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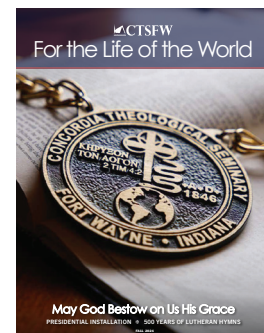
*Stephen P. Starke*  
In 1999, I came across “O God, Beyond All Praising,” a hymn written by Michael Perry to the tune THAXTED. It was then that the thought came to me that the Te Deum, that great confession of faith from the ancient Church, could possibly be versified to fit that tune. Such a strong tune could well carry such a strong text!

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### On the Cover

The chain of office, presented to new presidents at the time of their installation, features the seal of the Seminary with its motto, “Preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:2) and the year of the Seminary’s founding, 1846. The president wears the chain of office at occasions requiring academic regalia, chiefly the opening service and commencement. (Photo: Marcos Navarro)



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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture verses are from the English Standard Version (ESV).





# SONGS OF ISRAEL, SONGS OF THE CHURCH

*True praise is proclaiming  
what God has done.*

*By Andrew S. Gerike*



# SONGS OF ISRAEL, SONGS OF THE CHURCH

**T**he psalmist calls upon everything that has breath and all creation to praise the Lord (Ps. 150:6; 148:1–5). Most especially God’s people are bidden in many of the psalms to praise Him (Ps. 111–113, 115–117, 146–150). They are directed to thank Him through the making of music with skill: “Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre; make melody to Him with the harp of ten strings! . . . Play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts” (Ps. 33:2, 3b). Above all, they are exhorted to sing unto Him, as the familiar words of the Venite from Matins begin in Psalm 95:

Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

Several other psalms and passages call upon God’s people to sing unto the Lord (Ps. 33:3; 96:1; 98:1; Eph. 5:16; Col. 3:16), and many of the superscriptions to the psalms make plain the intention that they were to be sung.

As the Lord through the Scriptures bids His people to sing and give praise, so they do, moved by the Holy Spirit to open their lips and declare His praise. That word

**“A study of the Bible’s own hymns of praise reveal that true praise is proclaiming what God has done.”**

is proclaiming what God has done. We see this throughout the psalms as David, Asaph, and others recount the saving works of the Lord for His people Israel as a whole and for themselves as individual believers.

Israel did not just do this as she sang the hymns and prayers of the psalter, however. We see the scope of Israel’s praise and the depth of content in that praise in other places, as well. Scattered throughout the Old Testament, in close proximity to some of God’s greatest works of salvation, are the Old Testament canticles. The Old Testament canticles are hymns outside the psalter.

Moses led all Israel in singing to the Lord, praising Him for His destruction of Pharaoh’s host and for leading His people in steadfast love (Ex. 15). No mere heaping up of adjectives here! It is a concrete recounting of the greatest act of deliverance in the Old Testament. Moses does the same, yet again, as he nears the end of his

ministry and prepares Israel to cross over the Jordan into Canaan. He does as St. Paul will later bid the church in Colossians. He teaches Israel as he reviews the history of their fathers in the wilderness. He admonishes them with the warning against imitating the stubborn unbelief of that generation. He calls them to the true wisdom that sees and believes in the only God who kills and raises, who wounds and heals (Deut. 32).

Upon God’s gift of a son to her, and in remarkable anticipation of Mary’s own song of praise (Luke 1:46–55), Hannah sang of God’s graciousness. She echoes Moses’ earlier teaching in song of how God works through the cross of suffering to raise up the lowly:

The LORD kills and brings to life;  
He brings down to Sheol and raises up.  
The LORD makes poor and makes rich;  
He brings low and He exalts.  
He raises up the poor from the dust;  
He lifts the needy from the ash heap. (1 Sam. 2:6–8a)

Hannah then ends with a stunning messianic prophecy of God’s appointed King. (Remember, this is before the institution of Israel’s monarchy through Samuel.) She speaks plainly of the Anointed One whom Mary would bear one thousand years later:

The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;  
He will give strength to His King  
and exalt the horn of His Anointed. (1 Sam. 2:10b)

The Latter Prophets also give voice to Israel’s songs of praise. Early on in Isaiah’s prophecy, he gives God’s own declaration of what His people will not just say but *sing* because of His glorious deeds of salvation (Isaiah 12:1–6). Habakkuk’s prayer that concludes his prophecy ends with a note for the choir director (3:19), indicating a musical use for this resounding confession of God’s power over creation and, even more, His redemptive activity for His people. Harkening back to the first messianic prophecy of Genesis 3:15, Habakkuk makes clear that the salvation spoken of here is far beyond deliverance from mere earthly powers:

You went out for the salvation of Your people,  
for the salvation of Your anointed.  
You crushed the head of the house of the wicked,  
laying him bare from thigh to neck. (Hab. 3:13)

These songs (and others) of Israel’s praise were taken up along with the psalms by the early church and were a regular part of daily prayer. What they did for ancient Israel, they continued to do for the Christian church.



Photo: The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod/Erin M. Lunford

*Choir members sing during the Office of Vespers with the Distribution of Calls into the Holy Ministry on April 24, 2024, in Kramer Chapel at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.*

Namely, they taught the history of God’s people in song. They also taught the faith by preaching repentance, God’s gracious forgiving of His people’s sins, and His delivering His people from their enemies.

As the Lutheran Reformation began to produce hymnals, the traditional Old Testament canticles, as well as some other poetic and hymnic passages from Judges, Isaiah, and Jonah, were included as biblical patterns of true praise, at Luther’s own behest. Several of the classic and some newer Old Testament canticles are included in the pew edition of *Lutheran Service Book* (925–929), with still others available through *Lutheran Service Builder* (983–986).

Luther’s hymns and the Lutheran chorale tradition he inspired exemplify true Christian praise. They teach God’s Word, especially the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the fulfillment of all the promises given to Israel. By shedding His blood as the sacrifice for our sins, we have full redemption and deliverance from all our enemies. This emphasis may be the unique focus of Lutheran hymnody, but the songs of the Lutheran church clearly take their cue from the songs of Israel:

I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously . . .  
 The LORD is my strength and my song,  
 and He has become my salvation . . .  
 Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power,  
 Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy.  
 (Ex. 15:1a, 2a, 6).

Dear Christians, one and all rejoice,  
 With exultation springing,  
 And with united heart and voice  
 And holy rapture singing,  
 Proclaim the wonders God has done,  
 How His right arm the vict’ry won.  
 What price our ransom cost Him! (*LSB* 556:1)

Why sing the psalms? Why sing these other portions of Old Testament Scripture? Because as Christians we recognize that as God has done for His ancient people, so has He done for us in His Son. The God who called Israel out of slavery in Egypt, who led them through the wilderness and into the Promised Land, who provided for them all the way, and delivered them from the hand of their enemies, that God is none other than the God whom we worship and praise: the Holy Trinity. This is why the early church and we today affix the Gloria Patri to the ending of each of the psalms and canticles when we pray them. The songs of God’s holy Church in ancient Israel are indeed the songs of the holy Church today. 🏰



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