



Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Text: Joachim Neander (1650-1680)

Tune: *Ander Theil Des Erneuerten Gesang-Buchs*, Straslund,
1665

In the Christian Church, the one hymn of praise known by almost every denomination is Joachim Neander's "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty." The text and tune, beautifully wedded, give praise to God for His gracious gifts, especially His ordering and upholding of the world. For this gift, all of creation sounds forth a joyful hymn of praise.



Joachim Neander was born at Bremen in 1650, the oldest son of Johann and Catharina (née Knipping) Neander. Johann was a teacher at the Bremen Pädagogium (a school that trained boys to be pages, those who served people of high social standing). Joachim began his education at the Pädagogium in Bremen, but soon transferred to the Gymnasium (honors high school).

Joachim Neander Though Joachim was descended from a long line of Pastors, he did not initially lead a very Christian life. In fact, while attending Gymnasium he was noted for his disorderly and extravagant lifestyle. In fact, he had little use for church and found it a place to go to criticize others and poke fun at what happened there. However, one Sunday he went to St. Martin's Church in Bremen with his friends to engage in their typical Sunday activities, but was moved by the preaching of the Rev. Theodore Under-Eyck. He soon became close friends with the Rev. Under-Eyck and was converted.

Neander did not have an initial desire to enter the full-time service of the Church until a late night hunting adventure almost led to his death. Chasing some prey led him to a steep cliff, off of

which he almost fell to his death. Neander immediately fell to his knees and thanked God for saving him from death and promised to give his life in service for this protection. In the spring of 1671 he began tutoring five young men, sons of wealthy merchants from Frankfurt-am-Main, and followed them to the University of Heidelberg. He stayed there until 1673. In 1674 he was appointed Rector of the Latin School at Düsseldorf. There Neander worked under a Reformed Pastor, assisting him with several church responsibilities, though he was never ordained. The two initially worked well together, but when Neander was influenced by Separatist Pietists and refused to attend Communion services their relationship became contentious. Eventually the church council in Düsseldorf relieved him of his position. However, two weeks after this action he agreed to abide by the church rules and was reinstated. In July 1679 he became unordained assistant of his friend, the Rev. Under-Eyck at Bremen. He likely would have become ordained and later assumed the Pastorate, but he died of tuberculosis May 31, 1680.

Legend says that Neander wrote his hymns (in total he wrote about 60) in a cave in a beautiful wooded area in Neanderthal, near Mettmann, on the Rhine River. His love of nature often drove him there. To this day, a cave there is still there widely known as "Neander's Cave." He became the foremost hymnwriter for the Reformed Church and is often nicknamed "the Paul Gerhardt of the Calvinists."

This great hymn of praise repeats the joyful call, *Lobe den Herren*, "praise to the Lord." Each stanza gives a different reason for giving this praise. At the beginning we sing our praises for Jesus' position as King of Creation, as well as our Health and Salvation. As King of Creation, He gives everything that is needful and sustains us in this life (st. 2). Stanza three is likely a commentary on Neander's own life, but we can all see our own in it, as we all "heedlessly fall" in sin, but are caught and forgiven by our loving Savior. This Savior lovingly befriends us and "from the heavens" sends "streams of His mercy" (st. 4). For all that our gracious Lord gives to us, we burst forth in the best praise that we can render. The "Amen" sounds forth from all creation, eternally adoring Him for all that He is and gives so freely to us.