



The Day of Resurrection

Text: St. John of Damascus (670-787)

Tune: Henry T. Smart (1813-1879)

As we celebrate the season of Easter, one of our joys is sharing the praise of Our Risen Lord with the Church of all ages. In our hymnody we use hymns from all centuries and languages of the Church to celebrate Christ's resurrection. The hymn "The Day of Resurrection" is part of a series written by St. John of Damascus to celebrate Easter.



John of Damascus

St. John of Damascus was one of the last Fathers of the Greek Church, but was one of her greatest poets. John was born into the Mansour family, a prominent family in Damascus. His father was interested in his education and insisted that he be instructed in both the writings of the Greeks and Muslims. It is in this time that John became well-acquainted with the Quran, which he condemns, along with the Islamic religion, in his writings. However, his education was not limited to theology, and he became well-known for his skills in music, astronomy, mathematics, and geometry.

Theology was his greatest interest, and he eventually became a monk at Mar Saba and was ordained a priest in 735.

During his retirement, which was spent near Jerusalem, he wrote the majority of his theological works and hymns. His works can be divided into three distinct categories: philosophical summaries, defenses against heresies, and a defense of the orthodox Christian faith. One of his more notable works dealt with the topic of *iconoclasm*, which was a practice of seeing all holy images (paintings, crucifixes, etc.) as sinful and inappropriate for Christians to have.

To defend holy images he wrote *Apologetic Treatises Against those Decrying Holy Images*. His writing also played a role in the Second Council of Nicaea (held in the year 787), which was convened to deal with the issue of images.

In terms of hymnody, John wrote pieces known as *Canons*, pieces of poetry set to the eight Gregorian modes. His most notable are for Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost, though he wrote them for all the Feasts of Christ. The hymn "The Day of Resurrection" is a metrical translation of Ode One of his Paschal (Easter) Canon.

The tune to which we sing this hymn, LANCASHIRE, was written by Henry T. Smart, who wrote it in 1835 for a mission festival at Blackburn, Lancashire, England. For that festival, which celebrated the 300th anniversary of the Reformation in England, Smart wrote it to accompany the hymn "From Greenland's Icy Mountains." He published it officially in 1867 in his hymnal *Psalms and Hymns for Divine Worship*.



Henry T. Smart

The first stanza of "The Day of Resurrection" makes many allusions and direct references to the Passover, the foreshadowing of our redemption in Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection. Recalling Christ's triumph, foreshadowed in the Song of Miriam ("I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously..." Exodus 15:2), the stanza ends telling us that "Christ hath brought us over with hymns of victory." In his Ode, John ends each stanza telling us that we join in this "triumphal song." In stanza two we recall the words of Paul in Colossians 3, "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:1-3). In this stanza we ask that "our hearts be pure from evil," the same request we made in the Collect for Easter Sunday. We make this request so that we may rightly join in the triumphal song. Finally, we burst forth in praise with the heavens and the earth "and all that is therein." In an allusion to the Nicene Creed, we join in praising the Trinity with "all things seen and unseen" until we enter "the joy that has no end."