



Around the Word
Bible Study
 Epiphany, 2016

Hymn Study
**O Morning Star, How
 Fair and Bright (Stanza 1)**

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
 —John 1:5

[O Morning Star is] a spiritual bridal song of the believing soul concerning Jesus Christ, her heavenly Bridegroom, founded on the 45th Psalm of the prophet David.
 —Philipp Nicolai

One morning Nicolai was in great distress and tribulation in his quiet study. He rose in spirit from the distress and death which surrounded him to his Redeemer and Saviour, and while he clasped Him in ardent love there welled forth from the inmost depths of his heart this precious hymn of the Saviour's love and of the joys of Heaven. He was so entirely absorbed in this holy exaltation that he forgot all around him, even his midday meal, and allowed nothing to disturb him in his poetical labours till the hymn was completed.
 —Richard Lauxmann, on the composition of "O Morning Star"

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Introduction: One of the biggest problems with contemporary Christian praise & worship music is that it is usually more concerned with emotion than doctrine. Nor do these songs provide the full range of emotion; most often, they come in the feel-good variety. There aren't many contemporary "praise songs" that could be sung at a funeral. This is because they reflect a theology of glory, the (false) doctrine that for Christians, life will be nothing but rainbows and butterflies.

Jesus promises no such thing. He bids His followers to take up their crosses (Matthew 16:24) and warns them that the world will hate them, even as it hated Him (John 15:18). The theology of the cross preaches that God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9), that God wishes to be known only through the humility and shame of the cross (LW 31:52–53).

The hymn, "O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright" is no theology of glory. It was written by Pastor Philipp Nicolai during the Great Pestilence of 1597, which claimed the lives of 1300. In July alone, 300 people died, and Nicolai often buried up to 30 people in a single day. "O Morning Star" is a hymn that overflows with the comfort, peace, and joy of the Gospel—even as it looks death square in the eye.

Opening: "O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright" (Stanza 1)

O Morning Star, how fair and bright!
 You shine with God's own truth and light,
 Aglow with grace and mercy!
 Of Jacob's race, King David's son,
 Our Lord and master, You have won
 Our hearts to serve You only!
 Lowly, holy!
 Great and glorious,
 All victorious,
 Rich in blessing!
 Rule and might o'er all possessing!

Compare stanza 1 of "O Morning Star" with Psalm 45, which was the basis for this hymn. Where do you see elements of psalm 45 in this stanza?

"O Morning Star"

Why is the comparison of Christ to a morning star apt?

How does the prophet Balaam describe Christ in Numbers 24:17? What makes the activity of this star surprising in this verse, especially in light of the positive connotations we usually associate with Christ/morning star language? How does this nevertheless reaffirm our Lord's teaching in Matthew 25:31–46?

What source of light does the apostle identify in 2 Peter 1:19? How does Scripture associate this light source with Christ? See John 1:1, 14.

How do John 8:31 and 2 John 1:9 reject the notion that God might give us spiritual enlightenment directly, apart from His Word (e.g., in dreams, visions, "signs")?

"Lowly, holy"

How is the juxtaposition of these two words surprising? How is Christ's holiness manifest in His lowliness? See Luke 2:7; Matthew 20:28; Philippians 2:5–8.

"King David's son"

What image from earlier in this stanza does Christ utilize in describing Himself in Revelation 22:16?

When else have royal and luminary images been combined in Holy Scripture? See Matthew 2:2. Why is it appropriate that Christ's reign would be characterized by light? See Revelation 22:5.

What promise did God make David in 2 Samuel 7:11–13? How long will David's kingdom endure? Compare 2 Samuel 7:13 and Luke 1:33. What are its boundaries? See Isaiah 2:2; 62:1. How is Christ's reign described in Revelation 7:14–15?

Why did God raise up a Savior in the house of David? See Luke 1:68–79, especially verses 72–73.

"You have won our hearts"

See 2 Corinthians 4:6. What work of God does the apostle reference at the beginning of this verse (cf. Psalm 19)?

Why is it particularly appropriate to compare the creation of faith to the creation of the world? According to the apostle (2 Cor. 4:6), what filled our hearts prior to the Lord's shining the light of faith into us?

How is the earth described in Genesis 2:2? How is God's activity in Isaiah 35:5–6 related to the original creation and the conversion of dead sinners to life and faith? What event is Isaiah 35 describing? Compare Revelation 21–22.

