



Lord Jesus Christ, Be Present Now

Text: William II, Duke of Saxe-Weimar (1598-1662)

Tune: *Cantionale Germanicum*, 1628

As we come together for the Divine Service, it is appropriate to gather in prayer, asking that the Holy Spirit would waken our hearts to be receptive to the Word, that our praise and thanksgiving would be fitting, and that this same Spirit keep us until we are taken to heaven. The hymn, “Lord Jesus Christ, Be Present Now” is a hymn that does just that.

Though the hymn’s authorship is uncertain, it has often been ascribed to William II, who was Duke of Saxe-Weimar. The hymn first appeared around 1646, but the authorship was listed as unknown. It was not until later hymnals (1676 is the first time an author is given) that the Duke was listed as the author.



Wilhelm II

Wilhelm was born April 11, 1598 at Altenburg. His college studies took him to the University of Jena, where he found a particular interest in mathematics and music. When the Thirty Years’ War broke out, Wilhelm was eager to fight. However, he was wounded in Prague, at the battle of the Weisse Berg. However, he recovered and fought in the battle near Stadlohn, in Westphalia (August, 1623), where he was again wounded, but this time left for dead. He was captured, however, and taken prisoner. In

1625 he was allowed to go free, and he assumed the government of Weimar. However, in his time much was done to divide the region because of war and infighting. The final division of the land took place in 1644, and Wilhelm was given Saxe-Weimar, and his brother, Ernst, took Gotha. Weary of war and strained relations, he

set about to restore prosperity and godliness in the regions under his rule. One of the ways he saw to this personally was devoting himself more to the study of poetry and music. This interest led him to be an integral part of the Fruitbearing Society, the great German literary union of the 17th century. Though it was initially led by Ludwig, prince of Anhalt-Cöthen, after Ludwig’s death, Wilhelm led the group. His greatest helper was Georg Neumark (author of “If Thou but Suffer God to Guide Thee,” and also the composer of that hymn’s tune). When later writing about Wilhelm, Neumark said that Wilhelm as having “composed several hymns, as well-known in this place.”



The popularity of this hymn is evident. At its first appearance in the fourth edition of the *Lutherisches Handbüchlein* of Johannes Niedling it was given the title “A heartfelt petition of pious Christians for grace and the help of the Holy Spirit during the Divine Service, before the sermon.” By 1678 a directive was given to the Lutherans in Saxony that this hymn be sung in all churches every Sunday and festival day. The hymn has survived to the present day, and is still included in almost all German hymnals.

Even with a quick glance at the text, one can understand why the hymn was immensely popular. Though simple, it is profound and asks great things of God. In the first stanza, we ask for Christ to be present among us in the Divine Service. We ask that, when He is present among us in Word and Sacrament, that our hearts bow in devotion to the Lord who comes to be servant of all. While Christ is among us, we ask Him to help us in stanza two. We pray that Christ would “unseal our lips to sing Thy praise,” and that in this singing of His praise, that He would also “make strong our faith, increase our light that we may know Thy Name aright.” Stanza three has us look forward then to heavenly worship, when we will, with all the company of heaven join in their song, “Holy art Thou, O Lord, most high!” and live forever in the presence of Christ. Finally, a doxological stanza concludes this hymn, joining our praise with that same praise which extends throughout eternity.