

GLAD TIDINGS

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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AMAZING GRACE

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A *mazing grace, how sweet the sound...* This beloved hymn, a favorite sung often at our song services, was written between 1760 and 1770 by John Newton. It was originally published but not named in the song book titled the Olney Hymns, and was probably taught as a “new” song for one of Newton’s weekly prayer meetings.

This cherished melody, and these haunting lyrics, allows us as Christians to hear a story about a sinner, who through all the pitfalls of life and sin, has triumphed and has found God’s grace to lead him home.

It is interesting therefore to note that this hymn was written by a man who before becoming a popular minister in the Church of England started his young adult life as an impressed sailor. As such, he endured the rigors of life at sea. He also deserted, only to be apprehended and punished. He ended up as a servant to a brutal slave trader, and after being rescued by a friend of his father, he became the captain of a slave ship that plied its trade along the African coast.

While at sea, John Newton recorded in his journal on May 10, 1748, that during a great storm when all seemed lost, in desperation he said, “*Lord, have mercy on us.*” The storm abated and they were saved. After reflecting on this event he thought God had addressed him during the storm and he was being called to do the Lord’s work.

Today we find that there have been additional verses written and added by other writers. This hymn has been edited and verses have been added and deleted over the years. Most music publishers have settled with the five verses we find in our song book. The first four were written by John Newton.

In the Newton version of this hymn that was originally published in the 1779 edition of that hymnal, there are two verses that aren’t used today. But, which if sung right after verse four gives additional meaning to this hymn:

*Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
and mortal life shall cease;
I shall possess, within the veil,
a life of joy and peace.*

*The earth shall soon dissolve
like snow,
the sun forbear to shine;
but God, who called me here
below,
will be forever mine.*

You can hear in these lyrics, with clarity of thought and an expression of grace which has reached deep into a tender and receptive heart. Although John Newton was a denominational minister, he was an excellent song writer.

When we open our books to this hymn, think about the storied lyrics, and the Lord’s amazing grace. We may have never been rescued from a stormy sea, but we all have been lost in sin, needing direction back to God. Jesus stands before us saying, “*I am the way, the truth and the life...*” (John 14:6). We may have never felt the desperation of being unable by one’s own power to escape destructive waves, but all who are saved by Jesus Christ realize that it is by grace, and not of ourselves (Ephesians 2:8-9). Such realization moves us to trust Jesus for our salvation and obey His gospel (Heb. 5:9).