"To serve You only"

How does St. Paul describe the life of the baptized in Romans 6:1–7? In 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10? How does the apostle respond to the claim that since Jesus will forgive our sins, we can persist in willful, deliberate sin?

Do we avoid sin and strive to lead a godly life because God demands it? See Romans 7:6.

"Great and glorious"

How does St. Paul describe the greatness of God in Romans 11:33–36? What can we do if we want to grasp His judgments and fully comprehend His ways? Can we? See also 1 Corinthians 2:14.

"All victorious"

What victory has Christ won, according to 1 Corinthians 15:25–26, 55–57? How does this conquered foe continue to harass us, according to verses 55 & 56? To what does the apostle liken the pain of death?

"Rule and might o'er all possessing!"

How is this phrase consistent with what we learned about Christ earlier in this stanza?

Over what Kingdom does Christ reign? See Ephesians 1:22–23. With what weapons does He continue to supply us as we wrestle against Satan and the forces of hell? See Ephesians 6:10–18.

Look again at Psalm 45. This psalm juxtaposes two events we don't normally associate with each other: warfare & weddings. Why do you think the psalmist speaks of combat and marriage in the same psalm? How did Christ obtain His Bride for Himself? See Acts 20:28.

Closing: Psalm 45

¹My heart overflows with a pleasing theme;
I address my verses | to the king;*
my tongue is like the pen of a | ready scribe.

²**You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured up- | on your lips;***
therefore God has blessed you for- | ever.

³Gird your sword on your thigh, O | mighty one,*
in your splendor and | majesty!

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⁴**In your majesty ride out victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness and | righteous- ness;***
let your right hand teach you | awesome deeds!

⁵Your arrows are sharp
in the heart of the king's | enemies;*
the peoples fall | under you.

⁶**Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.**
The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of up- | rightness;*

⁷**You have loved righteousness and hated | wickedness.**
Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness
beyond your com- | panions;*

⁸your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes
and | cassia.

**From ivory palaces stringed instru-
ments | make you glad;***

⁹**daughters of kings are among
your ladies of honor; at your right
hand stands the queen in gold of |
Ophir.**

¹⁰Hear, O daughter, and consider, and
In | cline your ear:*

forget your people and your | father's
house,
¹¹**and the king will desire your |
beauty.***

Since he is your lord, | bow to him.

¹²The people of Tyre will seek your
fa- | vor with gifts,*
the richest of the | people.

¹³**All glorious is the princess in her
chamber, with robes interwoven |
with gold.***

¹⁴**In many-colored robes she is led
to the king, with her virgin com-
panions following be- | hind her.**

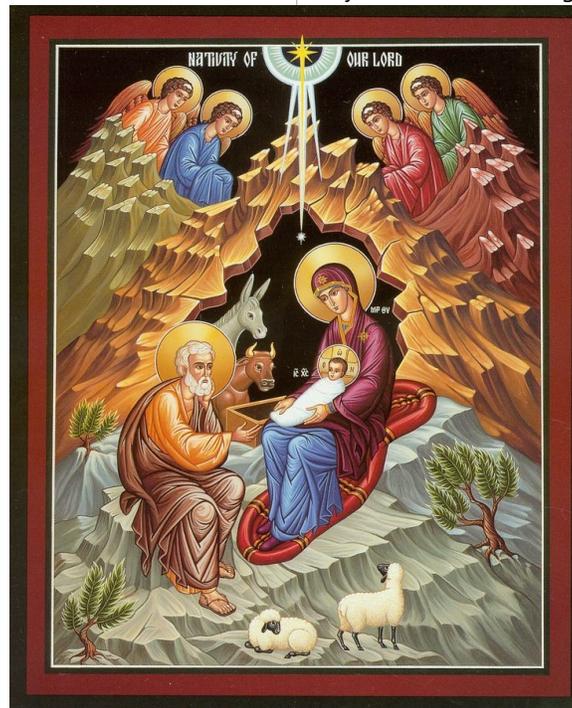
¹⁵With joy and gladness they are | led along*
as they enter the palace | of the king.

¹⁶**In place of your fathers shall | be your sons;***
you will make them princes in | all the earth.

¹⁷I will cause your name to be remembered in all gener- |
ations;*

therefore nations will praise you forever and | ever.

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son*
and to the Holy | Spirit;
as it was in the be- | ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**



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