

Heritage Hymns of the Month

MARCH

“Over Kedron Jesus Treadeth”

ELH 295

Our *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary*, its Rite I liturgy and its preservation of Norwegian/Danish heritage of church singing and hymnody would not be ours without Thomas H. Kingo. He is the Danish pastor and poet who produced the original 1685 Danish version and wrote many of its hymns. In this tradition, congregational singing is given a position equal to choral liturgical singing. Through their singing of the hymns, people in the congregation proclaim their faith to one another. The hymns are devotional too.

This is especially true of Kingo’s hymns for the Passion of Christ. He wrote a series of hymns which turn each part of Christ’s Passion into a sung sermon. The first part of each hymn tells what was done to Christ; the second part applies it for comfort to the Christian’s daily life. “Over Kedron Jesus Treadeth” is one of these Passion hymns. It is from the first part of Jesus’ Passion, in the Garden of Gethsemane. Over the first five stanzas, we “see how, anguish-struck,” Jesus experiences the depths of suffering for us. In the final three stanzas, comfort is applied to us: “When as flow’rs themselves I wither,/When I droop and fade like grass ...” then I hear of Jesus’ suffering “to cheer my singing soul.”

“On My Heart Imprint Thine Image”

ELH 593

The superscription on Jesus’ cross was the writing that Pontius Pilate placed over Jesus: “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” (John 19:19-22). For the baptized Christian – on whom the cross has been imprinted on forehead and breast – the superscription that God sees is: “Jesus, crucified for me.”

This verse is from Thomas Kingo’s Passion hymn for Good Friday. That hymn is 29 verses long; this verse, centered on “Jesus, crucified for me,” is the *exact center* of the hymn by Kingo’s design. He places Jesus at the center, as Jesus is the center of the Christian’s faith and life. This verse has been used by many ELS congregations as a conclusion to each midweek Lent service. It also is used on Good Friday as we meditate on the gifts of Jesus’ death by crucifixion: “my life, my hope’s foundation, and my glory and salvation.”

Over Kedron Jesus Treadeth

1. Over Kedron Jesus treadeth,
To His passion for us all;
Ev’ry human eye be weeping,
Tears of bitter grief let fall!
Round His spirit flock the foes,
Place their shafts and bend their bows,
Aiming at the Savior solely,
While the world forsakes Him wholly.

2. David once, with heart afflicted,
Crossed the Kedron’s narrow strand,
Clouds of gloom and grief about him
When an exile from his land.
But, O Jesus, blacker now
Bends the cloud above Thy brow,
Hasting to death’s dreary portals
For the shame and sin of mortals.

3. Enter now the restful garden
As a peaceful quiet space,
Sorrow soon begins to darken,
Follow Thee in ev’ry place!
Come now, Adam, come and see
Enter blest Gethsemane!
See the Lord of heaven shaking
Hellish anguish for us taking.

4. See how, anguish-struck, He falleth
Prostrate, and with struggling breath,
Three times on His God He calleth,
Praying that the bitter death
And the cup of doom may go,
Still He cries, in all His woe:
“Not My will, but Thine, O Father!”
And the angels round Him gather.

5. See how, in that hour of darkness,
Battling with the evil pow’r,
Agonies untold assail Him,
On His soul the arrows show’r;
All the garden flow’rs are wet
With the drops of bloody sweat,
From His anguished frame distilling—
World’s redemption thus fulfilling!

6. But, O flow’rs, so sadly watered
By this pure and precious dew,
In some blessed hour your blossoms
’Neath the olive-shadows grew!
Eden’s garden did not bear
Aught that can with you compare,
For the blood, thus freely given,
Makes my soul the heir of heaven.

7. When as flow’rs themselves I wither,
When I droop and fade like grass,
When the life-streams through my pulses
Dull and ever duller pass,
When at last they cease to roll
Then, to cheer my singing soul,
Grace of Jesus, be Thou given—
Source of triumph! Pledge of heaven!

8. Daily I am gladly yearning
E’er to go to Kedron’s stream
And from earthly pleasure turning
In a penitential theme!
Daily in Gethsemane
With my spirit I shall see
Jesus’ bleeding and His sighing
For my soul is all His dying.