



Christ the Lord is Risen Today; Alleluia!

Text: attributed to Wipo of Burgundy (995-1048)

Tune: Robert Williams (1781-1821)

Easter has inspired some of the greatest music in the Church. The joy of Christ's Resurrection—His victory over sin and death—cannot help but he exclaimed in the most joyful song. "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" is a hymn version of an historic chant for the Easter Sunday Liturgy, *Victimæ Paschali Laudes* (Christians, to the Paschal Victim). This chant expresses the joy of Christ's Resurrection and recounts the Easter Gospel (St. Mark 16:1-8).



An historic manuscript of the *Victimæ Paschali Laudes*.

Victimæ Paschali Laudes is a *Sequence*. A sequence is a part of the Liturgy which functions in the same way as the Alleluia and Verse before the Gospel. It prepares you for the Gospel by highlighting a key phrase or idea from the reading. The Sequence begins to appear in the late sixth century in the form of extended verses written by Venantius Fortunatus (530-609).

By the tenth century, Notker Balbulus had expanded these verses to multi-stanza chants which he published in his hymnal, *Liber Hymnorum*. Sequences continued to be written into recent years, one of the last written sequences being *Adeste Fidelis*, the beloved Christmas carol, "Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful." However, liturgical reforms by Pope Pius V in 1570 eliminated most of the sequences, retaining only *Victimæ Paschali Laudes* for Easter and *Veni Sancte Spiritus* for Pentecost in addition to two only a few others which are largely unknown in the Lutheran Church. When sung in the Lutheran Church, the stanzas of the German hymn, "Christ is Arisen" are often inserted between the

divisions of the *Victimæ Paschali Laudes*, with the chant sung by the Pastor or choir, and the congregation singing the stanzas of the hymn.



Konrad II

Victimæ Paschali Laudes is attributed to Wipo of Burgundy. Though history has attributed this Sequence to him, it is uncertain if he actually wrote it. Little is known of Wipo. He was a priest and writer, serving most notably as chaplain to the Holy Roman Emperor Konrad II (990-1039). Upon Konrad's death, Wipo wrote his biography, *Gesta Chuonradi II imperatoris*, and presented it to Konrad's son and succeeding emperor, Henry III, in 1046. Wipo's only other surviving works are a collection of writings known as *Proverbia*, which he wrote around 1026, and *Tetralogus Heinrici*, a eulogy and lament of Konrad's death, which helped to form his later biography of Konrad.

Though we sang the *Victimæ Paschali Laudes* on Easter Sunday, it is good for us to once again sing it, but to use it in a hymnic version as Easter comes to its close. The tune associated with this hymn, LLANFAIR, was written by Robert Williams, a Welsh composer. Though he was a basket weaver by trade, he was also a highly skilled musician and wrote several hymn tunes. Interestingly, Williams was also blind, but because of his musical abilities was able to easily record his hymn tunes as he wrote them.

Stanza one calls on the Christian to "haste your vows to pay...at the Paschal Victim's feet," or, to praise and glorify Christ for His Resurrection. Stanzas two through five then tell the story of Christ's Death and Resurrection, using imagery from Isaiah 52-53, the four Gospels, 1 Corinthians 15, and several places in the book of Revelation. The end of stanza three captures a favorite image in Easter hymnody when we sing of the Crucifixion: "While in strange and awe-full strife met together Death and Life." But we know that the victory remained with life, so we cry, "Christ is risen today!" The hymn ends with an ascription of praise to Christ, who is our Hope, victorious King, and Prince of Life who has mercy on us and saves us by His Death and Resurrection. The Alleluia that punctuates the hymn and ends it keeps us in our Easter joy.