



This Joyful Eastertide

Text: George Ratcliffe Woodward (1848-1934)

Tune: *David's Psalmen*, Holland, 1685

Christ's Resurrection is the foundation of our faith. St. Paul states quite plainly: "If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty" (1 Cor. 15:14). But because Christ is risen, we have great hope and comfort. We are also given faith and the courage that comes by faith to face death confidently, because it has no power. Because Christ is risen, we merely wait for our own resurrection.

"This Joyful Eastertide" was written by George Ratcliffe Woodward. He was born December 27, 1848 in Birkenhead, England. He was Ordained as a Deacon on December 21, 1874 by the Bishop of London. His first position was to serve as Assistant Curate (assistant to the Pastor) at St. Barnabas, Pimlico. In September 1882 he moved to Little Walsingham in Norfolk.



George Woodward,
playing his euphonium.

Music was always one of Woodward's interests. He played cello and euphonium, and often led religious processions with his euphonium. He also enjoyed church bells, and devoted great time and care to their ringing and maintenance.

But he became well-known for his work with poetry. He married Alice Dorothy Lee Warner in 1889. She was his assistant with his second publication, *Carols for Christmastide, Series II*. Unfortunately, she died one year later, in October 1893. In the midst of this sadness, he compiled a book of Easter and Ascension poetry, which gave him great comfort. This

publication, *Carols for Easter and Ascensiontide*, featured his hymn, "This Joyful Eastertide." Woodward's hymn publications were only a part of his contribution to hymnody. He also did some translations of older hymns, bringing them from Latin into English. He also helped create the St. Barnabas Choral Society. His interest in carols and plainsong inspired him to release another Christmas volume, *Hymns and Carols for Christmas* in 1897. Later hymn compilations included *The Cowley Carol Book* (1899), *The Acahst Hymn of the Holy Orthodox Church in the Original Greek Text and done into English Verse* (1917), and *Hymns of the Greek Church* (1922). He also published three non-hymn works, *Legends of the Saints* (1898), *The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus* (1903), and *Poemata* (1903). One of his best-known choral works is "Ding Dong Merrily on High," which has been set by numerous composers. Woodward died in Norfolk on March 8, 1934.

The tune to which Woodward set "This Joyful Eastertide" is a Dutch tune by the name of VRUECHTEN. It was originally a seventeenth century folk tune for a love song, but was quickly transformed into a hymn tune in the 1685 hymnal, *David's Psalmen*. Woodward crafted his tune carefully so that the word "arisen" corresponded to the highlight of the tune, the melisma (one syllable extended over several notes) at the tune's conclusion.

St. Paul's great "Resurrection Chapter," 1 Corinthians 15, makes clear arguments concerning the Resurrection of the Dead. There is a necessary connection between Christ's Resurrection and our own. As he says in 15:16, "For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen." If our Resurrection is impossible, so also is Christ's. "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! ... If in this life only we have hope in Chris, we are of all men the most pitiable" (15:17, 19). But, of course, our Resurrection is guaranteed because it is absurd to deny Christ's Resurrection, an event witnessed and attested to by well over 500 people (1 Cor. 15:5-8), as well as the prophecy of Scripture. "This Joyful Eastertide," like so many other hymns captures the joy and comfort of Christ's Resurrection and ours as well. Woodward gives us a refrain we may sing all our days: "Had Christ, who once was raised, not burst His three-day prison, our faith had been in vain. But now has Christ arisen!" Alleluia!