



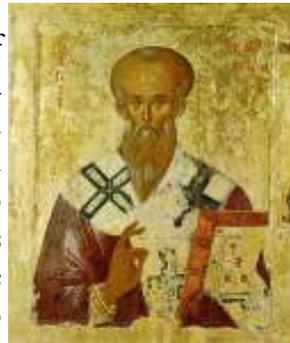
## Shepherd of Tender Youth

**Text: St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 170—c. 220)**

**Tune: Lowell Mason (1792-1872)**

“Shepherd of Tender Youth” is likely the oldest surviving hymn of the New Testament Church. Written by St. Clement of Alexandria around the year 200, its only nearest relative is “O Gladsome Light, O Grace” (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 101), also written around the same time.

Little is known of St. Clement of Alexandria. Around 190, Clement became a teacher of the Faith in Alexandria, but fled from there during Christian persecution in 202 A.D. Eusebius (c. 260—c. 340), Bishop of Caesarea, mentions several of Clement’s writings. Few of Clement’s writings survive today, but what does give us a glimpse into Clement’s life and work. He is one who sought to fight the pagan claim that Christianity was a religion for the ignorant.



St. Clement

He also evaluates the claims of heretics in his day to see where they had gone astray, and if their teachings could be brought back into orthodox Christianity. He only has one hymn of which we know, and that hymn is “Shepherd of Tender Youth.” It appears to be an addition by Clement to the end of *The Tutor*, his second work in a trilogy. He wrote the hymn to instruct newly converted pagans in the faith.

The hymn was first translated by Henry M. Dexter in 1846. It is a rather free translation. Dexter said that as he was translating he “transfused as much of its language and spirit” as he could. He

published this hymn in *The Congregationalist* in December 1849, when it began to be included in many hymnals.

Since its publication, however, this hymn has been unable to find a tune to call its own. Several tunes have been used for this hymn, but it continues to long for its own tune. *The Lutheran Hymnal* prints this hymn with the tune OLIVET, while subsequent Lutheran hymnals have used the tune ITALIAN HYMN (“Come, Thou Almighty King”).

Just as this hymn was originally written for the catechesis (training) of converts, so is it a good hymn for our own catechesis today. It teaches us of the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who shepherds tender youth. He is the perfect Shepherd because He was once a young boy, and knows what trials and temptations pursue children, and adults as well. The hymn’s first stanza depicts the Christian family joining together in the Divine Service to hear of Christ and praise Him for His gifts. It then moves into Christ’s sacrifice for sin and His sacrifice to give us life. Following the structure of the Divine Service, stanza three extols the Holy Communion in which the great High Priest is both host and meal, in which we are given “help from above.” Going forth from the Service, we pray for the strengthening of our faith, that God would guide us in the way we should go, and that He would always be our Shepherd, Staff, and Song. Finally, the hymn looks to eternity where we continue the high praise of the Good Shepherd who has redeemed us. The final stanza also teaches that children, the tender youth, are not to be forsaken, but are a part of the Church and they also join with all the Faithful to “swell the song to Christ, our King.”

