



## The Head That Once was Crowned with Thorns

**Text: Thomas Kelly (1769-1854)**

**Tune: Jeremiah Clark (1670-1707)**

At Jesus' Ascension, He returned to His rightful throne in heaven. Although He possessed that throne and all its power during His earthly life, He refrained from exercising it. He allowed Himself to take on a servant's form, and even endured the most agonizing of deaths. The royal crown was replaced by a crown of thorns. Now that He has ascended to the heavens, He wears the crown that is rightfully His. However, His body still bears the glorious scars of His crucifixion. These wounds are a comfort to us, because they point to the price He was willing to pay to win us back to the Father. Because His human body has ascended to heaven, ours which also wears His scars by Holy Baptism will be there, too.



Thomas Kelly

This joy comes in a sung confession written by Thomas Kelly. Kelly was born July 13, 1769 at Kellyville, Athy, Queen's County, Ireland, son of a Judge of the Irish Court of Common Pleas. His college education was received at Trinity College, Dublin, where he graduated with highest honors. He expected to become a lawyer, and went to London for that purpose. However, while he was in London studying for the Bar, he had to study Old Testament law, which required him to learn Hebrew. While studying Hebrew and coming to know Scripture, he developed an awareness of his sin, which distressed him greatly. His desire to flee from sin led him to an ascetic life, a life which refrains from anything that might be considered pleasurable. This asceticism threatened his life because of how rigorously he practiced it. He eventually was ordained in 1792 and returned to Dublin as a preacher. However, his preaching was so contentious that

Archbishop Fowler banned him and his companion preacher, Rowland Hill, from preaching in Dublin. Undeterred, he began preaching in two unauthorized churches in Dublin. Eventually he broke off from the Church of Ireland and built his own churches, where he preached. He married a daughter of the Tighe family, a family revered for their Christian piety, around the year 1800. Kelly continued preaching until he suffered a stroke while preaching at the age of 85. He died because of this on May 14, 1854.

In his life, Kelley wrote 765 hymns, and *The Lutheran Hymnal* contains eight of them. His first published collection came in 1802, *Psalms and Hymns by Various Authors*. This book contained 33 of his hymns. Next, in 1804, he published *Hymns on Various Passages of Scripture*, a volume which he edited and expanded in 1806, 1809, 1826, and 1836. Finally, in 1815 he released *Hymns Not Before Published*. Because Kelly also had much musical talent, he composed tunes for several of his hymns, published in 1815. In his last printing of *Hymns on Various Passages of Scripture*, he said in a foreword: "It will be perceived by those who read these hymns, that though there is an interval between the first and the last of near sixty years, both speak of the same great truth, and in the same way. In the course of that long period, the author has seen much and heard much. ... What pacifies the conscience then, does so now. 'Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.'"

The foundation of this hymn is Hebrews 2:10, "It was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Because Christ suffered, we know we will as well. But at His Ascension we see the end result of the suffering. Our best life is not lived here, but rather in the heaven God has prepared for us. Because the cross, "with all its shame, with all its grace" is ours by Baptism, we will inherit the joy of heaven (st. 4). We patiently bear our crosses here, waiting to reign with Our Lord in heaven (st. 5). To sustain us we receive the mysteries (Latin: *sacramentum*; the root of our word "sacrament") of His love (st. 5), Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar. By these we receive the life and heath that flow from Christ's cross, and joy for all eternity in the love Christ has for us that He has given us an eternal hope (st. 6).