



## Thy Strong Word

**Text: Martin H. Franzmann (1907-1976)**

**Tune: Thomas J. Williams (1869-1944)**

Martin H. Franzmann was a scholar, Seminary professor, and gifted hymnwriter, the author of many texts which continue to bless the Church to this day. His hymn *Thy Strong Word* captures the power of the Word of God—from creating and giving life to redeeming and giving eternal life. Throughout the hymn, we praise God for the Light He sends, Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.



Martin Hans Franzmann

Martin Hans Franzmann was born January 29, 1907 in Lake City, Minnesota. He received his Bachelor's Degree from Northwestern College in 1928 and received his Masters of Divinity from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Franzmann was raised in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) in the time when the fellowship between the Wisconsin Synod and our Missouri Synod had not yet been broken. He began his teaching career in 1936 when he was called to teach at his alma mater, Northwestern. In 1946 he accepted a position teaching in the Exegetical Department at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, a department he chaired as of 1954. However, Franzmann always fostered a love of all things British and eventually found the greatest outlet of that love when he was sent to teach at Westfield House of Theological Studies in Cambridge, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of England's theological school. He taught there until his death on March 28, 1976.

Franzmann was a highly gifted man who served his church not only in teaching and scholarship, but in the administration of the

Synod itself, as well representing the church abroad at conferences. He was congratulated for this work in 1954 when Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (however, at that time CTS was still in Springfield, Illinois) awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity “for his outstanding academic contributions and achievements as well as for his service and dedication to Lutheranism and the work of the Lutheran Church.” As a theologian his greatest contribution may well have been his outspoken resistance to the growing popularity of higher-criticism. As a professor he was highly regarded by his students. His knowledge of the Greek New Testament was remarkable, as several of his former students recall his ability to recite, from memory, large portions of the it. His work with hymnody began with his translation of two hymns, *Isaiah, Mighty Seer in Days of Old* and *Rise Again, Ye Lion-Hearted* for *The Lutheran Hymnal*. He went on to write several other hymns which have been included in Lutheran hymnals since. Some of his more popular hymns are *Preach You the Word*, *Thy Strong Word Did Cleave the Darkness*, *O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth*, and *With High Delight Let Us Unite*. Additionally, he was a gifted preacher, and his best sermons have been preserved in a volume entitled *Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets*.

Franzmann's hymn that highlights the power of the Word of God begins at Creation. Into the world, which was “without form and void” (Gen. 1:2), comes the creating Word of God, which gives light and seasons, setting the world into motion. But soon man fell into sin, plunging all the world back into the same darkness from which the powerful Word brought it forth. But into this death-deep darkness came Jesus Christ, the Light of God's Salvation (stanza 2). This same Word Incarnate, by His Word of Absolution pronounces us righteous. Stanza three captures the “now, but not yet” of Christian living. Though we are now *glorious* (forgiven children of God), we still *press toward glory* (waiting to be taken to our heavenly inheritance prepared by Jesus Christ for us). This brightness of our salvation shines forth from the cross where we look for remembrance of what Christ has done for us (stanza 4). Thus forgiven, we use all our faculties to tell forth God's mercy, Name, and the hope He gives us (stanza 5). Finally all creation—mortals, angels, and all who have ever been and will ever be—praise the Holy Trinity for His powerful creating and forgiving Word.