

Hymnology

#59 “Hark! A thrilling voice is sounding” (Merton): This hymn’s origins are found in two tenth-century sources. The text abounds in scriptural references; indeed every line in the Latin original can be reasonably associated with a passage from scripture, if not as a direct reference, at least a reflection. The English translation by Edward Caswell, which appeared in his *Lyra Catholica* (London, 1849), preserves most of the biblical references. Caswell’s translation, which has been revised in subsequent hymnals, originally began “Hark, an awful voice is sounding.” The tune Merton, composed by William Henry Monk, first appeared in *Parish Choir* in 1850, and subsequently in the first edition of *Hymns Ancient & Modern* (1861). The tune entered the *Episcopal Hymnal* in 1892.

#70 “Herald, sound the note of judgment” (Herald, Sound): The Rev. Dr. Stanley L. Osborne, author of *If Such Holy Song. The Story of The Hymns In the Canadian Hymn Book* (Whitby, Ontario, 1976), tells in that volume of the inspiration for this text: “A memorial window, which had for its subject the baptism of Jesus, was to be dedicated at Robinson Memorial Church in London, Ontario, in 1968. The minister, the Rev. M.A.J. Waters, was unable to find a hymn to express the thought of John the Baptist as the herald of Jesus. Then the words of this hymn began to take shape in his mind. ‘It seemed to write itself,’ said the author, and only required slight revision before it was sung on the following Sunday morning, with organ and trumpet accompaniment, to the tune Regent Square.” The text is rich in imagery and language from Isaiah, Matthew and Mark. The music is as recent as the text. Early in 1983 Robert Powell, composer and organist/choirmaster of Christ Episcopal Church in Greenville, NC, submitted anonymously to the Standing Committee on Church Music several tunes for possible inclusion in the *Hymnal 1982*. Among them was the tune Herald, Sound for use with Waters text “Herald, sound the note of judgment.” The result is an example of a new Advent hymn that has become a standard of our repertoire at St. John’s.

#75 “There’s a voice in the wilderness crying” (Ascension) is based on Isaiah 40: 3-11. The text is the work of the Canadian journalist and poet James Lewis Milligan. Written in 1925 to celebrate the union of the Congregational, Methodist, and Presbyterian Churches in Canada in that year, and first published in *The Hymnary* (Toronto, 1930), the hymnal of the United Church of Canada, this is believed to be the writer’s only hymn text. Although sometimes interpreted as “a trumpet call to the new church,” these verses have unquestionable association with the season of Advent. The music came about in 1938 at a meeting of the Committee of the Hymnal of the Anglican Church of Canada. The editor, Hugh Bancroft, wrote of the committee’s trying to find a good tune for “There’s a voice in the wilderness crying:” “Each one they tried was poor indeed. I suggested that I should go down to the basement, where there was a piano and see if I could evolve something better. I came up about a half hour later with a rough sketch of the tune Ascension.” The resulting tune first appeared in *The Hymn Book of the Church of England in Canada* (Toronto, 1938), and its use with James Milligan’s text was continued in *The Hymnal of the United Church of Christ* (Philadelphia, 1974). The tune name honors the Church of the Ascension in Hamilton, Ontario, where the composer served from 1936 to 1937.

#67 “Comfort, comfort ye my people” (Psalm 42) is also rich in biblical references to the ministries of Isaiah and St. John Baptist. The words were originally in German, written as a

meditation on Isaiah 40: 1-8. The author was Johann Olearius. The hymn was first published in *Geistlich Sing-Kunst* (Leipzig, 1671). The words in German began “Tröstet, tröstet meine Lieben.” Our English translation is by Catherine Winkworth. It first appeared in *The Chorale Book for England* (London, 1863). The melody of Psalm 42 first appeared in *Pseaumes Octantetrois de David* (Geneva, 1551), associated with Theodore Beza’s French version of Psalm 42, “Ainsi que la biche ree.” Louis Bourgeois was the musical editor of this psalter and therefore the probable composer of the melody. The tune is based on the 15th century French song “Ne l’oseray je dire.” In the German Lutheran tradition the melody was associated with the text “Freu dich sehr, O meine Seele,” in the early 17th century. The text and tune have become very popular in North America in the Catherine Winkworth translation. The hymn is virtually unknown in the UK.

#76 “On Jordan’s bank the Baptist’s cry” (Winchester New): The original Latin text was written by Charles Coffin as an Advent hymn. It was published in the 1763 Paris breviary and in Coffin’s *Hymni sacri* (Paris, 1763). It began *Jordanis oras praevia / vox ecce Baptistae quatit.* The somewhat free translation is the work of John Chandler, first published in the author’s *Hymns of the Primitive Church* (London, 1837). The hymn has been in Episcopal hymnals since 1871. The melody has had a varied history. It first appeared in a different meter in *Musikalisch Hand-Buch der Geistlichen Melodien à Cant. et Bass* (Hamburg, 1690) and was later expanded in Johann Anastasius Freylinghausen’s *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* (Halle, 1704). John Wesley, who owned a copy of this book, included a version of the melody in *A Collection of Tunes Set to Music As they are commonly Sung at the Foundery* (London, 1742). The tune was further modified by William Henry Havergal in *Old Church Psalmody* (London, 1847) and given the alternate names Crasselius and Winchester New. From Havergal’s collection it entered the first edition of *Hymns Ancient & Modern* in 1861, where it appeared with the harmonization of William Henry Monk.

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If you would like to receive *Hymnology* several days before Sunday’s service please contact Tony Antolini to be put on the St. John’s Choir e-mail distribution list (Google Groups). Tony’s e-mail address is <aantolin@bowdoin.edu>