



## Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness

**Text: Johann Franck (1618-77)**

**Tune: Johann Crüger (1598-1662)**

Lutheran hymns for the Lord's Supper are some of our finest hymns. Continuing in the Lutheran model of hymn writing to teach doctrine, solid Lutheran Lord's Supper hymnody displays our sacramental piety. When we come to the Altar and meet Jesus Christ as He comes to us in His Body and Blood, there are countless things that happen. There is repentance, awe, the debate of reason versus faith, and a longing to be in heaven where this kind of communion with our Savior lasts for eternity. One of the greatest gems of Lord's Supper hymns is "Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness."

This treasure was given to the Church by Johann Franck, was a prolific hymnwritier, writing 110 hymns. He was born June 1, 1618 at Guben, Brandenburg. His father died in 1620 and Johann was then adopted by his uncle, the town judge, who financed his education in several places. He received his college education at the University of Königsberg. It was there that he became friends with Simon Dach (author of "Through Jesus' Blood and Merit" and Heinrich Held (author of "Let the Earth Now Praise the Lord"), both of whom wrote numerous hymns. The two saw Franck's poetic gift and encouraged him to write hymns for use in the Church. At his mother's request, he returned home in 1640 to aid the family as Swedish and Saxon troops were troubling the area. In May, 1645 he began to practice law, in which he was trained at the University, and became widely known for his great professional ability, but also for his hymn writing. He eventually held several prominent elected positions as a lawyer. However, he is better known for his hymns. On the bicentenary of his death, June 18, 1877, a tablet to his memory was attached to the Stadtkirche (town church) of Guben.

Franck's hymns largely deal with the idea of the union of the soul with its Savior. Though he wrote a great number of hymns, we have only four of his hymns in *the Lutheran Hymnal*. He is ranked with Martin Luther and Paul Gerhardt as the greatest early Lutheran hymn writers.

Several of Franck's hymns are paired with tunes composed by Johann Crüger, who was as prolific with his composition of hymn tunes as Franck was with hymn texts. His most noted music teacher was Giovanni Gabrieli, one of the most influential musicians of the day. Crüger served as Kantor of St. Nicholas Church in Berlin. Known as one of the most distinguished musicians of his time, Crüger composed 71 hymn tunes, of which 18 are in wide use throughout the Church. During his life, Crüger was involved in four hymnals, many seeing numerous editions: *Neues vollkömmlisches Gesangbuch* (1640), *Praxis pietas melica* (1644), *Geistliches Kirchenmelodeyen* (1649), and *Psalmodica sacra* (1658).

Commenting on the wedding of text and tune for "Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness," John Julian's preeminent *Dictionary of Hymnology* says: "This hymn is perhaps the finest of all German hymns for the Holy Communion. It is an exhortation to the soul to arise and draw near to partake of the Heavenly Food and to meditate on the wonders of Heavenly Love, ending with a prayer for final reception at the Eternal Feast. It soon attained, and still retains, popularity in Germany (in many German churches it is still the unvarying hymn at the celebration), was one of the first hymns translated into Malabar, and passed into English in 1754."

This hymn can be easily divided into three main ideas. Stanzas 1-2 call the soul to communion with its Lord, while 3-6 sing of what is received. Finally, stanzas 7-9 deal with this life and the life to come; praying for right reception of the Sacrament here on earth, what Sacrifice guarantees our salvation, and ultimately a petition to enjoy eternal communion with Christ in heaven. These final three stanzas are also excellent prayers for personal use before and after receiving the Lord's Supper. As we approach this Sacrament in faith, may this hymn ever be our prayer and a model of how we come to the Sacrament on earth until Christ receives us as His guest in heaven!