

LET US WITH A GLADSOME MIND

Monkland 7.7.7.7.

Psalm 136
Paraphrased by
John Milton 1608-1674

Arranged by
John B. Wilkes
1785-1869

When John Milton, an English writer, was a boy about 15 years old he translated nine of the Psalms into metrical verse so that their words would be easier to say and to sing.

Look up the 136th Psalm in your Bible and compare it with John Milton's "Let Us With a Gladsome Mind." The way he rearranged words and phrases in poetry form in order to retain the meaning of the original text is called a "paraphrase." There are other paraphrases of scriptural texts in your hymnal. Can you find some?

Try to make your own paraphrase of a favorite scripture. After rearranging the texts and choosing words with present-day meaning, count the syllables in each line and see if there is a tune in the metrical index which fits your "paraphrase." REMEMBER! The meaning of the original Psalm or other scripture you choose must be preserved even though it is expressed in different wording!

When Milton first wrote his paraphrases, only actual scriptures were permitted by Church authorities to be used in formal worship services. It was not until after Milton's death in 1674 that hymn writers like Isaac Watts were allowed to write and use what we call non-scriptural hymns in 17th century England.

Even today – in our times – there is often disagreement over what is or is not an appropriate hymn for a worship service. When you have responsibility for selecting hymns for vesper, church school, or other worship services, think of these things:

First – Does the meaning of the text show the teachings of the Bible and does it fit into the service in which it is to be used?

Second – Is the hymn the right kind for the part of the service in which it is to be used? . . . Praise? . . . Prayer? . . . Meditation? . . . Christian Consecration and Service?

Third – Do both the text and the tune express effectively your thoughts and feelings in response to God's constant love? Are they the best songs for us to show our feelings about God and for the responses of the others who will be worshipping during this service?

Notice how the "Monkland" tune seems to say the words of gladness by its ascending pitches on the opening phrase and the rhythmic pattern of eighth notes which keeps the feeling of joy and lightness even when the melody descends. You might enjoy making a descant out of the bass line (after the first measure), singing it two octaves higher than written. Some of the choir members may want to experiment with their own descants, using either their voices or musical instruments, such as the flute or a recorder.



Milton continued to write paraphrases, poetry, and prose as he grew older, including a famous epic poem *PARADISE LOST*, which many of us will read in High School English. A favorite for young people will always be this paraphrase of the 136th Psalm, "Let Us With a Gladsome Mind." It was written over 300 years ago by a boy whose thoughts and feelings about God were much like our own!