



When All the World was Cursed

Text: Johannes Olearius (1611-1684)

Tune: Ahauser Fritsch (1629-1701)

The preaching of John the Baptizer is a common theme in Advent and Advent hymnody. As the Lord's forerunner, he is the Advent preacher *par excellence*. His work to prepare the way for the Lord began even before his birth. Gabriel's announcement to John's father, Zacharias, told the world that John was no ordinary man. Even from the womb John confessed his Lord. This work never stopped, even as John went to his death. May we always heed his cry of "Repent!" and be ready for Our Lord's appearing!



Johannes
Olearius

The one hymn that perfectly summarizes John's life, not just his teaching, is "When All the World was Cursed." This hymn was written by Johannes Gottfried Olearius. Olearius was born in 1611 while his father was Pastor of St. Mary's Church in Halle, Germany. He entered the University of Wittenberg in 1529 where he eventually received a Master of Arts degree (1632) and later a Doctor of Divinity degree (1643). In 1643 he was appointed Court Preacher and Chaplain at Halle by Duke August of Sachsen-Weissenfels. He was later appointed to several positions in Weissenfels, positions he held until his death in 1684.

Olearius was a prolific writer, writing a Bible commentary, several devotional works, and also countless hymns. He was the compiler of one of the most influential 17th century hymnals, *Geistliche Singe-Kunst*, first published in 1671 in Leipzig. This hymnal contained 1,217 hymns, 302 of them written by Olearius. His hymns were very useful, since many filled gaps in existing hymnody, largely providing hymns for seasons and feasts of the

Church Year which had few hymns or none at all. Many of his hymns were two or three stanzas long, simple in their construction, and captured succinctly the importance of the topic at hand. Many of his hymns spread rapidly and were included in most hymnals at the time. *The Lutheran Hymnal* contains seven of Olearius's hymns. He wrote two hymns for the Feast of the Nativity St. John the Baptizer (June 24), "When All the World Was Cursed" and "Comfort, Comfort, Ye My People."

The tune used for "When All the World was Cursed" was likely written by Ahauser Fritsch for his 1679 hymnal *Himmels-lust und Welt-Unlust* (roughly translated, "the joy of heaven and the displeasure of the world"). It was quickly spread and used for numerous hymns in other places. By trade and education, Fritsch was a lawyer, graduating from the University of Jena in 1661. However, he was well-educated and wrote on several subjects, including antiquities, law, and religion. However, his hymnal was one of his greatest works.



Ahauser
Fritsch

Although "When All the World was Cursed" was written for the Feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptizer, it is also an excellent Advent hymn. It begins with the world's condition, being held in the bondage of God's Law given through Moses. But John proclaimed an unknown Messiah, One who did not look or sound like the expected Messiah. But this Jesus was the One whom John confessed as Lord, even from his mother's womb (st. 2). He confessed Christ throughout his life, preparing hearts to turn to their Savior in true repentance. Because Jesus is "the Lamb of God that bears the world's transgressions," we will receive His peace and joy as He takes on all our sin to make atonement for it (st. 3). The one who believes that Christ's Blood made atonement for his sin and comes to Christ in repentance will receive the triple blessing of forgiveness, life, and salvation (st. 4). But we cannot receive this message without faithful preachers continuing to preach John's message. For this reason we ask that we would ever hear the words he preached and heed them in godly faith (st. 5). When we hear these Words of Scripture and have faith created in our heart by them, we are enabled to, by the Holy Spirit, "walk the Savior's way until we live with Him in His eternal day."