

Hymn of the Week

Second Sunday before Lent

All Creatures of our God and King

Words: William Henry Draper (1855-1933)

Tune: Lasst Uns Erfreuen – Arranged Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

After the celebrations of Christmas and Epiphany we come now to the Sundays of Ordinary Time (two this year) before we launch into the penitential season of Lent. In the Book of Common Prayer Kalendar these Sundays had rather odd Latin-based names starting with Septuagesima Sunday on which thoughts were turned to both creation and putting our thoughts in order before Lent and that pattern is reflected in our current Lectionary where the first lesson this week takes us right to the start of Genesis and the story of the Creation so what more appropriate hymn than one exhorting “all creatures” to praise God

There is however a good deal more to this hymn than initially meets the eye (or ear) not the least in its authorship which stretches way back beyond William Draper to St Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) and his *Cantico di frate sole* often also called Cantic of the Creatures. There is no space here for a detailed history of St Francis who is well known for his love of animals and his total renunciation of a wealthy life for one of poverty. The canticle was written over a number of years and reflects not only the love of creation and nature shown in the first four verses, but also a call to forgiveness and reconciliation in the fifth, written when a rift between the Bishop and the magistrates in Assisi caused a division in the whole community and then the sixth, written to welcome death when Francis was ill, near blind and suffering severe pain.

The canticle was translated into a singable version by William Draper, Rector of Adel in Yorkshire, a high churchman and strong supporter of the Oxford Movement which sought to restore medieval liturgy and ceremony.

The tune, like the words, has earlier origins in the Geistliche Kirchengesang first published in Cologne in 1623 arriving in England as did so many tunes arranged by Vaughan Williams, in the English Hymnal of 1906

The hymn, which can be something of a marathon, is sung here at a sprightly pace and in a lovely setting by the choir of St. Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh - sadly the fifth and sixth verses are omitted but read them another time (532 in our hymn book)

<https://youtu.be/5OP-77TilKo?list=RD5OP-77TilKo>

Keith Day

3rd February 2026