



## Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord

**Text: Martin Luther (1483-1546)**

**Tune: Fifteenth century melody**

As we pray, we very rarely address our prayers to the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Holy Trinity. As we have learned from Our Lord's instructions in the last several weeks, the Holy Spirit does His work in the background. He is not visible as Jesus is.. Rather, the Holy Spirit causes us to remember Jesus and all He has done for us to accomplish our salvation. The Holy Spirit comforts us in afflictions and gives us our confession in times when we must give an account. In short, the Holy Spirit is doing His job if we think not of Him, but of the love of our heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, who has opened heaven to us.



Martin Luther

This all changes one Sunday out of the year. On the Feast of Pentecost, the fiftieth day after Easter, we give special attention to the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit. On this day, all of our hymns address the Holy Spirit and teach us what He does for the Christian. Martin Luther gave the Church three hymns for Pentecost. All three seem to have been written for Pentecost 1524. The first was a German translation of the Latin chant, *Veni, Creator Spiritus*. Luther adapted the plainchant melody to simplified hymn tune and gave us the text *Komm, Gott Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist*, "Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest" (hymn 233). The second was an expansion of a sacred folk song of the fifteenth century, *Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist*, "We Now Implore God the Holy Ghost" (hymn 231). In a similar fashion, Luther gives us *Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott*, "Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord."

This hymn he based on an historic verse for Pentecost and Ordinations: *Veni Sancte Spiritus: reple tuorum corda fidelium, et tui amoris in eius ignem ascende: Qui per diversitatem linguarum cunctarum gentes in unitate fide congregasti. Alleluia, alleluia.* "Come, Holy Spirit, kindle the hearts of Your faithful people and kindle in them the fire of Your love; through the diversity of tongues You gather together the nations in the unit of the Faith. Alleluia, alleluia." In fact, the original

title for "Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord" was *Der Gesang Veni Sancte Spiritus gebessert* Dr. Mart. Luther, "The hymn, *Come, Holy Spirit*, improved by Dr. Martin Luther."

Not much is known regarding the origins of the tune associated with this hymn. It bears some similarities to the plainchant tune connected to the Verse on which the hymn is founded. In the years after its publication some attempted to marry Luther's text to the historic tune. Ultimately the tune we have was forever attached to this text. It was also the same tune that appeared with this hymn in its 1524 publication in the Erfurt *Enchiridion*.



As we sing this hymn it is fitting to consider that for which we pray. In the first stanza we pray for an outpouring of the Spirit's grace, love, and light that alone can unite Christendom in her praise of God. This mirrors Luther's explanation of the Third Article of the Creed when he reminds us that "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

The second stanza asks that the "Word of Life" would shine, teaching us to "know our God aright and call Him Father with delight." This Word also keeps us from false doctrine, ensuring that Christ alone is our Master. Again, Luther builds his explanation of the Third Article on this stanza: "In the same way [the Holy Spirit] calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps her with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers."

Finally we pray that the proof of faith would be visible in our lives just as the tongues of fire were visible on the heads of the apostles that first Pentecost. We pray that the Holy Spirit would "Grant us the will Thy work to do and in Thy service to abide." Filled with the Holy Spirit, we are able to face trials with strength. Ultimately the Holy Spirit's work in us causes us to pass through death and ascend to eternal life with God. Our heavenly bliss is the reason the Holy Spirit is active, for "On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ." By the Holy Spirit may we ever confess this just as Luther closes his explanation in the Catechism: "This is most certainly true."