



Who Trusts in God, a Strong Abode

Text: Joachim Magdeburg (c. 1525—c. 1583)

Tune: *Trente et quatre chansons musicales*, Paris, 1530

The one who has Christ as his Lord and Savior needs not fear the crafts and assaults of the devil. “Who Trusts in God, a Strong Abode” preaches the Gospel, not only of our salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but of the protection Christ affords us in this earthly life. In the end, Satan loses his power against us as we are taken to our promised inheritance at the right hand of God.

The first stanza of “Who Trusts in God, a Strong Abode” was written by Joachim Magdeburg. Magdeburg was born around 1525 at Gardelegen in the Altmark. He began attending the University of Wittenberg in April 1544 and by 1546 was appointed Rector of the school at Schöningen, near Brunswick. Following this position, Magdeburg held numerous positions, all for short periods of time.



Much of his life was spent in the turmoil of the years following the death of Martin Luther, in which time the German rulers splintered religiously and tried to force all in their region to be Lutheran, Reformed, or Roman Catholic. As Magdeburg was a very strict Lutheran, he refused to strip away liturgy, vestments, art, and music—all things Lutherans hold dear to this day as means which teach the faith—to conform to Reformed rulers, while refusing to reinstate Roman Catholic ceremonies which had been eliminated or reformed to please Roman Catholic rulers. In all, Magdeburg was either forced to move at least ten times by the local rulers or his own conscience. Finally by 1571 he was able to find a more

permanent position as chaplain to the Austrian troops Hungary and later in Erfurt. Though little is known of Magdeburg after that time, it is recorded that he spent the remainder of his life in Cologne, whose Lutheran community had often supported him in his manifold struggles.

“Who Trusts in God, a Strong Abode” is the only known musical work of Magdeburg, or least his only surviving work. He authored the first stanza, and the remaining two are by an unknown author. He wrote it based on Psalm 73:25-26, and published in his 1572 collection of fine church music, entitled, *Christliche und tröstliche Tischgesenge*. Stanzas two and three appear with the hymn in *Harmonia Cantinum Ecclesiasticarum* in Leipzig in 1597. From the time Magdeburg wrote his stanza, he intended that it be sung to its current melody. Though the tune was originally written for a French love song, he recognized its dignified sound and thought it could be used well in the Church. J.S. Bach also recognized the dignity of this tune, as he had a liking for it and used it more than any other hymn tune. He used it in His St. Matthew Passion, as well as six different cantatas. The harmonization published in *Die Lutherische Hymnal* is one of Bach’s own harmonizations.

Magdeburg wrote this hymn to be sung on Saturday evening as a preparation for the Sunday Divine Service. The imagery of his stanza is exceptional, especially when it is remembered that he likely wrote it while he was serving as a military chaplain. He reminds the singer that, because of Christ, no fear can oppress us because we have Christ as our hope and consolation, and our Saviour will shield us from all harm (st. 1). The additional stanzas remind us that, though Satan and the world tries to attack us, Christ will never fail us. He will guide us through all things, and nothing, not even death, can separate us from His love (st. 2)! Finally, with this Savior in view, we look boldly towards heaven. When we consider what Christ has prepared for us, even temptation loses its power. Daily we are renewed with the heavenly dew of our Baptism, which keeps us “until we stand at [God’s] right hand through Jesus’ saving merit” (st. 3).

