



Veni, Creator Spiritus
Text: Rabanus Maurus (780-856)
Tune: Plainsong, 9th century

Several of our Pentecost hymns find their roots in an ancient Latin chant, *Veni, Creator Spiritus*. In *the Lutheran Hymnal*, two of our hymns cite this chant as the foundation for the text we know. The first is “Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest” and the second is “Creator Spirit, by Whose Aid.” These two hymns give perfect examples of how ancient texts can be used in modern hymnody in which we sing the faith.



Rabanus Maurus

The text which founds these two hymns was written by Rabanus Maurus, the Archbishop of Mainz, Germany. Rabanus was born around the year 780 to noble parents in Mainz. In 801 he became a Deacon while studying in Fulda. He completed his studies in Tours, under the notable Alcuin. When he returned to Fulda, he was appointed with the task of leading the school there, which soon became the most noted schools and centers of book production in Europe. In 814 he was ordained as a Priest. Shortly after, he spent some time living and studying in Palestine and returned to Fulda in 817. In 842, he “retired” to the cloister in nearby St. Petersburg to devote his time to literature and devotion. However, he was summoned back from retirement in 847 to become the Archbishop of Mainz. He died while serving in that role in the year 856.

Maurus was a prolific writer. Much of his writing consisted of unpublished commentaries on books of the Bible, though his sermons are close to the commentaries in terms of quantity. However, he was also greatly interested in poetry and wrote a series of

poems, entitled *De laudibus sanctae cruces* (The Laudable Holy Cross) which depict the cross in several different ways. His poem, *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, was published in the modern equivalent of a Bible Dictionary.

This poem, eventually set to music in the form of a plainsong chant, based on Gregorian Mode VIII, is now very common in several denominations. It is used not only at the Feast of Pentecost, but also at the Ordination of Priests, coronations of kings, dedications of churches, and other solemn festivals. For Lutherans, it is a key element of the Rite of Ordination, sung at the beginning of the Rite itself.

The first way this hymn made it into the vernacular is through the Lutherans. *Veni, Creator Spiritus* was translated into German by Martin Luther as *Komm, Gott, Schöpfer, Heiliger Geist*. Johann Walther adapted the tune and changed it from a flowing chant to the Lutheran chorale style to make it easier for children to sing, and by this hymn they learned the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This hymn is the basis for our hymn, “Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest.” The tune is also Walther’s, though some newer hymnals also include the original plainsong chant.



John Dryden

The second way this text makes it onto our lips is by the versification, “Creator Spirit, by Whose Aid,” a free translation made by John Dryden (1631-1700). Though Dryden was a poet, this was only one of his writing professions. He also authored several plays and translations of great works. His translations of hymns are few in number, though several are attributed to him. His translation of *Veni, Creator Spiritus* does more to capture the spirit of the Latin rather than producing an exact English equivalent. This, however, can give more freedom to expound the meaning of the text rather than directly presenting it.

Veni, Creator Spiritus is an excellent text which teaches the person and work of the Holy Spirit. It is an invocation of the Spirit, a calling upon Him to come to us and give His gifts to us. The Holy Spirit is rightly called the “Finger of the Hand Divine” who gives to us all that God would give, especially the revelation of Jesus Christ. We pray that the Holy Spirit would keep far from us temptation and