



The Day is Surely Drawing Near

Text: Bartholomäus Ringwaldt (1532-1599)

Tune: Unknown, *Geistliche Lieder*, Wittenberg, 1535

The hymn “The Day is Surely Drawing Near” is a recast of the medieval Latin chant, the *Dies Irae* (see ¶ *e Lutheran Hymnal*, no. 607 for an English translation). Originally this hymn saw great use during the Thirty Years’ War because the distress of that time led many to think the end was at hand. This hymn has been preserved through the ages to continue to teach of the events at the Last Day, but moreover God’s great grace and love to all those who have faith in Him.

Bartholomäus Ringwaldt was born November 28, 1532 at Frankfurt-a-Oder. His early life is unknown. He was Ordained in 1557 and served as Pastor of two parishes before finally setting in Langenfeld in 1566, where he remained until his death in 1599. He exerted a considerable influence on his contemporaries through his poetry. After 1577 there are several recorded pamphlets of his poems which described the times and the morals of the people. Despite his status as one of the most prolific hymnwriters of the 16th Century, ¶ *e Lutheran Hymnal* only includes two of his hymns (“The Day is Surely Drawing Near” and “O Holy Spirit, Grant Us Grace,” *TLH* 293). He published two hymnals, one in 1581 entitled *Hymns for the Sundays and Festivals of the Whole Year* and the other in 1586, the *Handbüchlein*.



Bartholomäus Ringwaldt

This hymn’s tune, ES IST GEWISSLICH, first appeared in Joseph Klug’s *Geistliche Lieder* in 1535. In that hymnal it was attached to



Martin Luther’s “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice.” However, the tune at hand was never meant for that text.

“The Day is Surely Drawing Near” was originally published in 1565, but when it appeared its author was anonymous. However, by the time Ringwaldt published his *Handbüchlein* in 1586, he claimed it as his and made several revisions to it. Our English translation was made by Philip A. Peter for the Ohio Synod’s *Lutheran Hymnal* in 1880.

While not as vivid in its imagery as the *Dies Irae* (“Day of Wrath, O Day of Mourning,” *TLH* 607), this hymn nevertheless sings of the same events as the *Dies Irae*. This hymn is also a perfect teaching of the events of the Last Day, when our faith reaches its final goal. The clear teaching of Law and Gospel is beautifully set forth in this hymn. While we certainly deserve the woe and death of those who scorned the Lord (stanza four), for the sake of Jesus’ Blood and merit, we know eternal life is ours (stanza six). While the imagery of stanza three, depicting the opening of the books and judgment of all (c.f., Daniel 6:9-10), may be less than pleasant, we need not fear. As stanza five teaches us, our name is written in that Book of Life and nothing can remove it. Our name is there permanently because Jesus paid our debt and for our sin was smitten. In Christ we are free from Satan and from all condemnation. Confident in our salvation, we burst forth in the petition of the seventh stanza, that Christ would no longer delay but come quickly to make us free from every evil that now plagues us.

May we always pray with David, “Save me, O God, by Your Name, and vindicate me by Your Strength” (Ps. 54:1), knowing that Christ is our Intercessor whose Blood covers us from all sin, and that He will take us to our eternal rest and freedom.

