

Marvel Now, O Heav'n and Earth!

One of the oldest hymns in our hymnals is “Savior of the Nations, Come” (LSB 332). Written around the year 370, St Ambrose’s Latin text has been translated many times. Our English version comes to us via Martin Luther’s translation (c. 1523). Whereas much of the church has seen it as a Christmas hymn, Luther put it in the Advent section, for these words offer us something to sing and to ponder as we await the arrival of Jesus.

***Savior of the nations, come, Virgin’s Son, make here Your home!
Marvel now, O heav’n and earth, That the Lord chose such a birth.***

We don’t “marvel” at much anymore. Maybe that’s because we think we’ve seen and heard it all. Magicians and their illusions are nowhere near as popular now as they once were. Special effects on television and in the movies make just about anything imaginable seem real, and now virtual reality systems are bringing that imagined reality into our everyday lives. Yet here in this ancient hymn we hear of something amazing, something wonderful, something worth “marveling” at.

***Not by human flesh and blood, By the Spirit of our God,
Was the Word of God made flesh—Woman’s offspring, pure and fresh.***

***Here a maid was found with child, Yet remained a virgin mild.
In her womb this truth was shown: God was there upon His throne.***

***Then stepped forth the Lord of all From His pure and kingly hall;
God of God, yet fully man, His heroic course began.***

What is here announced is truly unique, as in, “the only one of its kind.” Nowhere else in history was the Word of God made flesh. Behold, a virgin conceived and bore a Son, who was “God of God, yet fully man.” Take a moment to marvel at that! God is spirit, and man is body and soul. Yet here, in this Savior, the Son of God is incarnate, in-fleshed, in a baby born of a virgin. He is one hundred percent God and also one hundred percent man.

But God doesn’t do this just to show off His power. This isn’t just a divine magic trick for our entertainment. This Savior has a “heroic course” to follow.

***God the Father was His source, Back to God He ran His course.
Into hell His road went down, Back then to His throne and crown.***

***For You are the Father’s Son Who in flesh the vict’ry won.
By Your might pow’r make whole All our ills of flesh and soul.***

This Savior came from God, humbled Himself to suffer the torments of hell itself, and then returned to His throne beside God the Father. Mind you, this is only Advent, and we’ll get to these events soon enough as the Church Year goes on. Yet we dare not forget what this Savior of the nations has done, lest we cheapen Him into a sentimental gift from God that only makes us feel good for a few weeks each year. And this He did for us and for our salvation!

***From the manger newborn light Shines in glory through the night.
Darkness there no more resides; In this light faith now abides.***

Marvel, then, at this gift God gave so many centuries ago! For this same Jesus, still true God and true man, is and remains our one and only Savior. His light shines, shattering the darkness of our sinful world, and brings us hope and life, now and into this new year!

***Glory to the Father sing, Glory to the Son, our king,
Glory to the Spirit be Now and through eternity!***