



Christians, Come, in Sweetest Measures

Text: Adam de Saint Victor (1100-1146)

Tune: Johann Balthasar König (1691-1758)

As the Christian Church commemorates her saints, especially the Apostles and Evangelists, it is only right that we praise God for those whom He used to spread His saving Gospel. On these days commemorating the saints, we thank God for their work and ask for His grace that we may follow them in godly faith and service to our neighbor.

One such hymn that accomplishes all this, while keeping the focus solely on Christ, is “Christians, Come, in Sweetest Measures.” This hymn was written by the prolific Latin hymnwriter, Adam de Saint Victor. He was the most prominent and prolific of the Latin hymnwriters of the Middle Ages. However, very little is known of his life. He is either of British or French background. Those who wrote of him described him as *Brito*, which may indicate Britain or Brittany. He did receive his early education in Paris, which gives some credence to the French background. In 1130 he became a monk in the Abbey of St. Victor, located in a Paris suburb. At the time, this Abbey was one of the most celebrated theological schools of the region.

He spent his time in study and authorship. Numerous hymns and sequences (hymns sung between the Epistle and Gospel on high feast days) have been proved to be his, though we know that we have lost more of his writing than we currently have available. In fact, his sequences were so prized that they were all preserved at the Abbey until it was dissolved in the French Revolution (1789-1799). Unfortunately, only 37 of them made their way into general circulation and were published by a Roman Catholic theologian of the early 16th century. Besides these 37, there are still available 106 more hymns and sequences that we know for sure are his. This

collection can be found at the French National Library in the Louvre at Paris, where they were sent when the Abbey was closed. They went unknown for several years, but were finally released in a complete edition a few decades later.

Adam’s hymns were so loved by his Abbey and those of other generations because of everything he was able to include in a short hymn. None of his hymns are of excessive length, but because of his expansive knowledge of Scripture, especially typology (a foreshadowing in the Old Testament of something brought to bear by Christ in the New Testament), he was able to create hymns which truly taught what the text’s inspiration was about, be it a day in the Church year or a passage from Scripture. He also was so skilled in the Latin language that he was able to plumb the depths of the language to create intense imagery and skillful rhymes that make his works a true labor of love. John Mason Neale, one of the foremost translators of Greek and Latin hymnody, counts “Christians, Come, in Sweetest Measures” among Adam’s most beautiful compositions.

When this hymn was translated into English, it was attached to a tune written by Johann Balthasar König. *The Lutheran Hymnal* contains several of König’s tunes. König is best known as the editor of the most comprehensive hymnal, compiled in the 18th century, the *Harmonischer Lieder-Schatz oder Allgemeines evangelisches Choral-buch* (Frankfurt, 1738). It contained an impressive 1,940 tunes, several of which he wrote for the project.

“Christians, Come, in Sweetest Measures” was written by Adam for the Feast days of the Evangelists. The Evangelists and the Gospels they wrote are spoken of as the “rivers four that gladden” (st. 2). Christ is the Fountain of these Gospels, the One who gives the “love from God to lost mankind” (st. 1). The more we avail ourselves of hearing the Gospel, the living voice of Jesus, our souls “more and more shall be translated” beyond sin’s temptation because our faith is strengthened by the Word (st. 3). Because we have faith, created by the Word, at the last day the “angelic pinion” will bring us to Christ, the “Source of love” where our thanks and praise for His mercy will ring forever in the place of rest which He has prepared for us (st. 3-4).