



Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice

Text: Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Tune: Martin Luther (?) (1483-1546)

“Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice” is likely Martin Luther’s second hymn. His first was a hymn describing the martyrs’ deaths of Johann Esch and Heinrich Voes, a hymn entitled “Flung to the Heedless Winds” (*TLH* 259). With that hymn, this one shares a vivid, personal, dramatic style. But while in the martyrs’ hymn two individuals served to illustrate the joy and confidence of faith, here the same theme is depicted in the struggles and victories of every believer. And while the first hymn described a historical event, the second takes its material from Luther’s innermost experiences.

This hymn was first published in the first Lutheran hymnal, the *Achtliederbuch* (literally, *eight song book*). The date at the end of the hymn is 1523. In the *Achtliederbuch* the hymn is entitled “A Christian Hymn of Dr. Martin Luther, setting forth the unspeakable grace of God and the true faith.” Copies of this leaflet on which this hymn was likely first printed and distributed remained in private collections to the nineteenth century, but are now lost. From the *Achtliederbuch* the hymn passed into all Lutheran hymnals, beginning with the Erfurt *Enchiridia* and Walter’s Wittenberg hymnal of 1524.



One of the early printings of this hymn.

There remains the question of this hymn’s tune. Three different melodies have been associated with it. The *Achtliederbuch* gives the melody which is printed in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, identified as *NUN FREUT EUCH*. However, the tune *ES IST GEWISSLICH* (“The Day is

Surely Drawing Near”) is occasionally called *nun freut euch*. Other hymnals from Luther’s era used *ES IST DAS HEIL*, “Salvation Unto Us Has Come.” It is supposed that Luther wrote the tune we know for this hymn. The tune we know carries the text well and musically portrays the joy which the text carries.



Martin Luther

This hymn is a classic Reformation hymn because it is theologically dense. It succeeds at capturing the Lutheran idea of hymnody. It teaches the singer the story of salvation. It begins with God’s great love for mankind, moves to man’s fall into sin, preaches God’s plan for salvation, and then the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Finally, it summarizes Jesus’ teaching that men will attempt to destroy the Church, but Christ protects His Bride, and for that “God be praised forever.” The hymns were written in this way so children could learn them at school and then commit to memory and take to heart the Biblical doctrine of Justification. Also, children would come home singing these hymns and eventually the parents would learn them as well. At the time of the Reformation, music was the ideal teacher because of high illiteracy rates. Even though the people could not read the Bible, they could hear its Gospel treasures taught in hymns like this one, and by their singing of them, take them to heart and always have the Gospel with them.

This hymn is a particular delight for young and old because of its simple structure and portions of dialogue. In stanza five, the Father speaks to the Son. In stanza six, the Son’s obedience is narrated. Finally, stanzas seven through ten summarize the teaching of Our Lord on His atoning sacrifice, and His promise at His Ascension. But the hymn is highly relatable. Luther opens with the “pangs of hell” which torment the Christian under the Law. Everyone can relate to this message. Despite these “pangs of hell,” the giving of God’s dearest Treasure is His greatest wonder which won our victory. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift (2 Cor. 9:15)!