



## Ye Sons of Men, Oh, Hearken

**Text: Valentin Thilo (1607-1662)**

**Tune: Hamburg, *Neu Catechismus-Gesangbüchlein*, 1598**

As we picture the season of Advent in our minds, one picture that frequently comes to mind is that of the prophets preparing the way for the Messiah, especially John the Baptizer. All prophets were called to the same task: preparing the way of the Lord and making hearts ready for the coming of their Redeemer. For this reason, many Advent hymns are prophetic in tone, carrying this message. “Ye Sons of Men, Oh, Hearken” is one such hymn, hailing the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ for our redemption.



Valentin Thilo

This hymn was written by Valentin Thilo around the year 1659. Thilo was born April 19, 1607 at Königsberg. In 1624 he began studies at the University of Königsberg, as a student of theology, but his greater interest was the study of rhetoric. When the professor of rhetoric, Samuel Fuchs, retired in 1632, he recommended Thilo as his successor. So great a master of rhetoric, the University was eager to have him teach, so great that they left the position open for two years while he finished studies at the University of Leyden. He returned to Königsberg and graduated with his Master of Arts degree on April 20, 1634. He served the University for twenty-eight years, and in that time served five times as Dean of the Philosophical Faculty and twice as Rector of the University. Thilo died while still serving on the faculty, July 27, 1662.

Valentin Thilo was good friends with Heinrich Albert (author of “God, Who Madest Earth and Heaven”) and Simon Dach (author

of “Through Jesus’ Blood and Merit” and “Oh, How Blest are They Whose Toils Are Ended”). Together with them, Thilo was a member of the Königsberg Poetical Union. Most of his hymns were written for various Festivals and days of the Church Year. They appeared mostly in two hymnals, *Preussische Fest-Lieder*, 1642 in Elbing, and the *New Preussisches vollständiges Gesang-Buch*, Königsberg, 1650. In addition to his hymns and poems, he also published two textbooks on rhetoric in 1635 and 1647.

The tune used for “Ye Sons of Men, Oh, Hearken” is AUS MEINES HERZENS GRUNDE, which was at one time paired with Johann Walter’s hymn “The Bridegroom Soon Will Call Us.” It first appeared in David Wolder’s *Neu Catechismus-Gesangbüchlein* in Hamburg in 1598.

Thilo’s hymns are, as a rule, very short. For this reason it is unclear if Thilo himself penned what we have as stanza four. It is not found in the hymn’s first printing in the *Preussische Fest-Lieder*. Stanza four does not appear until 1659 in the Hanover hymnal, *Das Hannoverische Gesangbuch*. Additionally, some hymn commentators believe that stanza three, discussing one with a humble and lowly heart, was written about Thilo’s sister. She was the wife of a Königsberg Pastor and died of an illness that killed many in the town. She died August 16, 1639.

As an Advent hymn, “Ye Sons of Men, Oh, Hearken” is perfect. It has a heavy emphasis on the preparation of the heart for the coming of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Its content is reminiscent of the preaching of John the Baptizer, calling sinners to repentance and preparing the way for the Messiah. The second stanza captures much of the imagery from Isaiah 40 where the prophet makes straight highways and levels valley and mountain so the glory of the Lord may be revealed. Thilo realizes that this is not discussing physical deserts, but our hearts, confessing that this landscape change is actually “the heights of pride abasing.” Stanza three recalls the Mary’s song, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), when she said “He has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted the lowly.” The final stanza asks for Christ to dwell with us forever so we may eternally sing His praise, showing forth His glory revealed in His birth, death, and resurrection.