THE HYMNS WE SING:
Christ Is Arisen
Author Unknown, c. 1100

The beautiful hymn 'Christ Is Arisen' is the oldest Easter hymn in German and one of the oldest know German hymns of any kind. It has found its place as the hymn of the Easter season, capturing the history, theology and benefit of the Lord's resurrection. Already old at the time of the Reformation, this hymn was one of Dr. Martin Luther's favorites. "After a time one tires of singing all other hymns," said Luther, "but the 'Christ ist erstanden' one can always sing again." [*The Handbook of the Lutheran Hymnal*, W. G. Polack] Luther even preaches about this hymn in his Easter sermons. The tune is as old as the hymn itself and based on a Gregorian Chant.

The hymn follows the three-fold pattern of the Kyrie, ending each part with the prayer, "Lord, have mercy."

The hymn begins with the wonderful news of the resurrection, "Christ is arisen." This reflects the ancient Easter greeting, "Christ is risen. He's risen indeed! Alleluia!" This is also how most Easter hymns begin. Consider the following hymns in the Lutheran Hymnal (their titles are so similar, it's often difficult to tell them apart):

He is Arisen! Glorious Word!
Christ the Lord is Risen Again
Christ the Lord is Risen Today, Alleluia!
Christ the Lord is Risen Today
He's Risen, He's Risen, Christ Jesus the Lord

This, of course, is not a surprise. On Easter morning is there anything better to say than this, "Christ is arisen"?

But the hymn before us does not just state the raw historic fact of the resurrection, it goes on to extol the benefit of Jesus' coming out of the grave's dark prison, "We now rejoice with gladness; Christ will end all sadness."

> *Christ is arisen*
> *From the grave's dark prison.*
> *We now rejoice with gladness;*
> *Christ will end all sadness.*
> *Lord, have mercy.*
>
> *All our hopes were ended*
> *Had Jesus not ascended*
> *From the grave triumphantly.*
> *For this, Lord Christ, we worship Thee.*
> *Lord, have mercy.*
>
> *Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!*
> *We now rejoice with gladness;*
> *Christ will end all sadness.*
> *Lord, have mercy.*
>
> *The Lutheran Hymnal, 187*

Jesus' resurrection was not just for His own benefit, it was (like everything that Jesus did and does) for us. Jesus' rising from the dead and conquering the grave means that He has brought an end to all the things that bring us sadness, namely sin, death and the devil. The three great enemies of humankind have been destroyed by Jesus in His death, and His victory is made manifest in His resurrection.

The hymn continues with a mention of what things would be like if Jesus had not ascended from the grave, "All our hopes were ended had Jesus not ascended." Here the hymn reflects the thoughts of St Paul:

> "And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is also in vain. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise- if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."

[*1 Corinthians 15:14-19*]

But, Paul continues, "But now Christ is risen from the dead!" Our hymn captures this note of praise, "For this Lord Christ we worship Thee!"

The disciples, too, worship the risen Lord. "And when they saw Him, they worshiped Him." [*St Matthew 28:17*] We, too, are pleased to join in this worship of Christ, true God and true man, who is risen from the dead, risen for us, to end all our sadness and give us comfort and peace.

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

Pastor Wolfmueller, Easter Season 2006