**LSB 378: *Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light***

Offering hymn, Christmastide 2019-20

**Johann Rist (1607-67), author**1 (The LSB contains 4 hymns by Rist (378, 448, 625, 642)).

Johann Rist was born March 8, 1607 at Ottensen (near Hamburg) Germany, where his father Kaspar was a Lutheran Pastor. From the beginning, Rist’s life was dedicated to the ministry. He attended the University of Rinteln, where he was influenced by Josua Stegmann (1588-1632; *Abide, O Dearest Jesus*, LSB 919) to become a hymn writer. Later, while he was studying Hebrew, mathematics and medicine at Rostock, Rist endured the devastation of the Thirty Years’ War, enduring famine, plundering (losing his scientific and musical instruments) and the plague. He eventually recovered from the plague and in 1635 he married and settled at Wedel, on the Elbe near Hamburg, where he was called to be Pastor. Rist served God’s people at Wedel as Pastor and physician until his death in 1667.

Johann Rist authored close to 680 hymns “pressed out of him by the Cross,”2 as well as historic works depicting the sufferings resulting from the Thirty Years’ War. Rist meant his hymns for private devotion and thus they were not sung in his own church during his lifetime. His Advent and the Lord’s Supper hymns are known for their objective scripturally grounded Christian faith, their power to console, and to encourage and strengthen trust in God’s Fatherly love and in their love of the Savior.3 On account of that they were quickly adopted for use throughout Germany. It is remarkable for the time that they were sung by Protestants and Roman Catholics alike! Rist was crowned poet laureate in 1644 by Emperor Ferdinand III, and in 1645 was given the rank of nobility.

**Johann Schop (c1590-1667), composer**4 (LSB contains two Schop hymn melodies, *Ermuntre dich*, and *Werde munter*), which appears accompanying hymns 548, 589, and 681).

Johann Schop was born in Niedersachsen and became a noted composer and violin virtuoso. In 1614 he was appointed a court musician in Wolfenbüttel, and in 1615 moved to musically serve King Christian IV in Copenhagen. Schop left Copenhagen in 1619 to escape the plague, and finally settled in Hamburg in 1621 where he served as Kapellmeister and court musician until his death. His hymn tunes were initially written expressly for the hymns of his friend, Rev. Rist.

**The hymn**

*Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light*, and its accompanying tune, were initially published by Rist and Schop in their joint 1641 work *Himmlische Lieder, Erste Zehen* (Heavenly/Divine songs, first ten [archaic spelling of *zehn*]). The *LSB* hymn is a grouping of stanzas 9, 10 and 12 from Rist’s Christmas hymn *Ermuntre dich, mein schwacher Geist* (Take courage, my weak spirit); hence the title of the tune in LSB.5 Later, Dietrich Buxtehude (c1637-1707), Georg Philipp Telemann (1681-1767), Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) and others, arranged the hymn into chorale compositions. Additionally, Bach utilized stanza 9 (stanza 1 in the LSB hymn) in part 2 of his *Weihnachts-Oratorium* (Christmas Oratorio).6 The English text in LSB, marking the first appearance of the hymn in LCMS hymnody, is taken directly from the translation/paraphrase in the 1973 Australian *Lutheran Hymnal*.7

The melody itself is written in classic *bar form*, adapted from the German secular court song of the time. This form follows an AAB pattern, namely a music phrase, “A,” which is repeated (termed *Stollen*), followed by a concluding section, “B” (termed the *Abgesang*). Dr. Luther used this form extensively in his hymnody, examples include *Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice* (LSB 556), *From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee* (LSB 607) and *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* (LSB 656/657). Of note, Schop’s other LSB melody, *Werde munter*, is also an example of *bar form*. The use of this vernacular form facilitated singing by the laity.8

This powerful hymn, is a great reminder to us that in our times of weakness, we can trust fully in the One who at His incarnation became weak for us, hung helpless on the Cross to atone for our sins, and rose to declare us right with the Father. In Him we have all we could ever need and to Him alone be the glory! Amen.

