE" in the 1889 'LDS Psalmody' with music attributed to "English Chorister." The text in this hymnal is the same as we sing today, however the last two phrases of the second verse vary from the Manchester Hymnal which originally read, "Once with thieves was crucified - Now on yonder cloud he rides." Another difference is that the last phrase of the verses is repeated in the 1889 LDS Psalmody, which continued in subsequent editions.

Our hymn was included in the 1948 Edition of "Hymns, The Church of Jesus

year. At seventeen, he and his brother set out to find a place of their own and walked two hundred miles west where they purchased some land on agreement of four yearly payments. They returned east and hired out to earn the rest of the money. His brother failed to do his part, so Parley made the next installment himself and he and his father spent the following winter and spring clearing ten acres with axes and planting a crop.

During this time of labor Parley related that his mind turned to God and he had a desire to be baptized. He investigated a number of the Christian sects and did not agree with their doctrines, but eventually joined himself to the Baptists at the age of eighteen.

Although they had a good crop on their newly cleared farm, they were unable to find a market for it and could not make the next installment on the debt. The seller prosecuted and Parley lost everything he had paid and their improvements.

Disillusioned with civilized life, in 1826 Parley headed west, intending to find a home among the native Americans where he would teach them the gospel. He worked his way to Ohio where he built a cabin in a forest for the winter a few miles from a settlement about thirty miles west of Cleveland.

The following spring, at the age of twenty, he decided to stay. He arranged to purchase the land with payment in a few years and began clearing for a farm. He returned to his boyhood home in New York to seek the hand of his sweetheart, Miss Thankful Halsey. She had continued to love him through the three years of his absence and agreed to share the toils of frontier life with him. After he worked the summer as a hired hand, they were married in September of 1827 and left in October for Ohio.

"Robert le Diable" which was performed in Paris and produced on a lavish scale. The cultural tastes of the time lent to the romantic, supernatural and macabre, and the opera was a great success. It was said to have set the model for French Grand Opera for the rest of the 1800's. In 1836 a similar success was achieved with the opera "Les Huguenots," which was said to have been performed 1000 times before the turn of the century.

Giacomo returned to Berlin temporarily in 1842 to serve as music director for the King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm IV. He wrote a German opera during this time ('Ein Feldlager,' 1844), and then returned to Paris with "Le Prophète" in 1849. He shifted to a lighter style for a time and produced two comic operas. His last grand opera, "L'Africaine" was being rehearsed at the time of his death.

Giacomo Meyerbeer was said to be independently wealthy, which allowed him to be particular in his compositions and to have influence on the choice of singers and with the press. His works were very popular in his day. Some were revived in the twentieth century, but are not well known today. His legacy is said to be his influence on grand scenes, dramatic and spectacular elements, novel orchestration and manipulation of arias and ensembles. Composers such as Berlioz and Puccini are believed to have been influenced by him.

Giacomo Meyerbeer is best known for his operas, but he also is understood to have written concerti, religious music, lieder, chanson, romances, organ music and other pieces.

As mentioned above, at the age of seventy-three Giacomo Meyerbeer passed away at Paris as his opera "L'Africaine" was being rehearsed in May of 1864. His remains were returned to Berlin and interred in a Jewish cemetery there.

Christ of Latter-day Saints," (LDS Hymnal) with music again attributed to "English Chorister." This hymnal also included arrangements for men's and women's voices.

The hymn continued in the current 1985 LDS Hymnal with the music attributed to Giacomo Meyerbeer, adapted. The music in 3/4 time was transposed to a slightly lower key with some modifications to the bass clef notation.

"Jesus, Once of Humble Birth"

(Text as found in the 1985 LDS Hymnal)

Jesus, once of humble birth,
Now in glory comes to earth.
Once he suffered grief and pain;
Now he comes on earth to reign.

Once a meek and lowly lamb,
Now the Lord, the great I Am.
Once upon the cross he bowed;
Now his chariot is the cloud.

Once he groaned in blood and tears;
Now in glory he appears.
Once rejected by his own,
Now their King he shall be known.

Once forsaken, left alone,
Now exalted to a throne.
Once all things he meekly bore,
But he now will bear no more.

Eighteen months later, they had a good farm and a frame home and Thankful was teaching school to the children of other settlers. About this time, Parley went to hear the preaching of a reformed Baptist minister, Sidney Rigdon, who had come into the area. The doctrine he taught was closely aligned with Parley's understanding of the scriptures and he with a number of others embraced the teachings and joined together in a society that met to worship.

He began to delve into the scriptures and pray for an understanding. He felt his prayers answered and the scriptures open to his view. He had a desire to share this knowledge and felt the Spirit work with him so powerfully that he could not rest, so Parley and Thankful decided to leave what they had built and embark on a mission.

They decided to begin at their native place, and began their journey in August of 1830 by land and boat. When they got as far as Rochester on the Erie canal, Parley felt there was something he needed to do in the area and leaving the canal boat at Newark, sent his wife on alone. Walking into the country, he was led to the acquaintance of Mr. Hamlin who had just obtained a copy of the newly published "Book of Mormon." He agreed to let Parley borrow it, and the next morning on calling at the Hamlin home, Parley began reading it.

