



## The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us

Text: Johann Walther (1496-1570)

Tune: *Musae Sioniae*, vol. 7, Wolfenbüttel

At the end of the Church Year, our thoughts often turn to Christ in judgment. Though this picture can elicit fear, for the Christian it is not meant to do that. Though by these texts we are called to repentance, we are also called to comfort and rejoicing in the Gospel hope given us by our Baptism into Christ. Because we are God's dear children, we are already judged, and we are judged as innocent, redeemed by Jesus' Blood. For us, the return of Christ is a joyful day, the day when our souls and bodies will be reunited to spend eternity with Our Lord in the new heaven and new earth.

"The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us" was written around 1552 by Johann Walther. Walther was born in 1496 in a small village in Thuringia. Friedrich the Wise, Elector of Saxony, hired Walther in 1524 to be the bassist in his court orchestra and by 1526 was appointed *Kapellmeister* (orchestra master). In 1534 he became Kantor in Torgau. When Elector Moritz went to Dresden he took Walther with him to be his *Kapellmeister* there. By 1554 Walther was ready to retire and was pensioned and returned to Torgau where he served as *Sengermeister* (choirmaster) until his death in 1570.

Walther was a more distinguished musician than hymnwriter. One of his greatest tasks was spending a great deal of time with Martin Luther helping him with his hymns. In 1524 Walther spent three weeks with Luther in Wittenberg helping him adapt his hymn tunes and historic Church music, writing them in five part harmony for the *Geistliche gesang Buchlein*, published in Wittenberg that same year. Walther was also present the first time Luther's *Deutsche Messe* was used on October 29, 1525. Most of Walther's hymns were published in his hymnal, *Das christlich Kinderlied D. Martini Lutheri*, in 1566. Of Walther it was said that he, "together with

Luther laid the foundation for evangelical church song."

This hymn's tune, although of unknown authorship, was edited by Michael Prätorius, who was born in Thuringia the year after Walther's death. Prätorius began his musical career as organist in Frankfurt, and later in Lüneburg. From 1604 until his death he served in the court of Duke Brunswick of Wolfenbüttel. Prätorius was a serious student of music and undertook many ambitious projects. One of his largest was a complete encyclopedia of the art and practice of music, a three-volume work entitled *Syntagma Musicum*. He worked on several hymnals, one of the most notable being his *Musae Sioniae*, a nine-volume work.



The title page of Prätorius's *Musae Sioniae*

When Walther wrote "The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us" he authored a 34-stanza hymn. However, in his lifetime the hymn was very rarely sung in its full form. The seven-stanza version published in *The Lutheran Hymnal* is the adaptation that was widely used in Walther's day, which is stanzas 31, 8, 9, 16, 18, 17, and 13 (in that order) of his original hymn. Walther titled it "A Beautiful Spiritual and Christian New Miners' song of the Last Day and Eternal Life."

In this hymn, Walther extols the joy that will be ours at the second coming of Christ. He captures the Christian joy at Christ's return, noting that His voice should not appal us as He returns. When Christ comes to take us to His heaven prepared for us, we will be greeted by the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs (st. 2), language which Walther borrowed from the *Te Deum laudamus*. Together with the Faithful who have gone before us, we will "come before Him Who for us man became," remembering Christ's Incarnation (st. 3). We all will join in endless praise of the Lamb, joining the angels in the song they sing (st. 4), praising Christ as He spreads the Feast and bestows His bounty on us (st. 6). Forever we will be free from sin, death, and evil, always in Christ's heavenly gladness won for us (st. 7).