

Hymn of the Week

Epiphany II

O for a thousand tongues to sing.

Words – Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Tune – Richmond by Thomas Haweis 1734-1820

The writer of this week's hymn needs no introduction being probably the most prolific and well-respected hymn writer ever. This hymn is, in turn, probably Wesley's best known and most popular hymn being printed as the first in multiple editions of the Methodist Hymnal. Charles underwent a renewal of his faith in 1738 and one year on was inspired to write a hymn commemorating this event, the result was a hymn of some 18 verses of which our current hymn forms part. Clearly congregations of those days had more stamina and fortitude than we since as well as its marathon length the hymn contained some "robust" references of which the following are an example:

15. Harlots, and publicans, and thieves,
In holy triumph join!
Saved is the sinner that believes,
From crimes as great as mine.

16. Murderers, and all ye hellish crew,
Ye sons of lust and pride,
Believe the Savior died for you;
For me the Saviour died.

Today we only manage to sing six verses, but they still remain one of the finest and most expressive example of the work of this monumental hymn writer.

This hymn is sung to several tunes largely depending upon the denomination of the singers. In our hymn book it is set to the well known "Richmond". The composer Thomas Haweis initially was apprenticed as a surgeon and pharmacist but had a change of heart and studied for the ministry at Oxford where he was ordained in 1757. Haweis went on to become vicar of St. Mary Magdalene church in Oxford but was later removed by the bishop who was suspicious of his Methodist sympathies. Just to give things a remote local connection, Haweis later became Rector of Aldwinkle in Northamptonshire; those of you from the Abington/Hildersham end of the world may remember that our one-time Vicar Jim Mynors left us to become PIC of the parish of Aldwinkle (plus others).

The hymn is sung here by the Epworth Choir appropriately at the methodist Central Hall.

https://youtu.be/ia2D0F2nU0o?list=OLAK5uy_maWb5HzPoAoXrHusjp9vZH6BGjvlILjI4

Keith Day – 14th January 2026