

"BLESSED ASSURANCE" — a hymn study

by Wayne S. Walker

"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith...and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10.22)

INTRODUCTION:

1. Truly this "full assurance of faith" is something worth singing about, and one song in which we do so is "Blessed Assurance" (#4 in Hymns for Worship Revised and #477 in Sacred Selections for the Church).
2. The text was written in 1873 by Frances Jane VanAlstyne, better known by her maiden name of Fanny J. Crosby (1820-1915). The tune (Assurance) was composed by Phoebe Palmer Knapp, who was born on Mar. 9, 1839, in New York City, NY. The daughter of a well-known Methodist evangelist Walter C. Palmer, she showed evidence of unusual musical talent as a child. Her mother, also named Phoebe Palmer, was a hymnwriter. At the age of 16, young Phoebe married Joseph Fairfield Knapp, a successful businessman who founded the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and was even offered the nomination for mayor of New York City. Their marriage was described as an ideal one in every way.
3. The Knapps were members of the John St. Methodist Church in New York City, where Fanny Crosby was also a member. Miss Crosby, who produced more than 8,000 gospel song texts in her lifetime, and Mrs. Knapp, an amateur musician who enjoyed composing melodies, became close friends. One afternoon in 1873, Phoebe was visiting the blind poetess and shared with her a tune that she had composed. Fanny often wrote texts on the spot if a melody said something to her, so Phoebe asked Fanny what this one said to her. Immediately Fanny smiled, rose to her feet, and replied, "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine; Oh! what a foretaste of glory divine." Fanny continued to dictate the verses while Phoebe wrote them down, and shortly afterward the two women had the completed lyrics joined to the melody as we have them today.
4. The first appearance of the hymn seems to have been in *Gems of Praise* published later that year by John Robson Sweney. During her lifetime, Phoebe Knapp published more than 500 gospel songs. After the death of her husband in 1891, she was left with an annual income of \$50,000, much of which she donated generously to religious and charitable causes. Her son, Joseph Palmer Knapp, was head of the Crowell-Collier Publishing Company and founder of the Knapp Foundation, Inc., of New York and North Carolina. Phoebe died at Poland Springs, ME, on July 10, 1908.
5. Among hymn books published by members of the Lord's church during the twentieth century for use in churches of Christ, this song has been included in just about every one. It appeared in the 1921 *Great Songs of the Church* (No. 1) and the 1937 *Great Songs of the Church No. 2* both edited by E. L. Jorgenson; the

1935 *Christian Hymns* (No. 1), the 1948 *Christian Hymns No. 2*, and the 1966 *Christian Hymns No. 3* all edited by L. O. Sanderson; the 1963 *Abiding Hymns* edited by Robert C. Welch; and the 1963 *Christian Hymnal* edited by J. Nelson Slater. Today it may be found in the 1971 *Songs of the Church*, the 1990 *Songs of the Church 21st C. Ed.*, and the 1994 *Songs of Faith and Praise* all edited by Alton H. Howard; the 1978/1983 *(Church) Gospel Songs and Hymns* edited by V. E. Howard; the 1986 *Great Songs Revised* edited by Forrest M. McCann; and the 1992 *Praise for the Lord* edited by John P. Wiegand; in addition to *Hymns for Worship* and *Sacred Selections*.

6. It is a hymn that praises God for the wonderful assurance that He gives to His people

I. Stanza 1 says that our assurance is based on the fact that "Jesus is mine"

"Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God; Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood."

- A. The assurance that we can have from God is the result of the fact that He raised His Son, Jesus Christ by whom He'll judge the world in righteousness, from the dead, Acts 17.30-31.
- B. Because of what God has done for us in Christ, we can become heirs of salvation, Rom. 8.15-17.
- C. But to have this wonderful blessing, we must be born of His Spirit, Jn. 3.3-5.

II. Stanza 2 says that our assurance is like that given to Jacob.

"Perfect submission, perfect delight, Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending bring from Above Echoes of mercy, whispers of love."

- A. The "visions of rapture" aren't necessarily a direct, maybe even miraculous, experience at conversion, but rather can be thought of as a new way of seeing things as a result of the fact that we've now submitted ourselves to God: 2 Cor. 5.16-20
- B. The thought is that just as God promised assurance to Jacob at Bethel by the dream of the ladder upon which angels ascended and descended, so He

promises His assurance to us: Gen. 28.12-15

C. Of course, we understand that this assurance is revealed to us through His word and is based upon the revelation of His mercy and love: Eph. 2.4-5

III. Stanza 3 says that our assurance is the foundation for our hope of heaven.

"Perfect submission, all is at rest; I, in my Savior, am happy and blest,
Watching and waiting, looking above, Filled with His goodness, lost in His love."

- A. Because of a person's willingness to submit to Christ, he comes to be "in Christ": Gal. 3.26-27, Eph. 1.3
- B. And because of the assurance that God gives to those who are in Christ, we can know that we have the promise of eternal life: 1 Jn. 5.11-13
- C. Therefore, those who are in Christ can be watching and waiting, looking above for the hope that God has promised: Phil. 3.20-21, Tit. 2.13-14, 2 Pet. 3.10-14

CONCLUSION:

The chorus reads:

"This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Savior all the day long."

As was suggested before, the fact that God has provided this assurance to Christians through the scriptures is surely something for which we should praise Him (Ps. 146.2). And we can do this every time we sing, "Blessed Assurance."