



December 3, 2023

THE SONGS WE SING AT CHRISTMAS

## Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

John 1:1-9; 6:33-35

### About the Song

From the Greek text of the “Prayer of the Cherubic Hymn in the Liturgy of St. James  
The liturgy thought to have been created under Cyril of Jerusalem around 347 AD  
Used as preparation for the eucharist, as we will use it today  
Gerard Moultrie translated from the Greek in 1864 & appeared in *Lyra Eucharistica* by Orby Shipley.  
The tune from a book of French folksongs, *Chansons Populaires des Provinces de France*, 1860  
Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) paired it with this text for the *English Hymnal* (1906),

### The Light of light descendeth

Light as the bookends of the Bible: **Genesis 1:3-4 and Rev 22:5**  
Light as the holy, the good, favor, blessing, truth, the person of God, the dwelling of God  
Light as victory over darkness: vanquish, vanish: **Psalm 107:14; Isa 42:7; Mic 7:8**  
Jesus as Light that enlightens everyone and the darkness cannot overcome: **John 1:1-6**  
Star Wars has it wrong: darkness not a something but an absence  
World ruler has no claim on me: **John 14:30**; But take heart, I have overcome the world: **John 16:33**

### His Own Self for Heavenly Food

Jesus as the Bread of God, Bread from heaven, Bread of Life: **John 6:32-35**  
The metaphor is beautiful, only if you don't think about it too long  
Jesus pushes the metaphor into uncomfortable territory in **6:53-56 (see verse 60!)**  
Even worse: what the metaphor would mean for Jesus  
To be victim, chewed, digested, utterly consumed for the good of someone else  
The pinnacle of humiliation

### Light and Bread Meet at the Cross

The greatest victory of light over darkness was when Christ was consumed on the cross  
Though it appeared light was being extinguished (darkness over the land from 12 to 3PM): **Luke 23:44**  
Light was descending into death and abolishing its power: **2 Timothy 2:10; Hebrews 2:14**  
Light and Bread go together: light shines most powerfully when it lays itself down  
The light of the Golden Lampstand shining over the Table of the Showbread in the Holy Place  
This sign at Christmas time : the star over Bethlehem (“the house of bread”)  
Where can we shine bright by laying down [our rights, our power, our way, our lives]?

## Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

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Let all mortal flesh keep silence,  
And with fear and trembling stand;  
Ponder nothing earthly-minded,  
For with blessing in His hand,  
Christ our God to earth descendeth,  
Our full homage to demand.

King of kings, yet born of Mary,  
As of old on earth He stood,  
Lord of lords, in human vesture,  
In the body and the blood;  
He will give to all the faithful  
His own self for heav'nly food.

Rank on rank the host of heaven  
Spreads its vanguard on the way,  
As the Light of light descendeth  
From the realms of endless day,  
That the pow'rs of hell may vanish  
As the darkness clears away.

At His feet the six-winged seraph,  
Cherubim with sleepless eye,  
Veil their faces to the presence,  
As with ceaseless voice they cry:  
"Alleluia, Alleluia,  
Alleluia, Lord Most High!"