

Discovering Hidden Treasures in the Sealed Portion of the Hymnbook: How to Share and Enjoy Lesser-Known Hymns

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The following are some of my favorite lesser-known, seldom-sung hymns. As time permits, we will sing at least one verse of each hymn and discover ways to enjoy these and many other lesser-known hymns in our homes and church meetings.

#12 'Twas Witnessed in the Morning Sky

Restoration, Missionary Work: Opening, intermediate, closing, choir

Text adapted from Hymn #11, “What Was Witnessed in the Heavens?” Music adapted from a celebrated organ solo, “Solemn Melody” by Sir H. Walford Davies. The four-part writing exceeds the reach of the hands; organ pedals must play bass line to encompass all parts. Both the soprano and bass lines never repeat a consecutive note, creating harmonic changes on almost every beat! This is elevated hymn writing. The solemn and dignified manner, which is employed for a joyful topic, may be one of the obstacles to its acceptance and popularity.

#16 What Glorious Scenes Mine Eyes Behold

Book of Mormon, Restoration, Revelation: Opening, intermediate, closing

The text does not mention the Book of Mormon by name; it calls it “Ephraim’s records.” This delightful hymn sets the heart and imagination on fire with “glorious scenes” and prophetic utterances. The present text and tune were also published in the 1948 LDS hymnal.

#50 Come, Thou Glorious Day of Promise

Gathering of Israel, Second Coming, Millennium: Opening, intermediate, closing, choir, procession

Written in chorale style; dignified writing. The first phrase of eight bars is repeated verbatim in the second phrase. Duet in it puts it in the realm of a choir hymn. The present text and tune were also published in 1948 LDS hymnal.

#54 Behold, the Mountain of the Lord

Gathering of Israel, Temples, Millennium, Zion: Opening, intermediate, closing

Text based on Isaiah 2:25, as is the more popular “High on the Mountain Top.” The text was written by an eighteenth-century Scottish Protestant, yet the doctrines ring true to Latter-day Saints. The text was published in the 1950 LDS hymnal with an ambitious and difficult musical setting. The present tune is well suited for the text. Of note, the melody rises to enhance the words “Up to the hill of God” in last line of verse one.

#57 We're Not Ashamed to Own Our Lord

Courage, Second Coming, Worship, Self-worth: Effective closing

This text, filled with restored gospel truths, appeared in Emma Smith’s 1835 hymnal and in the 1950 hymnal. It is a heartfelt, confident affirmation of faith. Karen Lynn Davidson points out in *Our Latter-day Hymns* that “congregations must be prepared to move right on to the next phrase in the seventh measure, rather than dwelling on the word “earth” in (verse one). . . .” The octave skip in the melody from the seventh to the eighth measure gives strong emotional emphasis to the words “We love.” The hymn can be easily sung by congregations with solid musical leadership.

#151 We Meet, Dear Lord

Commitment, Reverence, Sabbath Day, Unity: Opening

This hymn of invocation is new to the 1985 hymnal. It is an expression in song of the particular blessings to be enjoyed from participating in church services. Verse two mentions the singing of hymns. (See Carson's fughetta setting attached to this handout for use in a prelude or as an introduction to the hymn.)

#155 We Have Partaken of Thy Love

Commitment, Forgiveness, Service: Closing

A simple, resolute hymn that is new to the 1985 hymnal. This is a beautiful closing hymn, a petition for the Lord's companionship and a benediction of thanks for the blessings of sacrament meeting. Deserves to be sung more often.

#231 Father, Cheer Our Souls Tonight

Comfort, Hope: Closing

This elegant hymn is new to the 1985 hymnal. It is a beautiful prayer for personal comfort and a blessing on distant loved ones. It is not grouped with the other closing hymns, but serves this purpose very well.

#234 Jesus, Mighty King in Zion

Baptism, Commitment, Renewal: Intermediate, closing

This text was included in Emma Smith's 1835 hymnal and with Cannon's tune especially for the 1948 hymnal. The author of the text was not a Latter-day Saint (d. 1785), yet relevant to LDS thought, especially in reference to baptism by immersion. "This hymn reaffirms the baptismal covenants we...made as followers of Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus rose to a new life as a resurrected being, so after our baptism we...rise to a life of renewed commitment. We first imitate Jesus by being baptized in similitude of his death and burial; the ensuing responsibility is to imitate him in our lives" (Karen Lynn Davidson). CARSON NOTE: I was surprised to discover this fine hymn within the week of preparing this handout. I had not noticed it before. It can effectively be sung in a sacrament meeting anytime and need not be relegated solely to baptismal services.

#275 Men Are That They Might Have Joy (Music by J. J. Keeler)

Book of Mormon, Humility, Joy: Opening, intermediate, closing

This joyful hymn was part of the choir section in the 1950 hymnal. The key has been lowered one half step and the last phrase of the melody has been simplified for the 1985 hymnal. CARSON NOTE: In 1985, while working in the sheet music department at Wakefield's, Inc., in Provo, I excitedly showed J. J. Keeler a case of newly published 1985 hymnals. He took a copy in his hands and looked in the index for the number of this hymn. He immediately made the comment that they had lowered the key and simplified the melody on the last line. The original melody had an octave leap on the word "that" and came down the scale in steps to the final note, he explained.

Conclusion

Under "Using the Hymnbook" on page 381 in the 1985 hymnal, notice that well-known hymns are suggested for stake conference, but no such statement is made regarding sacrament meetings. However, achieving a good balance between familiar favorites and less well-known hymns is suggested. When choosing a less-familiar hymn it is helpful to have the organist play the entire hymn for the introduction. Have the organist play it for prelude music. Have the choir learn it or perform it, or ask the Relief Society sisters to sing it in their meeting the week before. Then, by the time the ward is introduced to the hymn in sacrament meeting, it is no longer unfamiliar.

The Latter-day Saint hymns teach sound doctrine. Each hymn is meaningful and sacred. We should strive for familiarity with all of these inspired hymns.