



May God Bestow on Us His Grace

Text: Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Tune: Unknown, *Deutsch Kirchenamt, Straßburg, 1525*

Lutherans have a high view of Missions. We confess that God is the one at work. He has given His Church the Word to spread to all men. We, His humble servants, preach the Word and leave God to do the real work. Contrary to others who believe that the Word needs our help to be efficacious, we know that God's Word is rich in blessing. To illustrate the power of the Word, Martin Luther penned the Lutheran Church's first "missions" hymn in 1524 as he wrote "May God Bestow on Us His Grace."

In 1523 Luther published his *Formula Missæ*, "The Order of Mass and Communion for the Church at Wittenberg." Immediately Luther's friend and coworker, Paul Speratus, made a German translation of it, which he published in January 1524.



Martin Luther

Attached to that translation was "May God Bestow on Us His Grace," Luther's paraphrase of Psalm 67. Knowing that Speratus's translation was published early in 1524, we know that this hymn was written in 1523, making it among Luther's earliest hymns.

In Speratus's printing, no music was included. However, it was printed in broadsheet form (like a modern day pamphlet) by Hans Knappe the Younger in Magdeburg in 1524. Also included with this

hymn was Luther's paraphrase of Psalm 130, "From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee." On May 6, 1524 a man was imprisoned in Magdeburg for singing these hymns and selling them to the public.

Luther thought of "May God Bestow on Us His Grace" as a sort of closing hymn. It is his only Psalm paraphrase that ends with an "Amen." This idea is also supported by its position at the end of Speratus's translation of the *Formula Missæ* and Luther's suggestion in the same that the service end with the Aaronic Benediction ("The Lord bless thee and keep thee...") or Psalm 67:6-7, which reads: "God, our own God, shall bless us. God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him."

The tune which we have with this hymn is its proper tune, which was included with the text in Knappe's broadsheet printing. The tune is adapted from an older German hymn to the Virgin Mary. However, early printings were often made with this text set to the same tune as "To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord," Luther's Baptismal hymn.

The first stanza asks for God's grace to guide us into eternal life. It is also a prayer that we, in Christian vocation, would be afforded the opportunity to share Christ's "riches without measure" to the "heathen," to those who do not know Christ. We share His saving gifts with them that God would work through that confession of His grace to convert them. If we consider this stanza in light of Luther's note that the hymn's corresponding Psalm could be used for a final blessing, it is an appropriate closing hymn, asking God to be with us as we venture into the world and share His grace and the joy it gives us.

Stanza two echoes Psalm 115:1, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your Name give glory." In the second stanza we pray that all the world look to God with praise and the "voice of exultation" for His saving work through the Word. This same Word is at work preventing sin from flourishing, because the people of God are kept in the pasture of the Word, where our souls are fed and nourished, kept in "righteous paths."

Finally, we pray that the Word would take root in us and cause us to do good works, pleasing to God and helpful for our neighbor. But still in those times when we do good works, the praise is directed at the Triune God alone, not towards us. His Word is "rich in blessing," filling us with awe and thanks, for which our hearts say, "Amen," that is, "it shall be so."