



## All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above

**Text: Johann Jakob Schütz (1640-1690)**

**Tune: Melchoir Vulpius (c. 1560-1615)**

As the Church sings hymns of praise, it is important that God be praised for His actions towards humanity, not just His status as God. We thank and praise Him for what He has done for us in Christ Jesus, not simply for His existence. The hymn “All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above” captures well our reasons for offering our sacrifice of praise to God, all concluded with the refrain, “To God all praise and glory!”

The hymn was written by Johann Jakob Schütz. Schütz was born September 7, 1640 at Frankfurt am Main. He studied law at Tübingen, where he became skilled in civil and canon law. After graduation he began to practice law in Frankfurt.

Schütz was a religious man, but became occupied with the concept of *Pietism*. Pietism flourished under Schütz’s close friend Philip Jakob Spener. Spener looked to works, not as proof that a person had faith, but that a person was saved, and the better a person behaved, the more genuine their faith. Schütz was sympathetic to this position, and urged Spener to organize his famous *Collegia Pietatis*, small group meetings that sought to replace corporate worship. The idea was that those who truly had faith would be a part of one of these groups, while those who were unfaithful would only attend the regular Sunday service. These groups focused on right living and downplayed the necessity of Jesus’ atoning death and looked to themselves for proofs of salvation rather than what Jesus has done for us. After Spener left Frankfurt, he was replaced by J.W. Petersen who was more radical than Spener. Petersen advocated separatism, which taught that true believers would not even associate themselves with congregations because of

the presence of sinners. Unfortunately Schütz became a full Separatist and stopped attending Lutheran services, and even stopped receiving Holy Communion. Schütz died May 22, 1690.

The hymn has generally been attached to the tune LOBET DEN HERRN, IHR HEIDEN ALL, a tune written by the sixteenth century Lutheran Kantor Melchoir Vulpius. Vulpius was born into an extremely poor family, but was able to receive a good education, which exposed him to excellent music. After receiving as much of an education as he could without significant financial means, he became Kantor in Schleusingen. His primary duties there, in addition to some school teaching, was to write hymn tunes and other pieces of service music. He was the composer of almost 200 motets and 400 hymn tunes. His music is characterized by simplicity. While many arrangements being written at the time were written for large choirs and parishes with expansive musical resources, his compositions were frequently for four voices and simpler in arrangement, though still beautiful.

As the hymn “All Praise to God, Who Reigns Above” is examined, it is remarkable that Schütz’s extreme form of Pietism did not color it. The great German hymnologist Eduard Emil Koch said that this hymn “outweighed many hundred others; and a classical hymn, which from its first appearing attracted unusual attention.” When Schütz wrote this hymn, he wrote it in nine stanzas. What we have in *The Lutheran Hymnal* is stanzas 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, and 9. The original stanza 2 discusses the praise of God which exists both in heaven and earth for His excellent ordering of all creation. The original stanzas 6 and 7 meanwhile emphasize God’s fatherly love and guidance of His children here on earth. They both refer to the world regarding Christians as cast off, but truly loved by their Redeemer and Creator.

All the stanzas of this hymn reflect God’s care for His creation. He does not forsake His flock (st. 4), hears our cries in times of need (st. 3), and watches over us in all situations (st. 2). The refrain, “To God all praise and glory” punctuates every stanza, praising God for the unmerited gifts He gives in Christ Jesus. In addition, as we sing we invite all creation to join in this thankful cry, praising the God who redeemed us and gives us His peace.