

THE HYMNS WE SING: Savior of the Nations, Come

St Ambrose, +397

“Savior of the Nations Come” is called the Advent hymn *par excellence*. It was originally written in Latin by St Ambrose (c.339-397), the bishop of Milan (northern Italy). Martin Luther later translated this hymn from Latin into German. Our English version is a translation of Luther's German.

Ambrose spent much of his life fighting the false teaching of “Arianism,” which teaches that Jesus was the first-born creation, but denied that He was God. Against this teaching, “Ambrose was distinguished for his defense of the orthodox faith and for his firm stand in all matters revealed in Scripture, opposing both paganism and heresy with equal zeal.” [Concordia Cyclopedia, p. 16] To combat false teaching, Ambrose wrote, taught and composed hymns to teach the orthodox faith.

Here is a bit of Ambrose's writing, defending the divinity of Jesus:

Further, that none may fall into error, let a man attend to those signs vouchsafed us by the holy Scripture, whereby we may know the Son. He is called the Word, the Son, the Power of God, the Wisdom of God. The Word, because He is without blemish; the Power because He is perfect; the Son, because He is begotten of the Father; the Wisdom, because he is one with the Father, one in eternity, one in Divinity.

St Ambrose
Of the Christian Faith, I.II.16

But perhaps Ambrose's greatest gift to the church is the hymn we are now considering, “Savior of the Nations, Come.” In this hymn he sings what he teaches, extolling the wonderful truth of the person and work of Jesus. This beautiful hymn was born out of theological controversy.

As we sing this hymn throughout the season of Advent, we, too, confess that Jesus is begotten of the Father, singing, “From the Father forth He came.” We confess that He is Light of Light, singing, “Brightly doth Thy manger shine, glorious is its light divine.” We confess that He is conceived by the Holy Ghost, singing, “Not by human flesh and blood; by the Spirit of our God was the Word of God made flesh.” We confess that He was born of the Virgin Mary, singing, “Wondrous birth! O wondrous Child, of the Virgin undefiled.”

Most of all we confess that Jesus, crucified, dead and buried, has won for us our salvation, singing, “Thou, the Father's only Son, Hast o'er sin the victory won.” It is this salvation that causes us to break forth in praise to the Holy Trinity. “Praise to God the Father, sing! Praise to God, the Son, our King! Praise to God the Spirit, be! Ever and eternally.” Amen.

**Savior of the nations, come;
Virgin's Son, make here Thy home!
Marvel now, O heaven and earth,
That the Lord chose such a birth.**

**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.**

**Wondrous birth! O wondrous Child
Of the virgin undefiled!
Though by all the world disowned,
Still to be in heaven enthroned.**

**From the Father forth He came
And returneth to the same,
Captive leading death and hell
High the song of triumph swell!**

**Thou, the Father's only Son,
Hast over sin the victory won.
Boundless shall Thy kingdom be;
When shall we its glories see?**

**Brightly doth Thy manger shine,
Glorious is its light divine.
Let not sin o'ercloud this light;
Ever be our faith thus bright.**

**Praise to God the Father sing,
Praise to God the Son, our King,
Praise to God the Spirit be
Ever and eternally.**

The Lutheran Hymnal, 95

For further study concerning Jesus' Divine Names...

St John 20:28; Romans 9:5; 1 John 5:20