



"The Light Divine"

March Hymn of the Month

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

The Hymn



In the temperate climate zone of the Northern hemisphere, the month of March sees spring slowly approach and the effects of increasing sunlight and warmth are visible in the landscape. Buds form on trees and shrubs and flower bulbs push tender leaves up through the soil.

Physical life as we know it on planet Earth could not exist without the electromagnetic radiation, or light, of the sun. The wavelength range of visible light is generally meant when the word "light" is used. "Light" has several meanings in the English language, however, and many analogies are used in poetry and scripture. The text of our hymn uses several of these meanings to convey its poetic message.

In the Biblical account of the creation of the earth, the first act of God was to command: "Let there be light." This physical light set in place by God is referred to in the first verse of the hymn, which could be paraphrased as: The light given to us by God shines on the brooks and flowers and trees and allows us to see them, and when we see these beautiful things it makes us

The Author



Matilda Rose or Rozella Watts Cahoon was born in March of 1881 to George and Wilhelmina Watts. The family

lived in the area known at the time as South Cottonwood, Salt Lake County, Utah. This area is south of Salt Lake City in the metropolitan area.

Little is known of her early life, but it is evident that she was bright and talented and took advantage of opportunities for schooling and musical training.

In June of 1908 she married Leonard Cahoon, they were both age 26. They were blessed with two daughters, Virginia and Janice. Leonard passed away in 1931 at the age of about 50.

It is apparent that Matilda had great strength and ability and was active in both her community and her church. She taught music in the Salt Lake City public schools for 39 years. Two of her pupils were Marvin J. Ashton and Gordon B. Hinckley. The year her husband passed away, she was serving a term in the Utah House of

The Composer



Mildred Laura Tanner Pettit was born in August of 1895 to Henry S. and Laura Pettit. One source says it was at Salt Lake City and another

source says it was at Payson, Utah.

Mildred was the third child in the family. Soon after her birth, the family moved to Michigan for a few years. Education for her father was a likely reason. The 1910 census shows the family with eight children living in Salt Lake City and her father's occupation as attorney at law.

Mildred's grandparents are believed to have been Utah pioneers and her father is understood to have been the first city judge of Salt Lake City. Her mother was active in the community, and is said to have been the first woman to serve in the Utah State Legislature and the first state president of the PTA.

Mildred evidently had a talent for music and was well-educated, attending the church college in Salt Lake City, which later became the University of Utah. She studied with notable musicians of the area, Alexander Schreiner and Frank Asper, among others. She is said to have taught

happy. They remind us of God's love and his promised blessings, which gives us hope for good things to come. The author uses another meaning of the word 'light' when she speaks of "kindling," or igniting, hope.

The second and third verses use a different definition of the word 'light': "something that enlightens or informs." To 'enlighten' is to furnish knowledge to or instruct. This is used in describing the effects of faith. The second verse could then be paraphrased as: The knowledge given by faith, or belief and trust in God, is present in the heart of every child. Small at first, like a bud, it grows slowly and gently and can be seen radiating from the child's countenance. 'Radiance' alludes to 'light' as well.

Spiritual illumination is another meaning of the word 'light.' In the third verse the author states that faith can make clear, or illuminate, understanding of God's purposes through feelings. Jesus taught also that the pure in heart shall see God. A prayerful plea for this condition of the heart is expressed with an implied understanding that personal revelation would attend it. Understanding God's divine purpose and will for us is essential to living a devoted Christian life.

The chorus contains supplication to God, our Heavenly Father, that His light, or enlightenment and spiritual illumination will come upon us and cause us to 'see' or understand clearly what we should do. Reference to yet another meaning of 'light' is found in the word 'truth' which as a guiding star (which gives 'light') will help keep us on the straight and narrow path to the kingdom of Heaven.

Although originally written as a gospel song for children, "The Light Divine" has a message that applies to any age. Regardless of our years of life, we are all children of God, who, as the

Representatives. She continued her education as an older adult and graduated with honors from the University of Utah at the age of 65.

She served on the General Primary Board of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1914 to 1939 (25 years). During this time she directed music for the board meetings and collaborated with Mildred Pettit in writing lyrics for a number of children's songs, including "The Light Divine."

In her later years she lived with her daughter Janice's family in Salt Lake City. After over 40 years as a widow, she passed on in September of 1973 at the age of 92.

"The Light Divine"

Text as found in the 1985 LDS Hymnal

The light of God rests on the face
Of brook and flower and tree
And kindles in our happy hearts
The hope of things to be.

The light of faith abides within
The heart of every child;
Like buds that wait for blossoming,
It grows with radiance mild.

Today thine unseen purposes
By faith's rare light we feel.
Dear Father, make us pure in heart;
To us thy will reveal.

Chorus:
Father, let thy light divine
Shine on us, we pray.
Touch our eyes that we may see;
Teach us to obey.
Ours the sacred mission is
To bear thy message far.
The light of faith is in our hearts,
Truth our guiding star.

school for a few years before marrying William A. Pettit, who was a recent medical school graduate. They were eventually blessed with four sons and a daughter.

In 1932 Mildred was called to serve on the General Primary Board of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). In collaboration with Matilda Cahoon, she created many programs and songs for the young children of the church. The family is believed to have lived in Philadelphia for a few years after this which allowed Mildred to receive additional music training. In 1936 they moved to Southern California where they would remain. About 1940 her husband is said to have served as the President of the Pasadena Stake of the LDS Church.

Mildred followed her mother's example and was active in the PTA. She also served as a Relief Society president in the church.

In 1957 Naomi Randall asked her to write the music for a new song to be sung at a Primary General Conference. The music for this song, "I Am a Child of God," would become her best known work.

Mildred is said to have been active in service into her 80th year and passed on in April of 1977 at the age of 81. Her husband had preceded her six years earlier.

Apostle Paul stated in the Book of Hebrews, is the Father of our spirits.

It is said that the song was written for a children's chorus, likely in Salt Lake City, Utah, and was first published in the 1939 edition of "The Primary Song Book" of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). It was included in subsequent LDS Children's songbooks. When the 1985 edition of "Hymns, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (LDS Hymnal) was published, it included a number of favorites from the children's songbook, including our hymn 'The Light Divine.' The text is essentially unchanged, however the music in 4/4 time was modified from that found in the previous edition of the children's book "Sing With Me." The key of the tune known as LIGHT DIVINE remained unchanged but the expressive accompaniment was modified and arranged in a four-part harmony more suitable for hymn-singing in worship services.

The poetical message of faith in this uplifting hymn continues to point us to our Savior, Jesus Christ, who is "the light of the world."



Information in this article came from :

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