



O Lord, How Shall I Meet Thee

Text: Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676)

Tune: Johann Crüger (1598-1662)

As Advent and the new Church Year begin we hear of Christ's coming as gracious king. Advent marks the three comings of Christ: His coming as the baby in Bethlehem; His coming today in the Means of Grace; and His coming on the Final Day to take His redeemed children to the heaven He has prepared for them. This Advent hymn of Paul Gerhardt captures these themes of Advent and teaches them in a way that brings the comfort and joy of Advent.



Paul Gerhardt

Paul Gerhardt is easily one of Germany's greatest hymnwriters. His life was marked with several crosses that helped him to better understand the grace of God. At an early age, his father, Christian, died, while the Thirty Years' War raged throughout Germany. In 1655 Gerhard married Anna Maria Berthold. Their first daughter died in infancy, and the family suffered from extreme poverty. While serving as Pastor in Berlin Gerhardt was forbidden to preach in his own church for not being willing to abandon Lutheran doctrine. While this battle was raging,

Gerhardt and his wife had five more children, but three of them did not live past their first few days. After he left Berlin, another son died, and his wife became seriously ill. By Easter 1668 she died. Gerhard's only surviving family was a six year old son. In 1669 Gerhardt was Called to serve as Pastor in Lübben, where he remained until his death.

In total Gerhardt wrote 133 hymns (21 of them are in *Lutheran Hymnal*). However, while several other composers from his era see declining translation into English and inclusion into hymnals, Gerhardt's hymns are actually seeing a resurgence, and new Lutheran hymnals are translating and including more of his hymns, especially ones that were unknown.

The hymn's tune, WIE SOLL ICH DICH EMPFANGEN, was written by Johann Crüger. Crüger was born in 1598 to an innkeeper in Groß Breesen and in 1613 went to Regensburg where he received his first musical training from Paulus Homberger, the Kantor in that region. In 1615 Crüger began the study of theology in Berlin. In 1620 he transferred to the University of Wittenberg where he trained himself in music. From 1622 until his death he taught music and theology and was the Kantor of St. Nicholas Church in Berlin. In 1643 Crüger met Gerhardt and was so taken by his poetry that he began to write tunes for Gerhardt's words. His 1647 hymnal, *Praxis Pietatis Melica*, the most influential German Lutheran hymnal, contained a large number of Gerhardt's hymns coupled with Crüger's tunes.



Johann Crüger

"O Lord, How Shall I Meet Thee" is a perfect Advent hymn. It captures the imagery of the Gospel, Christ's entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, but also expresses the meaning of Palm Sunday and Advent. It celebrates that Christ does not come as the wrathful king, but as the loving Savior who will fulfill His name, the One who will save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). Stanza three in particular is where this message is preached. While we "lay in fetters groaning" and "stood, my shame bemoaning," Christ came to set us free and to restore us to a place of honor. But more than this, He gives us forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, a treasure "that will not fail nor leave me as earthly riches fly." Christ's "love beyond all telling" is what caused all this. Finally, we look forward to Christ's return when He will "guide us safely home." Gerhardt's hymn is one for us to sing not only in Advent but through our lives.