



Jesus Christ is Risen Today; Alleluia!

Text: Anonymous

Tune: Anonymous; *Lyra Davidica*, 1708

Easter hymns are appropriate on almost any Sunday. Since each Sunday is a little Easter, it is only fitting to sing an Easter hymn that recalls Christ's resurrection. After all, it is only because His resurrection has been made ours that we have any hope in this life. So as we commemorate Holy Cross Day, we rejoice in getting Good Friday and Easter all in one day, singing praise to the One whose pains procured our salvation.

"Jesus Christ is Risen Today" is a unique hymn in that it was written in Latin, but well outside of the Church's era of Latin hymnody. The majority of our hymns that were originally in Latin were written before the tenth century, but "Jesus Christ is Risen Today" does not appear until well into the fourteenth century. However, even in the Latin versions there is very little agreement. Some texts have three or four stanzas, while others have as many as eleven. The best we can point to for a Latin foundation is that the texts which we have serve as a basis for the hymn's theme and not necessarily a source text.



The hymn became immensely popular in English after it was first published in London in John Baptist Walsh's *Lyra Davidica*, a 1708 compilation of metrical version of the Psalms. That version included a text similar to what we have as our first three stanzas. In 1749 the second edition of the *Compleat Psalmodist* contained a text almost identical to what our hymnal uses. Finally, the doxological fourth stanza was added for the *Book of Praise* published in 1862. That final stanza, though anonymous, is often

ascribed to Charles Wesley. Because of that, and the similarity in text and identical meter, it is often confused with, or made a part of, Wesley's Easter hymn, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" (TLH 193).

The hymn's tune, appropriately called *EASTER HYMN*, is slightly adapted from the tune which was printed with this hymn's first English appearance in the *Lyra Davidica* of 1708. It is a tune that is unmistakably attached to Easter. There is hardly a Christian denomination that does not have, use, and love this hymn for Easter itself, as well as the Easter season. It is one modern hymn tune that has spurred composers to some of their greatest work.

The reason that this is one of the most popular Easter hymns is not hard to understand. Though simple, its text tells the Easter story. On the cross Jesus Christ "suffered to redeem our loss," that is, our loss of innocence. By Jesus, what was lost is returned to us because of that holy day (stanza 1). He endured the cross and grave to redeem sinners. He did not die for the righteous, but the unrighteous. Christ, our heavenly King, is worthy of our praise because He has saved us (stanza 2). But He could not have saved us had blood not been shed. The Old Testament makes this point clear. But because He endured the pain—physically, mentally, and spiritually—of murder and rose again, He has won for us our salvation (stanza 3). Finally, all our praises for this salvation are joined together in a great doxology, praising Father, Son, and Holy Ghost for this great eternal love that gave us such a Redeemer (stanza 4). Because of Jesus' death and resurrection and our Baptism into the same, we are promised eternal salvation and a resurrection like His. God keep us in the true faith until He calls us to Himself!

