



Awake, My Heart, with Gladness

Text: Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676)

Tune: Johann Crüger (1598-1662)

The joy of Easter is the joy that sustains the Christian throughout life. The Holy Spirit is always at work, through the Word and Sacraments, to keep this joy and hope alive in us. This is a joy that nothing on earth or in hell can take from us because it is a gift of God, and nothing is stronger than our loving God. Those whom He sustains in this life, He brings to the life everlasting. This is our hope and confidence.

This hope and confidence is put in our mouths by the hymns of Paul Gerhardt. In the Lutheran church at Lübben, Germany, there hangs a life-size painting of Paul Gerhardt. Beneath it is the inscription, “The theologian tested in Satan’s sieve.” That is the epitome of the life of Paul Gerhardt, one of Germany’s greatest hymnwriters. At an early age, his father, Christian, died, while the Thirty Years’ War, a war waged because of theological differences between the Lutherans and Reformed, raged throughout Germany. On January 2, 1628 Gerhardt entered theological studies at the University of Wittenberg, where he remained until April 1642. He then became a private tutor in Berlin, where his gift of poetry was nurtured. Johann Crüger took note of Gerhard’s gift for hymnwriting and included most of his available hymns in his hymnal *Praxis Pietatis Melica*. In 1655 Gerhard married Anna Maria Berthold. Their first daughter died in infancy, and the family suffered from extreme poverty. In 1657 he became assistant Pastor at St. Nicholas Church in Berlin. However, here he became caught in the extreme theological battles of the time. The elector of Berlin, Friedrich Wilhelm the Great, thought Gerhardt sided with the Reformed, when he was, in fact, a strong Lutheran. When he would not be a part of



the false unity between the Lutherans and Reformed, he was removed from office and not even allowed to preach in his own home. While this battle was raging, Gerhardt and his wife had five more children, but three of them did not live past their first few days. At the end of his “Berlin Martyrdom,” another son died, and Anna Maria was seriously ill. He eventually returned to his congregation in the spring of 1668. However, at Easter of that same year, his wife died. Gerhardt’s only surviving family was a six year old son. In 1669 Gerhardt was Called to serve as Pastor in Lübben, where he remained until his death. In total Gerhardt wrote 133 hymns (21 of them are in *the Lutheran Hymnal*). However, while several other composers from his era see declining translation into English and inclusion into hymnals, Gerhardt’s hymns are actually seeing a resurgence, and new Lutheran hymnals are translating and including more of his hymns, especially ones that were unknown.

“Awake, My Heart, with Gladness” was one of Gerhardt’s hymns included in Crüger’s *Praxis Pietatis Melica* in 1648. Originally the hymn was nine stanzas. *the Lutheran Hymnal* omits one stanza, which comes between our second and third stanzas. It reads:

**Upon the grave is standing the Hero, looking round;
The Foe, no more withstanding, his weapons on the ground
Throws down, his hellish power to Christ he must give o’er
And to the Victor’s bands must yield his feet and hands.**

This hymn tells of Christ’s mighty deeds in dying for our sins and rising to life, thus destroying sin, death, and the devil. Stanza two shows this beautifully, as we sing that Satan’s “boast is turned to gloom” because Christ is risen and has robbed him of his false victory. And because hell’s prince has no victory, he has no power (st. 4). Because of Christ’s victory we can laugh at sin, death, and the devil because they are powerless over us because we belong to Christ, being purchased with His Blood in Holy Baptism. Because we are Christ’s, let the world wage its war against me because even “night is bright as day” (st. 5). The last three stanzas prepare us for our heavenly homecoming. Christ Our Lord prepares the way before us, leading us safely past death, sin, pain, and hell (st. 6). He shields us from all these things, giving us His peace (st. 7) until He leads us to the gates of heaven. At those gates He reminds us that because we shared in His death by Baptism, our heavenly crown awaits (st. 8). Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Christ Jesus Our Lord!