First stanza

1. The first stanza begins, “Break forth, O beauteous heavenly light…” much like our Collect for the Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord begins: listen for that. Read Isaiah 9:1-7, John 1:1-5, 1:14 and 8:12, and Revelation 21:22-24. Who is the “beauteous heavenly light”?
2. The stanza continues with the call to the shepherds to not “shrink with affright” for “the day of grace is dawning.” Read Luke 2:8-11. How did the shepherds respond to the appearance of the angel and the glory of the Lord? How did the angel address the shepherds? What is described in this hymn as the dawning of the day of grace?
3. The stanza continues with the proclamation of the infant Jesus being our confidence and joy, breaking the power of Satan. Read 2 Corinthians 8:9, 12:1-10, and Revelation 12:7-11. Another way to read 2 Corinthians 12:9 is, “My power in weakness is accomplished/fulfilled.” How did Jesus win our salvation and defeat Satan? How did this truth provide comfort for Paul? For Johann Rist and Johann Schop? How does this truth provide comfort for you?
4. The stanza concludes, “our peace with God now making.” Read Luke 2:14, Romans 5:1, Ephesians 2:14-16, Colossians 1:20 and Hebrews 13:20. The word for peace in both Biblical languages speaks to a wholeness/completeness, a joining together of all essential parts. What is God’s peace? How was it accomplished? How do you receive it? Read Philippians 4:7. How does God’s peace impact you?

Second stanza

1. The second stanza begins by describing the grace of the Christ-child as surpassing measure. Read Romans 5:12-21. Note that where the English word “abound” relates specifically to “grace,” the Greek term implies beyond measure, beyond what exists. What is the definition of grace? (If unsure, read for example Ephesians 2:1-8, Titus 3:3-7 and Hebrews 2:9.) How does the grace of Jesus surpass measure?
2. The stanza continues with the believer’s proclamation that he cherishes his Brother Jesus more than all worldly treasure. Note that this response and the ensuing prayer appear *after* the declaration of God’s grace in the first stanza and the first part of the second! Read Luke 12:13-34. What does Scripture teach about pride in worldly possessions? Who is your genuine treasure? How may this have comforted Johann Rist in his time of deprivation? What does this mean for you in times of want? What does this mean for others who are poor, weak and sick? Where is your treasure?
3. The stanza concludes with a prayer for Jesus to dwell in the heart of the believer, where He is received with joy. Read Romans 8:10-11, Galatians 2:20 and Ephesians 3:14-19. How does Jesus dwell in your heart? Why does that fill you with joy?

Third stanza

1. The final stanza is one of doxology to Jesus. Once again, we see Him referred to as our Brother. Read Romans 8:14-17, and Hebrews 2:10-18. On what basis may you call Jesus your Brother?
2. The stanza, and hymn, concludes with a plea to Jesus to help us praise, love, and seek Him. Read Psalm 51, the superscription and vv3-5 and 15. Note that Matins and Vespers open with Psalm 51:15. What circumstances drove David to write this Psalm? What circumstances to you bring to the Lord in your prayers? What assurance has He given you through this Psalm and expressed in this stanza?

Collect for the Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord:

O God, You have made this most holy night shine with the brightness of the True Light; grant, we earnestly implore You, that as we on earth have known the mysteries of that Light, we may also come to the fullness of its joys in heaven; through the same Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end.  Amen.

**End Notes**

1. Information on Johann Rist taken from Fred L Precht, *Lutheran Worship Hymnal Companion* (St. Louis: CPH, 1992) pp. 744-745; Aryeh Oron, *Johann Rist (Hymn-Writer, Composer)* at <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Lib/Rist.htm> (accessed 3 December, 2019); John Julian, *Johann Rist*, reprinted at <https://hymnary.org/person/Rist_Johann> (accessed 3 December, 2019).
2. This quote appears in the article, “Hymns,” in *Encyclopedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information, 11th edition, volume 14* (New York: The Encyclopedia Britannica Company, 1910) p. 189
3. John Julian, *ibid*.
4. Information on Johann Schop taken from Aryeh Oron and Thomas Braatz, *Johann Schop (Composer)* at <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Lib/Schop.htm> (accessed 5 December, 2019).
5. Johann Rist and Johann Schop, *Himmlische Lieder (1641/42)* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag GmbH, 2012) pp 28-29, also <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/Chorale454-Eng3.htm> (accessed 5 December, 2019)
6. Movement 3, *Brich an*. The text may be found at <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Texts/BWV248-2-Eng3.htm> (accessed 6 December, 2019)
7. LSB 378 consists of stanzas 2, 3 and 4 of the hymn *Ermuntre dich* *(Arise, my soul, sing joyfully)*, LH 31 in *Lutheran Hymnal/authorized by the Lutheran Church of Australia* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1973). The first stanza in the Australian hymnal is a translation/paraphrase of the first stanza of the Rist hymn. I wish to thank Pr. Jake Zabel, St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, Dalby, QLD, Australia, for providing me with the details from the Australian hymnal.
8. Robin A. Leaver, *Luther’s Liturgical Music, Principles and Implications* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), pp. 13, 199