



## O Blessed Holy Trinity

**Text: Martin Behm (1557-1622)**

**Tune: Nikolaus Herman (c. 1480-1561)**

An important category of hymns is the one of prayer. Numerous hymns are actually prayers asking God for His divine protection and guidance. “O Blessed Holy Trinity” is one such hymn. This hymn rightly sees our peaceable life as a gift of the Triune God, and prays that He would maintain it through all our days.



Martin Behm

This hymn’s composer, Martin Behm, was the son of Hans Behm, town overseer of Lauban, Silesia, where Martin was born. During Behm’s teenage years his town experienced an extended famine. Wishing to protect him and also further his education, Dr. Paul Fabricius, a distant relative, sent for Behm and brought him to Vienna. Behm not only received education, but served as a tutor there. In 1576 he went to Straßbourg, where he was warmly welcomed by Johann Sturm, rector of the newly founded University there. However, at his mother’s request, Behm returned to Lauban in May 1580 upon his father’s death.

By Easter 1581, Behm was appointed assistant instructor at the town school, and on September 2 of that same year was ordained assistant Pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Lauban. The senior Pastor accepted a Call in Breslau in 1584, and the position remained open for two years. In June 1586, the town council appointed Behm to be the chief Pastor of the church. He served as Pastor there for 36 years and was highly regarded as a skilled preacher and caring Pastor. During his pastorate, there were several periods of famine,

pestilence, and war, but he stayed faithful through them all and was a caring Pastor for all those affected. He was also known as a prolific writer. However, Behm fell ill after preaching on the Tenth Sunday after Trinity 1621 (August 8) and lay ill for 24 weeks. Eventually he died on February 5, 1622.

Behm was regarded a prominent and prolific hymn writer, writing more than 480 hymns. His hymns often emphasize the suffering of Christ, something he did intentionally to impress them deeply on his own heart and those of others. His hymns were published in three volumes entitled *Centuria precationum rhythmicarum*, released in Wittenberg in 1606, 1608, and 1615. Despite this large corpus of hymns, only three of his hymns are included in *the Lutheran Hymnal*, which are his only hymns which have been translated into English.

The tune commonly associated with “O Blessed Holy Trinity” was written in Nikolaus Herman in 1560. Herman wrote it for another hymn, but it never became popular, so he reused it for a second hymn in 1562. After that year it was associated with several other texts. In 1744 it was attached to “O Blessed Holy Trinity” and the two have been inseparable since, and the tune was eventually named O HEILIGE DREIFALTIGKEIT, which is the first line of “O Blessed Holy Trinity” in German.

This prayer for Divine protection begins with an invocation of the Trinity, asking that He be “this day my Guide and Host.” This protection extends not only over our lives, but over all the possessions which God has given, for Satan seeks to “cause distress” and “bring me shame and wretchedness” (st. 2). Stanzas three and four both address each Person of the Trinity individually, asking first for conversion by God’s love, wisdom, and light, then for forgiveness and the strengthening of that faith given by God. The hymn ends with a paraphrase of the Aaronic Benediction (Numbers 6:24-26), seeking the Lord to watch us in all things, but also to give His constant peace, which is ours by Christ’s sacrifice for our forgiveness.

