

Heritage Hymns of the Month

October

“There Many Shall Come from the East and the West”

ELH 200

Magnus Landstad was a writer and translator of many hymns, and publisher of the 1870 Norwegian hymnbook that many Norwegian immigrants brought with them to America. This is one of Landstad’s greatest hymns. It is based on Jesus’ words recorded in Matthew 8:11-12: “I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven ...” (ESV)

Our Lord sees in advance people from many nations sitting at the Supper of the Lamb in heaven with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is a promise, so it is the Gospel. The hymn’s second verse preaches the Law, the message of warning, that many do sadly resist God’s grace and will be “eternally lost and unfriended.” But those who are saved are those who “hear when our Shepherd doth call/in accents persuasive and tender.” In verses 3-5 we are praying with humility that God’s work of grace would bear fruit in us: “O may we all hear ... O that we the throng of the ransomed may swell ... God graciously make us in heaven to dwell ... God grant that I may of His infinite love/Remain in His merciful keeping.” This is underscored by the closing of every verse: “Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!”

“God’s Word Is Our Great Heritage”

ELH 583

Nikolai F.S. Grundtvig (author of “Built on the Rock”) wrote this hymn verse on the 300th anniversary of the Reformation to be an additional verse to Martin Luther’s hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” It is often used as the festival hymn verse on Reformation Sunday (following the exordium, another old Norwegian Lutheran tradition). As we sing this we are reminded that God’s Word is the means by which faith in Jesus is obtained and passed on to our children and each generation. The prayer that closes this verse asks for God to help us “keep its teachings pure” in our churches “throughout all generations.”

Secondary Hymn for the Month

“Built on the Rock”

ELH 211

There Many Shall Come from the East and the West

1. There many shall come from the east and the west
And sit at the feast of salvation
With Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the blest,
Obeying the Lord’s invitation.
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

2. But they who have always resisted His grace
And on their own virtue depended,
Shall then be condemned and cast out from His face,
Eternally lost and unfriended.
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

3. O may we all hear when our Shepherd doth call,
In accents persuasive and tender,
That while there is time we make haste one and all
And find Him, our mighty Defender.
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

4. O that we the throng of the ransomed may swell,
To whom He hath granted remission.
God graciously make us in heaven to dwell
And save us from endless perdition.
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

5. God grant that I may of His infinite love
Remain in His merciful keeping;
And sit with the King at His table above,
When here in the grave I am sleeping.
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

6. All trials are then like a dream that is past,
Forgotten all trouble and sorrow;
All questions and doubts have been answered at last;
Then dawneth eternity’s morrow.
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!

7. The heavens shall ring with an anthem more grand
Than ever on earth was recorded;
The blest of the Lord shall receive at His hand
The crown to the victors awarded.
Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!