

Music Blurbs for 3-8-20

News and Notes

This week we'll sing "What wondrous love is this," "Love divine, all loves excelling," and "Lift high the cross." At 10:30 we'll also sing Fanny Crosby's biggest hit "Blessed assurance." The choir will sing Stainer's perennial fave "God So Loved the World."

8:00 a.m. worship - Lift high the Cross

Today's closing hymn "Lift high the cross" had long been popular in British congregations. When it first appeared in the 1979 Episcopal Church's publication *Hymns III*, it became an overnight hit. The text is considered by some to be the twentieth century replacement of "Onward Christian soldiers."

The original text by George Kitchin was written for a festival for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1887. The text recalled the vision of the cross seen by the emperor Constantine: "in this sign you will conquer." In 1916, Michael Newbolt revised the text for the supplement to *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. For the US version that appeared in *Hymns III*, the number of verses was pared down to four, the militaristic imagery was removed and more inclusive language was employed. The tune CRUCIFER was the music written for this text in the 1916 *Hymns Ancient and Modern* supplement. The tune name suggests both the person that carries the cross in a liturgical procession as well as the Christian who bears the cross as a sign of baptism.

10:30 a.m. worship – Blessed Assurance

Today's hymn "Blessed Assurance" was written in 1873. Phoebe Knapp, a well-to-do member of a Methodist church in Manhattan, had written a tune and wanted to play it for her friend from church, Fanny Crosby. She played her new tune on

the piano and turned to her friend and asked, “What do you think the tune says?” Crosby answered, “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine,” and then proceeded to recite the entire first verse of the hymn. The hymn was published that July in *Guide to Holiness and Revival Miscellany*, a magazine published by Phoebe’s parents’ religious publication house.

Fanny Crosby (1820-1915) was blinded for life at six weeks of age by a doctor trying to cure an eye infection. At age 15 she was enrolled in the New York Institute for the Blind and by 22 she was a member of the faculty, teaching history and rhetoric.

A lifelong Methodist, by age six she began writing hymns and in her lifetime went on to write over 8,000 gospel hymn texts. Her hymn texts became staples of the most prominent gospel song writers of the day. “Blessed assurance” appeared in Ira Sankey’s collection *Gospel Songs No. 5* published in 1887. Dwight Moody was the Billy Graham of the day and Ira Sankey was his song leader. Sankey sang this song many times leading to its fame and recognition. It entered the Methodist hymnal in 1889 and has remained there ever since. For Episcopalians, it first appeared in the 1993 edition of *Lift Every Voice and Sing*.

According to Dr. Michael Hawn, director of the school of sacred music at Perkins Institute of Theology, “Crosby captured the poetic essence of the Wesleyan understanding of Christian perfection in the phrase, ‘O what a foretaste of glory divine!’ The entire hymn is focused on heaven, a place where ‘perfect submission’ and ‘perfect delight’ [stanza 2] will take place. The earthly existence is one of ‘watching and waiting, looking above’ [stanza 3]. As we submit ourselves to Christ and are ‘filled with his goodness’ and ‘lost in his love’ [stanza 3], we are remade in Christ’s image and are moving toward Christian perfection.”