

Hymn of the Week

Epiphany 2026

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness

Words: John Samuel Bewley Monsell (1811 -1875)

Tune: Was Lebet – Reinhardt MS (1754)

When it comes to my personal league table of hymns, this one is very near the top. Although often used at, and very suitable for, Epiphany because of the mention of offerings of gold and incense, the hymn has a much broader message making it suitable for use during any season

Drawing on Psalms 29, 30 and 96 the text emphasises the importance of holiness, adoration and reverence in worship and that our gifts of obedience and lowliness will be received and valued by God every bit as much as the symbolic gifts of a material nature. We are then reminded that even if we offer ourselves (our gifts) with humility and trepidation then God through Jesus will accept them and bring us hope and joy. From an entirely personal and slightly mischievous perspective I am delighted that the hymn encourages us to “kneel” a posture that seems to be fast going out of favour in some quarters indeed I was horrified recently to find myself in an Anglican church that offered no facility to kneel other than on the bare floor!

The author of the hymn, John S B Monsell was the son of the Archdeacon of Derry and was educated at Trinity College, Dublin becoming a priest in the Church in Ireland 1835 and holding several posts there until coming to England and Windsor in 1853 where he became a follower of the Oxford Movement and tradition. Monsell extensively restored his church in Windsor before moving to Guilford where he again commenced restoration but came to an untimely end in an accident while inspecting progress with roof work.

There is a tenuous but interesting link between John Monsell and Balsham in that the widow of Charles his (priest) brother, Harriet Monsell refounded the Community of St John Baptist at Clewer near Windsor after her husband's death in 1850. The current Chancel organ in Balsham was built by J W Walker & Sons in 1856 for the same Convent of St John Baptist at Clewer and transferred to Balsham in 1955.

Little is known of the origins of the tune Was Lebet other than that the melody is found in a MS by Johann Heinriech Reinhardt dated 1754

The hymn is sung here by the Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge in a glorious arrangement by the late Richard Marlow

<https://youtu.be/YOBpygllt8U?list=RDYOBpygllt8U>

Keith Day – 30th December 2025