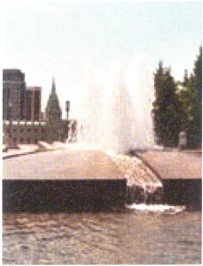


Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing

August 2012 - Hymn of the Month



The Hymn



This very personal hymn describes eloquently the author's realization of human imperfection and need of divine grace, even when desire is strong, and voices a prayerful plea for God's intervention. Written in England about 1758, it is

believed to have first appeared in "A Collection of Hymns Used by the Church of Christ in Angel Alley, Bishopgate, 1759."

Some of the poetic terms used in the hymn may not be as familiar today as they were 250 years ago. The word "Fount" is a short form of "fountain," meaning a natural spring of water; and in the symbolic sense meaning a source, or origin. Thus the first line of the hymn is a plea to the Lord, who is the source of every blessing, to come and "tune" or make the heart capable of singing, or appreciating and rejoicing in, his grace.

The second line continues the water metaphor with "streams of mercy, never ceasing..." The third line then contrasts with "flaming tongues..." Here the meaning of flaming is more likely "ardent or passionate," and expresses a desire to sing "loudest praise" as the angels do. A sonnet is a poetic form, the origin of the word means "little song." It is interesting to note that a sonnet always contains a question and an answer, and the symbolism of the Lord having the answers to our questions is significant.

In the fourth line, the word "Mount" is the short form of "Mountain" and likens the redeeming love of the Lord to a mountain; and to be "fixed" is to be securely fastened. To be securely fastened to a mountain is to be immovable.

The use of the word "Ebenezer" refers to the Bible, and means "The stone of help." First Samuel 7:12 describes the prophet Samuel setting a stone after a victorious battle and calling it "Eben-ezer", saying, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

The Author



Robert Robinson was born in 1735 at Swaffham, Norfolk, England. It is said that he attended Latin school at age eight. His father died when he was about ten, leaving his mother in poverty. She is believed to have been a godly woman who

desired her son to be a clergyman, but her circumstances required that she send him to London when he was fourteen, apprenticed to a barber and hairdresser. His master is reported to have found him fonder of reading than barbering.

About the age of seventeen, it is said that he went with some drinking companions to a Methodist service with the intent to "pity the folly of the preacher, the infatuation of the hearers, and to abhor the doctrine..." considering the poor Methodists to be deluded; but the preaching of George Whitefield so impressed him that he came away envying their happiness. After some years of fear and introspection he "found peace in believing" at about age twenty and attended on the ministry of the evangelical preachers of the day.

About 1758 he was invited to become a Methodist minister and went to a church in Norwich, then about 1759 was invited to "supply the pulpit" of a Baptist Church in Cambridge, where he was highly regarded and accepted the full charge about 1761. Said to be "a man of genius" he was reported to also be rather unorthodox, and drew criticism for changing churches. He wrote a number of highly acclaimed scholarly and theological books and a number of hymns. *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, is probably today his best known work. It is said that this hymn-poem was written for the conclusion of a sermon in 1758 when he was about 23 years of age.

The Compilar/Compr



There is some uncertainty about the composer of the hymn. As was common at the time the hymn was sung to different tunes. The tune name usually associated with the hymn in the

United States to this day is known as NETTLETON and many believe it is a traditional American folk melody; while some attribute it to John Wyeth. In any event, John Wyeth was instrumental in the tune becoming associated with the hymn text.

The smoothly flowing melody in ¾ time fits the text well, and the rhythmic swells give the feeling of the ebb and flow of waves of water. This is a further complement to the hymn title.

John Wyeth was born in 1770 at Cambridge, Massachusetts and was apprenticed to a printer as a boy. Traveling to Santo Domingo he became the manager of a printing company at the age of 21. He barely escaped the insurrection there and in 1792 returned to America to settle in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

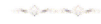
He again became involved in the publishing business and became co-owner of the newspaper, *The Oracle of Dauphin*. It is said that President George Washington appointed him as postmaster, only for him to lose the position five years later when President John Adams declared the position incompatible with involvement in newspapers.

The use of "fold" again refers to the Bible and the analogy of the Lord as The Good Shepherd, gathering his sheep into a sheepfold, a high-walled protective enclosure, which represents his gospel.

A "fetter" is a chain or shackle for the feet that prevents free action; and the author expresses the desire that the heart may be tied similarly to the Lord and sealed up, to prevent the chance of wandering away. This desire recognizes the very real human tendency of inconstancy that is the test of every Christian, a tendency that the author must have felt very personally.

The number of verses used has varied by publication over the years, and the lines in the stanzas have sometimes been rearranged and/or omitted. The verses below are believed to be the original. The two verses most familiar to Latter-day Saints, published in the 1948 edition of the LDS Hymnal, are shown below in bold type. The hymn was not included in the 1985 edition, but remains a favorite.

Robert Robinson is said to have retired in 1790, about the age of 55, to Birmingham and died that summer at Showell Green, Warwickshire, England, where he was believed to have been at the home of a Unitarian leader, Dr. Priestly, and it is said he died during the night as he had always wished, "soft, suddenly, and alone."



Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing – Text

**Come, thou Fount of every blessing;
Tune my heart to sing thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above;
Praise the mount; I'm fixed upon it;
Mount of thy redeeming love.**

Sorrowing I shall be in spirit,
Till released from flesh and sin,
Yet from what I do inherit,
Here Thy praises I'll begin;
Here I raise my Ebenezer;
Here by Thy great help I've come:
And I hope by Thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.

Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood;
How His kindness yet pursues me
Mortal tongue can never tell,
Clothed in flesh, till death shall loose me
I cannot proclaim it well.

**O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, as a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it;
Seal it for thy courts above.**

O that day when freed from sinning,
I shall see Thy lovely face;
Clothed then in blood washed linen
How I'll sing Thy sovereign grace;
Come, my Lord, no longer tarry,
Take my ransomed soul away;
Send thine angels now to carry
Me to realms of endless day.



John compiled and published two very successful volumes of music, *Repository of Sacred Music, 1810*, and *Repository of Sacred Music, Part Second, 1813*. It is reported that in a preface to the first collection John Wyeth stated his qualifications as "many years attention to the charms of church music; an extensive acquaintance with the taste of teachers of the first eminence in the United States; and the possession of some thousand pages of selected music to cull from."

The aim of the first collection was to provide tunes "for the use of Christian churches of every denomination." The second collection is reported to have contained more tunes for use in revivals and camp meetings.

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing with the NETTLETON tune was published in one of these volumes and was widely distributed.

John Wyeth died in 1858 at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



Information in this article came from:

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