This reading set the course of his future life. As he said, "I read all day; eating was a burden, I had no desire for food; sleep was a burden when the night came, for I preferred reading to sleep. As I read, the spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I knew and comprehended that the book was true, as plainly and manifestly as a man comprehends and knows that he exists. My joy was now full, as it were, and I rejoiced sufficiently to more than

pay me for all the sorrows, sacrifices and toils of my life."

Parley set out to meet with Joseph Smith, Jr. who had been the instrument in bringing forth the book. On arriving in Palmyra, New York, he met Hyrum Smith, Joseph's brother, who unfolded to him the events surrounding the coming forth of the 'Book of Mormon' and the organization of 'The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.' The events and doctrines were in accordance with Parley's own beliefs and Hyrum walked with him to the Whitmer's home in Seneca County, where there was a branch of the church.

Parley was baptized in Seneca Lake by Oliver Cowdery on September 1st, 1830 and in a meeting that evening Elder Cowdery and others laid their hands on his head to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost, and ordained him to the office of an Elder in the church.

From that time, Parley P. Pratt became a tireless missionary. He joined his wife in their homeland and began teaching the restored gospel to his family and neighbors. His younger brother, Orson, received this wholeheartedly, and spent his life in a similar manner.

in October of 1830, a mission call came to Parley P. Pratt from the President of the Church, Joseph Smith, Jr., whom Parley had now met and had come to accept and revere as a Prophet. He and three others were sent to the 'western' states at that time, the furthest being Missouri, and to the Native Americans (Indians). On their way they taught and baptized Sidney Rigdon and many of his followers.

After much travel and hardship, having taught several tribes, and by means of several miraculous healings, Parley was reunited with his wife in Kirtland, Ohio after nineteen months apart. They migrated to the

Independence, Missouri, area with others and experienced the persecutions of that time, being driven out of their home into northern counties. Thankful was in poor health during this time, suffering from consumption (tuberculosis). Parley had many responsibilities and also marched with Zion's Camp.

They returned to Kirtland from Missouri penniless in October of 1834, but lacked for nothing essential. Parley continued to serve and was ordained an Apostle by Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer on February 21st, 1835. As prophesied by Oliver Cowdery at the time, his future was filled with the same trials as the ancient apostles, travel to foreign lands, incessant toil, hardships, and prison. His blessings were also great and he brought the gospel to many and was the instrument of healing to many.

Parley's wife, Thankful, received a miraculous healing by Elder Heber C. Kimball prior to their mission to Toronto, Canada, and was promised a son. After ten childless years of marriage they were indeed blessed with a son. They named him Parley according to the prophecy, born in 1837 after the mission to Canada was complete. Thankful received a vision in the days prior to the birth which prepared her for what was to come, as she passed away three hours after their son was born.

The infant was cared for by a Mrs. Allen who had just lost a baby, and Parley returned to Canada for a visit and then left for a mission to New York City. After much rejection they were blessed with eventual success, and Parley met and married a young widow, Mary Ann Frost, who had a daughter, four years of age.

Parley and his family returned to Missouri in April of 1838 and started a farm in Caldwell County near the

community of Far West. They were blessed with a son, Nathan, who was only three months old when Parley and other church leaders were imprisoned on false charges amid devastation of their properties by enemies. By April of 1839 all of the church members had been violently driven out of Far West and had crossed to Illinois. Parley remained a prisoner in Richmond for six months, and in Columbia for another two months before he and two others, assisted by family members, made a bold escape on the Fourth of July. Avoiding pursuers, his borrowed horse escaped while he was hiding in a tree the first day and he traveled on foot the rest of the way to rejoin his wife and friends in Quincy, Illinois.

By August of 1839, Parley had obtained his oldest son from Mrs. Allen who had nursed him, and departed from Nauvoo with his family to the Eastern States en-route to a mission to England. Arriving in England on a sailing ship in April of 1840 after twenty-eight days at sea, he commenced his service which would continue for two and a half years.

Among Parley's accomplishments in England were the editing and publishing of a monthly periodical at Manchester, 'The Millennial Star.' He also participated in assembling and publishing a hymnbook for the church at Manchester in 1840, for which he wrote about fifty original hymns and songs. "Jesus, Once of Humble Birth" was one of these hymns, which he said were written as the occasion required amid the press of duties which crowded upon him. The hymnbook included only text.

Parley P. Pratt began writing early in life, including poems and hymns, and was faithful in keeping a personal history and in correspondence. His autobiography, from which the information about him in this article is derived, provides invaluable

information about the early history of the Church to which he dedicated his life. He published a number of works in his lifetime and sent articles to periodicals of the day. He was a bold defender of his faith.

Parley continued in valiant service, returning from England to Illinois to suffer mob violence and again be driven from his home in 1846. He served another mission as his family emigrated to Utah, going to England again later that year, leaving his family in Council Bluffs, Iowa. He then returned to assist in the settlement of the new Utah Territory, serving on the Legislative council among other works. A mission call took him to the Pacific Islands and South America in 1851 and then to the Eastern States in 1856, a mission from which he would not return.

Brought to trial on false charges by a man with a grudge against him in St. Louis, Parley P. Pratt was acquitted, but was followed by his accuser and accomplices and assassinated near Van Buren, Arkansas on May 13, 1857. He had just celebrated his fiftieth birthday a few weeks before. His life was remarkable and he left behind a wonderful legacy of faith and works which live on in his hymns.



Information in this article came from:

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