

# H Y M N S

- 1 Thou art the Son beloved,  
The image of our God;  
Thou art the saints' dear portion,  
Imparted thru Thy blood.  
Among all God's creation  
Thou art the firstborn One;  
By Thee all was created,  
All for Thyself to own.
- 2 Thou art before all creatures,  
In Thee all things consist;  
Of all Thou art the center,  
By Thee all things subsist.  
Thou art the sole beginning,  
The Firstborn from the dead;  
And for the Church, Thy Body,  
Thou art the glorious Head.
- 3 Because it pleased the Father,  
All fulness dwells in Thee,  
That Thou might have the first place  
In all we ever see.  
All things Thou reconciledst  
To God by Thy shed blood,  
To thus present us holy  
And blameless unto God.
- 4 In Thee God's fulness dwelleth,  
Thou art God's mystery;  
The treasures of all wisdom  
And knowledge are in Thee.  
Thou art the hope of glory,  
In us Thou dost abide;  
In Thee we are perfected  
And God is satisfied.
- 5 All things are but a shadow  
Which unto us reveal  
Thyself, in whom we're rooted,  
The only One that's real.  
Enjoying all Thy riches,  
Thy fulness we will be;  
We'll hold Thee, as Thy Body,  
And grow with God in Thee.
- 6 With Thee in God we're hidden,  
Thou art in us our life;  
Thy peace in us presiding,  
We rest from all our strife.  
In the new man, Thy Body,  
Thou art the all in all;  
Our all-inclusive Savior,  
Thyself we'll ever call.

## Christ, Our All-inclusive Savior

**T**he book of Colossians presents Christ in a higher and fuller way than any other book of the Bible. He is portrayed as the center and the circumference of the universe. He is first with God and first with man and all creation. He is the beginning of both the old and new creation. He is all and in all. This profound vision concerning such a marvelous Christ has been put into a moving hymn of praise which glorifies Him as our all-inclusive Savior.

This hymn is a poetic exposition of the all-embracing exaltation of Christ presented in the Epistle to the Colossians. The imagery of the hymn follows the seeming incongruities found in this superb Epistle written by Paul, revealing the two aspects of Christ's person and status: His divinity and His humanity. He is at once both the image of the

invisible God and the Firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15). To fully appreciate the depths of this hymn, we need to see the central thought of Paul in this Epistle.

When he wrote this Epistle to the Colossians, Paul was dealing with the heresy of Gnosticism, which infiltrated the church in its infancy. The central tenet of this heresy was that matter is intrinsically evil, and since matter is evil, God cannot be directly related to matter. The response to this philosophy in its adherents was either extreme asceticism (in which they abstained from all manner of physical contact with material items, including certain foods and marriage) or unbridled abuse (in which they allowed the flesh to indulge itself in all manner of lust, claiming that physical matter, being unrelated to God, was of no consequence and could

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therefore be abused or ignored without affecting the spiritual essence within). Accompanying the Gnostic heresy was an emphasis on superior wisdom and knowledge, which only a select few were purported to possess. In refuting this heresy, Paul presented Christ as the centrality and universality of God's economy. In this economy, Christ is not only the absolute and complete expression of the invisible God but also the Firstborn among all of God's creation. As such, God in Christ is fully involved with creation. This involvement, this economy, is a mystery involving Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In God's economy, this Christ has been made available to all the believers.

Stanza 1 introduces the Son as the Beloved of the Father and the portion of the saints. As the Father's Beloved, He is the Father's delight and satisfaction. As the saints' portion, He is the life within them (Col. 3:4), the realm in which they walk and have their being (2:6-7). He is also the Firstborn of all creation; all things were created by Him and for Him. Christian expositors of the Bible have struggled for generations to explain the language of Paul concerning Christ as the Firstborn of all creation. Christians acknowledge Christ as the image of God, but many insist that He cannot be a part of creation. These Christians argue that the context of Colossians 1:15-17 contradicts His being a creature because in Him, through Him, and unto Him all things were created, and He is before all things. However, Paul declares that Christ is the image of the invisible God precisely because He is the Firstborn of all creation. These two phrases are used in opposition to each other. This indicates that the invisible God can be expressed only if His expression is visible; that is, His expression must be a part of the visible creation. In His divinity Christ is God, eternally existing as the second of the divine Trinity. But in His humanity He is the Firstborn of all creation. In Paul's argument Christ is intrinsically related to creation: It came into existence in Him as its intrinsic creative power, through Him as its active creating agent, and unto Him as its consummate goal (v. 16). In addition, all creation is held together in Him (v. 17). All of our worship to Him must be related to the awesome fact that He is not only God but also man, a creature, a part of His own creation. He is qualified to accomplish an eternal redemption for man because He is a man, born of a woman. And in His capacity as a man, He is able to be the expression of the invisible God in a physical realm. As a man He is the very embodiment of the Triune God.

Stanza 2 continues the theme of Paul in Colossians 1:17-18 concerning Christ in relation to creation, both old and new. He is before all creatures and all things consist in Him (He is the intrinsic source of their existence). He is also the holding center of creation, the means by which all

things subsist (continue in existence). This relates to the first creation, of which He is the center and the circumference. In the second half of the stanza, He is presented as the first, the center, of the new creation. He is the sole beginning of the new creation, the Firstborn from the dead, and He is the Head of the church, His Body. Nothing in the intrinsic existence of either the old or the new creation should be regarded as separate from Him.

Stanza 3 presents the Christ in whom all the fullness dwells. The fullness refers to the fullness of the Triune God. After the Son was incarnated, this fullness dwelt in Him bodily, that is, in His human body (2:9). Through Him the indwelling God reconciled all things to Himself by means of His blood shed on the cross (1:20). "All things" indicates that the totality of fallen creation has been cleansed and reconciled to God through the all-redeeming blood of Christ. We enter into and experience the effectiveness of this redemption through faith.

Stanza 4 glories in Him firstly as the mystery of God in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden and secondly as the hope of glory who now indwells the believers. As the mystery of God, He declared and showed God to us (John 1:18); He was the manifestation of God in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16). Now this wonderful God-man is in us as our hope of glory. What a wonder that the One who is the unveiling of God indwells His believers as their hope of glory! Hallelujah, we can enjoy Him as the subjective hope of glory in us (Col. 1:27). Not only so, but in Him we are being perfected: We are growing in His life by partaking of Him as our matchless portion (v. 12).

Stanza 5 presents Christ as the reality of every positive thing in the universe. Everything is a shadow of this reality (2:16-17). We have been rooted in Him so that we are now able to enjoy all of His riches as the very source of our living (v. 7; 1:27; Eph. 3:8). As we are enjoying His riches, we are becoming His fullness (Eph. 1:23; 3:19). As His Body, we hold Him as the Head, and we grow with the growth of God into Him (Col. 2:19).

The final stanza rejoices in all the riches that we have in Christ as presented by Paul in the third chapter of his Epistle to the Colossians. Christ is now our life, and we are hidden with Him in God (vv. 3-4). The peace of Christ is presiding and arbitrating in our hearts (v. 15) so that we are able to enjoy peace with God and with one another. Christ, in the new man which is His Body, is all and in all (vv. 10-11). All of our needs are met in Him. There is nothing left for us to do but to delight in Him as our all-inclusive Savior!

*by Gary Kaiser*