

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today

A Hymn Story

by Harry Eskew

This hymn is probably sung more on Easter Sunday than any other in the English language. Its author, Charles Wesley, as a young man, joined his older brother John in coming to Georgia as a missionary. The Wesley brothers' experience in Georgia was disappointing. Within a couple of years, they sailed back to England.

On their voyage to Georgia, the Wesley brothers encountered a group of Moravians from Germany who had impressed them greatly with their strong Christian faith. The Wesleys were deeply moved by the faith of the Moravians as they stood singing hymns in the midst of a howling storm. John Wesley recorded this account in his journal: "A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sang on. I asked one of them afterwards, 'Was [sic] you not afraid?' He answered, 'I thank God, no.'" Wesley continued, "But were not your women and children afraid?' He replied, 'No, our women and children are not afraid to die.'"

Even though John and Charles Wesley had set out to be missionaries, they only experienced their conversion in 1738 after returning to England. Charles Wesley's evangelical conversion began on Pentecost Sunday, and his brother John's spiritual conversion took place three days later. Charles Wesley's conversion released his gift of song, and he began writing the words of his hymns, numbering 6,500 in all.

In 1739, about a year after his conversion, Charles wrote "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today," titled "Hymn for Easterday." It was originally published in eleven four-line stanzas of seven syllables per line. The "Allelujahs" were added later. The joyful and florid tune, EASTER HYMN, greatly enhances Charles Wesley's popular Easter hymn.

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today

Christ the Lord is risen today, Allelujah!
Earth and heaven join to say, Allelujah
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Allelujah!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Allelujah!

Love's redeeming work is done, Allelujah!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Allelujah!
Death in vain forbids Him rise, Allelujah!
Christ hath opened Paradise, Allelujah!

Lives again our glorious King, Allelujah!
Where, O Death, is now thy sting? Allelujah!
Dying once He all doth save, Allelujah!
Where thy victory, O grave? Allelujah!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Allelujah!
Following our exalted Head, Allelujah!
Made like Him, like Him we rise, Allelujah!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Allelujah!