



## Songs of Thankfulness and Praise

**Text: Christopher Wordsworth (1807-1885)**

**Tune: George Job Elvey (1816-1893)**

While the season of Epiphany may seem like an easy one to pass through, especially when the familiar color of green returns to the Altar paraments and the Pastor's vestments, Epiphany has a great doctrine to teach, namely that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man (Colossians 2:9). The great Epiphany hymn, "Songs of Thankfulness and Praise" teaches this great truth to us, especially in its memorable refrain, "God in man made manifest."

The author, Christopher Wordsworth, published this hymn in 1862. To introduce it, he wrote: "*Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany—Recapitulation of the Subjects presented in the Services of former weeks throughout the season of Epiphany; and Anticipation of the future great and glorious Epiphany, at which Christ will appear again to judge the World.*" It teaches, as does the Epiphany season that in the person of Jesus Christ we truly find "God in man made manifest."

The first two stanzas of the hymn teach the historical facts of Jesus' life in the Epiphany Propers. We begin by singing of the "sages from afar" who came to worship the Christ (Mt. 2:1-12). We hear of Christ's Baptism (Mt. 3:13-17; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk. 3:21-23) and His first miracle, the changing of water into wine (Jn. 2:1-11), and his continued miracles of "making whole palsied limbs and fainting soul." As the hymn nears its conclusion, we sing of the darkening of sun and moon (Mt. 24:27-31; Mk. 13:24-27; Lk. 21:25-28), the trumpet blast that heralds the return of Christ to judge the nations (1 Thes. 4:16), and the confessing of Jesus as God (Phil. 2:9-11).

However, the message of Epiphany is not primarily the historical event of the visit of the Magi, but the great Epiphany, namely, the Son of God being made known to the world. Wordsworth catches this main teaching of Epiphany in his hymn when, for every action of Jesus, he teaches that Jesus is no mere man, but fully God and man. Not only was He born in Bethlehem, but He is the "Branch of royal David's stem," as Isaiah (Is. 11) foretold.

Jesus' threefold Office of Prophet, Priest, and King is also taught. Through these three Offices of the Christ, we are taught by Holy Scripture what Our Lord has done for us. As Prophet, Christ preached (and still preaches to us today!) that He is the Son of God and that He has "the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6:68). In His Priestly Office, Christ perfectly fulfilled the Law in our stead, which we ask in the fifth stanza that we might be given the grace to do: "May we imitate Thee now and be pure as pure art Thou." Of course, Christ's greatest Priestly work was His sacrificial death for our salvation. Although couched in a poetic and Scriptural allusion, "Manifest in valiant fight, quelling all the devil's might," brings to mind the phrase from the Easter Sequence, "Death and life have contended in that combat stupendous," which Paul in 1 Cor. 15:54 completes: "Death is swallowed up in victory." Ever in His Priestly Office, Christ intercedes for us with His heavenly Father (1 Jn. 2:1).

Lastly Christ exercises His dominion in His kingdoms of power and grace, governing and keeping all on earth, but especially keeping His Church. Wordsworth teaches that Christ keeps His Bride through His Means of Grace: "Grant us grace to see Thee, Lord, mirrored in Thy holy Word." In addition, echoing the words of Joseph to his brothers in Genesis 50:20 ("As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."), we are taught this Kingly Office in stanza three: "Manifest in gracious will, ever bringing good from ill." The third arm of Christ's Kingly Office is that He will bring about the close of the age, brining His children to everlasting glory in the new heavens and earth (stanza four).

The teaching that undergirds all of Epiphany, and this hymn, is succinctly taught in our Confessions: "*For to give life, to execute all judgment, and to have all authority in heaven and on earth, to have all things given into His hands, to have all things under His feet, to cleanse from sin and so forth, are not created gifts, but divine and infinite qualities. Yet according to the statement of the Scriptures these properties have been given and communicated to the man Christ.*" (FC SD VIII 55)

Had Christ not been fully God and fully man, He would have none of these divine attributes, His death for nothing, and His resurrection a lie, and, as St. Paul says, our preaching and faith would be empty (1 Cor. 15:14).

Thanks be to God that Our Blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is both God and man. Because He is, our salvation is sure. Although we are undeserving sinners, Jesus Christ died for us and freely gives His life to us! This life is ours because we are united to Him through the waters of Holy Baptism. We are given His Word. We are given His very Body and Blood. We have these things as Our Lord's promise that we have eternal life, are His own, and no one can snatch us from His hand (Jn. 10:28)!