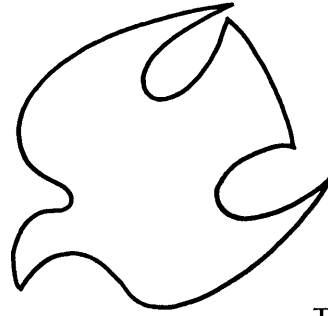


DOWN TO EARTH



Tune: *Personent Hodie*

Fred Kaan was born in Haarlem in the Netherlands on July 27, 1929. Having studied in Germany as well as England, he speaks Dutch, English, French and German equally well. But all of his hymns have been written in English—first mimeographed and then printed in a small book called *Pilgrim Praise* to give his Congregational Church in Plymouth, England, hymns free from “dated language, static ideas, remote symbolism.” He has tried to write hymns about things which others have not written, and to make his language as simple and direct as possible. He also likes to combine poetry and theology (the study of God).

Which came first: the chicken or the egg? That is an old riddle to which there is no correct answer. Which came first in this hymn: the text or the tune? In this case, the tune. Fred Kaan liked the old melody from *Piae Cantiones* (Latin for “Holy Songs”) which was published in 1582. You may enjoy singing an anthem called *Personent Hodie*, or *On This Day Earth Shall Ring*, arranged by Gustav Holst. The most exciting feature is the rhythm, and Mr. Kaan has written his new words to fit. With two exceptions (salvation and tomorrows) he has used words of only one or two syllables.

Stanza one is about direction. Like a dove descending, Christ came down to earth from heaven to bring salvation to everyone.

Draw here your interpretation of Stanzas 1 and 2

Stanza two is about light and darkness. Love is like light—when we shine with love, the dark has to disappear. Jesus Christ is the light of the world and His coming defeats the darkest of nights (the kind when there is no moon). The result is that instead of sad, we can hope to be glad.

Stanza three is about hunger and food. When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper (Holy Communion) we remember Christ’s words, “This is my body and blood given for you.” In the line “in the house there is bread,” Mr. Kaan hides a joke which only those in the know can appreciate: the name Bethlehem when translated from the Hebrew language means “house of bread.” So Christ, who was the bread of life, was born in the town called “house of bread” as foretold by the prophets. He was born in a stable, but ended his ministry at the Last Supper around the table—and every church has a communion table or altar where the feast is celebrated.

The refrain, or chorus, tells us how we should feel because of what each stanza tells us. Sing! Dance! Spring up and down! Why? Because Christ is here in our midst, right now, every moment—not just long ago in a manger. The hymn ends with the song the angels sang the night of Christ’s birth—“Gloria in excelsis” (Glory to God in the highest).

After you have learned the hymn, you may want to act out in movement, dancing, or drama how you feel about these words. Nothing fancy, just simple movements which seem to be another way to express the ideas and words.

Hymnstudy by Austin C. Lovelace