

Blurb for 1-27-19

Today's hymn 'Immortal, invisible, God only wise' is just one of the many successful pairings of text and tune that we owe to Ralph Vaughn Williams work creating *The English Hymnal* of 1906. The author of the text, Walter Chalmers Smith, drew inspiration from 1 Tim. 1:17: "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen." The hymn text first appeared in Smith's 1867 collection *Hymns of Christ and the Christian Life* (London). Percy Dearmer, text editor for the *English Hymnal*, used the first three verses of the six verse original, and combined verses 5 and 6 to create a new fourth verse. That has remained the standard form of the hymn ever since. The editors of the present hymnal also made changes in order to use inclusive language whenever possible. Hence, "Great Father of glory, Father of light" was changed to "Thou reignest in glory, thou rulest in light."

The tune is of uncertain Welsh origin and first appeared in 1839 in a Welsh hymn collection. In Wales the tune is known as **Joanna**. We refer to it as **St. Denio**. Other names have appeared as well but there is no apparent reason for any of the names. Vaughn Williams used the tune many years later as the theme for the scherzo movement of his *Household Quartet: Three Preludes on Welsh Hymn Tunes* (1944). The piece was written as a string quartet, or any other combination of instruments that could be found around a household.