



## Christ, the Life of All the Living

**Text: Ernst Christoph Homburg (1605-1681)**

**Tune: *Das grosse Cantional*, Darmstadt, 1687**

As we draw closer to Holy Week and Our Lord's Crucifixion, our thoughts turn more and more to what He endured on those last days all for us. But we do not mourn, instead we burst forth in thanksgiving for what Christ has done for us, singing "Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus, unto Thee!"

Ernst Homburg was born in 1605 at Mühlh, near Eisenach, Germany. He practiced law in Naumburg as Clerk of the Assizes and Counselor. In 1648 he became a member of the Fruitbearing Society (*Die Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft*), a society established for the standardization of the German language and promotion of its use as a scholarly and literary language. He died in Naumburg on June 2, 1681.

Song writing was not a new thing for Homburg when he wrote his hymns. In his early life he wrote several secular songs about love



and drinking. His greatest output of these songs occurred from 1638-1653. However, he encountered several domestic troubles, mainly centered on the sudden illnesses he and his wife encountered, in addition to other afflictions. These troubles caused him to turn to the Lord. Because of the deliverances he experienced from plagues and violence, he placed all his confidence in God. He then turned his songwriting abilities into a benefit for the Church and wrote approximately 150 hymns. His hymns were published in two parts, the first as his *Geistlicher Lieder*,

*Erster Theil* which contained 100 hymns and was published in Naumburg in 1658 and his *Geistlicher Lieder, Ander Theil* contained 50 hymns and was published in Jena in 1659. In the preface of the *Erster Theil* (First Part), he said that his hymns are "Sunday labors" and that he was "specially induced and compelled to their composition by the anxious and sore domestic afflictions which God...has for some time laid me aside." He went on to say that he wrote because he had been "especially prompted to do this by reason of the heavy cross which my good and gracious Lord has visited me. During all this time I have found my best comfort and strength in the Word of God." His hymns are marked by simplicity, firm faith, and liveliness. He was regarded by his contemporaries as a poet of the first rank.

Though Homburg's hymns were really poems, people were eager to sing them because of their high quality. Though he specified no tunes for any hymns, people quickly attached tunes to his poems or wrote suitable tunes. The tune JESU MEINES LEBENS LEBEN was written in 1687 for another hymn, but quickly became associated only with this hymn because it was published with it in a 1776 German hymnal.

Homburg originally titled this hymn, "Hymn of Thanksgiving to His Redeemer and Savior for His Bitter Sufferings." This is a fitting title as each stanza discusses what Christ suffered and what it benefits us. The first stanza is an introduction to the Passion, highlighting that Christ's Passion and death were for our eternal life. In stanzas two and three we sing of Christ's scourging, from which we benefit the deliverance of our souls, bursting the bonds of sin, and removing God's curse. In stanza four we recall the sham trial and torment Christ received from the people, which He endured to crown us with heavenly glory. In stanza five we remember the false accusers who took away Christ's comfort and security so that we may gain the same. Finally in stanza six we sing of Christ's death by crucifixion for our atonement and His torment to prevent our doom. For all these we sing, "Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus, unto Thee!" Stanza seven concludes the hymn with our thanksgiving for Christ's death and His "last triumphant cry" for which we shall "praise [Him] evermore on high."