

## **There's light upon the mountain**

Henry Burton (1840 - 1930)

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Tune THERE'S A LIGHT UPON THE MOUNTAINS Maurice Lawton Wostenholm (1887-1959)

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pR23MQKUsTM>

There's a light upon the mountains, and the day is at the spring,  
When our eyes shall see the beauty and the glory of the King;  
Weary was our heart with waiting, and the night-watch seemed so long;  
But his triumph-day is breaking, and we hail it with a song.

There's a hush of expectation, and a quiet in the air;  
And the breath of God is moving in the fervent breath of prayer:  
For the suffering, dying Jesus is the Christ upon the throne,  
And the travail of our spirit is the travail of his own.

He is breaking down the barriers, he is casting up the way;  
He is calling for his angels to build up the gates of day:  
But his angels here are human, not the shining hosts above;  
For the drum-beats of his army are the heart-beats of our love.

Hark! We hear a distant music, and it comes with fuller swell;  
'Tis the triumph-song of Jesus, of our King, Immanuel:  
Zion, go ye forth to meet him; and, my soul, be swift to bring  
All thy finest and thy noblest for the triumph of our King!

### **Andrew Pratt**

I can't mark when I first heard or sang this hymn. Certainly it will have been sung from the *Methodist Hymn Book* of 1933. In the 1950s my parents took me as a primary school child to Palace Avenue Methodist Church in Paignton, in Devon. Was it then? Or later spasmodically attending a smaller church in Torquay, or in Exeter, Westcliff on Sea or Wrexham. Surely it was no later than that, the 1970s. I suppose it doesn't matter except it seems rooted in my memory and it is a fond memory.

For me this hymn is a contradiction. The language is archaic and I have striven to write hymns in contemporary language. Some of it seems whimsical but perhaps that's the wrong word. I wonder if mystical suits it better. Don Saliers, an American hymnologist, has suggested that hymns enable us to sing and experience, to embody perhaps, feelings and faith which if we simply read, or said them, we would find hard to own. That's where this hymn 'works' for me.

Here we are, just a short way into Advent, looking forward to the celebration of the coming of light into the world, eternal light. The painting of Jesus with a lantern,

standing outside a closed door, by Holman Hunt, comes to mind. We are waiting for that King to enter again into our realm. Henry Burton uses such evocative words which summon up, not just what we imagine, but what we are actually feeling, children in our hearts, waiting for Christmas, 'a hush of expectation'. We could be lulled into sentimentality. But the Christ we await is 'breaking down the barriers', 'calling for his angels to build up the gates of day'. And we are still in some mystical, imaginary mode. Again the text twists and catches us unaware. We are the angels, the messengers, being called 'For the drum-beats of his army are the heart-beats of *our* love'. Those words 'our love', bring us up short. And from here there is only one way to go, onward and upward. 'We hear a distant music' and we are already moving in our hearts if not literally, that we might bring 'all [our] finest and [our] noblest for the triumph of our King!' Words and tune will carry us here, from a mystical imaginary beginning to the reality of commitment and the self-offering of love.

*Let us pray:*

*Our God, who looked not from a distance, but came as light to live among us, as we feel in our hearts and sing with our lips, may we live in our lives. Amen*

I come full circle for in the YouTube clip above, we hear the hymn sung by a Methodist congregation but in the Apollo Theatre, Manchester in 1991 with the 55 strong Hillside Singers from Brinscall making up the Methodist district choir of 200+ singing for the annual Conference celebration. So thanks to them!