



## The Star Proclaims the King is Here

**Text:** Coelius Sedulius (c. 400-c. 499)

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

As the Church marks the half of the Church Year where we commemorate events in the life of Christ, it is not uncommon for hymns to tell these events chronologically. Two of the most popular of this type of hymn appear in the Epiphany section of the hymnal. The first is “Songs of Thankfulness and Praise,” and the second, “The Star Proclaims the King is Here.” These hymns are helpful to us, not only so we learn the events in the life of Christ, but also begin to learn their theological significance.

Though this hymn shares a genre with “Songs of Thankfulness and Praise,” “The Star Proclaims the King is Here” boasts a much older authorship. It was written by Coelius Sedulius, who lived through the fifth century. Little is known of Sedulius. Most of what we know of him comes from two letters he wrote to someone named Macedonius. Sedulius was a poet, and early in life devoted himself to the study and composition of secular literature. It is believed that he spent his life in Rome, and flourished around 450. However, at some point he converted to Christianity and devoted himself to Christian literature and poetry. His dates are determined from his Christian writing, which frequently mentions the work of Jerome, translator of Holy Scripture, who died in 420. He is praised by Cassiodorus (a Roman statesman and writer become monk), who died in 575 and Gelasius, who was pope from 492-496. After Sedulius’s death, his works were collected and published. His best known works are *Carmen Paschale*, a poem which condenses the four Gospels, and *Opus Paschale*, a more fully written version of the same work.

He is also well known for his hymn, *A solis ortus cardine*, a twenty-three stanza abecedarian hymn, a hymn where each stanza

begins with a the next letter of the alphabet. *A solis ortus cardine* details the life of Christ from His Nativity to His Resurrection. The first stanzas have been translated into English as a hymn we know as “Now Praise We Christ, the Holy One” (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, no. 104). The next group of stanzas, explaining the first few Gospels of the Epiphany season, is what we have here as “The Star Proclaims the King is Here.” Though our version was translated by the Rev. John Mason Neale, centuries earlier Martin Luther made a German version of these stanzas, translated as *Was fürchtest du, Feind Herodes, sehr*.



This hymn begins with Herod’s fear that Jesus had come to take away his earthly kingdom. This fear led to his slaughter of all Bethlehem’s baby boys two years and younger. We commemorate these first martyrs for Our Lord on December 28, the Feast of the Holy Innocents. But as we sing, Christ does not come to take any realms of earth, but to give “the realms of heavenly day.”

Herod only has this fear because the Magi saw God’s guiding star and went to find the heavenly King to whom the star pointed. As the Magi came with gold, frankincense, and myrrh, their gifts confessed that the infant whom they worshipped was not just a baby, but was the incarnate Son of God.



This Infant grew and eventually began His public ministry. His public ministry began at His baptism by John in the Jordan River. There He was anointed for His office as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Not only did His baptism mark the beginning of His work, but it set apart water as the means to which He would join His Word to cleanse and save mankind from sin.

Stanza four shows all creation as obedient to its Lord as Jesus changed water into wine at the Wedding at Cana. Through all of these events, Jesus is revealed not only as fully God and man, but as our Savior, whom we praise for His love which showed itself ultimately at Calvary and the empty tomb.

