

Hymn of the Week

Easter Day

**Come ye faithful, raise the strain of triumphal gladness**

Words: John of Damascus (c. 675 - c. 754) Translated J M Neale

Tune: St. John Damascene – Arthur Henry Brown (1830-1926)

I make no secret of the fact that this hymn is without doubt my Easter favourite nor can I hide my disappointment that it is no longer heard in our churches. The hymn is notable for its beautiful linking of spring with the resurrection, and for its use of the crossing of the Red Sea as a type of the liberating work of Jesus Christ and of course a direct link between Easter and the Passover.

John the writer of the hymn was the son of a Christian who was an important official at the court of the Muslim caliph in Damascus. After his father's death, John assumed that position and lived in wealth and honour. At about the age of forty, however, he became dissatisfied with his life, gave away his possessions, freed his slaves, and entered the monastery of St. Sabas in the desert near Jerusalem where he became the theological advisor of Patriarch John V of Jerusalem, who ordained him to the priesthood. John is generally recognised as one of the foremost Byzantine hymn writers. As with so many early Latin and Greek texts, this hymn was translated by the Victorian high churchman J M Neale of whom I have written previously.

The tune to the hymn is the work of AH Brown who unusually was almost completely self-taught, Brown began playing the organ at the age 10. He was organist of the Brentwood Parish Church, Essex (1842-53); St. Edward's, Romford (1853-58); Brentwood Parish Church (1858-88); St. Peter's Church, South Weald (from 1889); and Sir Anthony Browne's School amazingly to his death age 94 in 1926. Brown wrote many hymn tunes in regular use today and like J M Neale was a strong supporter of the Oxford Movement and as such pioneered the restoration of plainchant and Gregorian music in the Church of England.

The hymn is sung here by the Choir of Wells Cathedral, if you are unfamiliar with the words they are conveniently on the screen.

<https://youtu.be/lXdcRp39dvs?list=RDlXdcRp39dvs>

This is the last of the current series of "Hymn of the Week", thank you to those of you who have taken the trouble to read and listen, I hope you have enjoyed the hymns and perhaps found something of interest in what I have written.

May I wish you a joyous and blessed Easter.

Keith Day