

## ***The Christmas Rose***

The third Sunday of Advent is upon us. One of the hymns for this Sunday, December 17, “*Lo, How a Rose is Growing*” is a familiar and beloved Advent hymn. The text translation in our Lutheran Book of Worship (LBW#58) is somewhat different from what is more commonly used for “*Lo How a Rose E'er Blooming*”. However, the meaning, symbolism and Biblical references are the same.

The hymn's origins may be traced back to the late 16th century in a manuscript found in St. Alban's Carthusian monastery in Trier, Germany. The origin of the image of the rose in the hymn has been open to much speculation. For example, an apocryphal legend has it that on Christmas Eve, a monk in Trier found a blooming rose while walking in the snow-covered woods, and then placed the rose in a vase on an altar to the Virgin Mary. Some Roman Catholic sources claim that the focus of the hymn was originally upon Mary, who is compared to the symbol of the “mystical rose” in Song of Solomon 2:1: “I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys.” Most Protestant theologians and hymnologists have placed the focus on Jesus as the “rose”, citing Isaiah 11:1—“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.” A third passage from Isaiah 35:1 suggests a stronger biblical basis for the image: “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.” There are many translations of the text from the original 16<sup>th</sup> century German and many different stanzas to the hymn published in hymnals over the past four hundred years. In the LBW version, the 4<sup>th</sup> verse is of particular note:

*The flow'r so small and tender  
With fragrance fills the air  
His brightness ends the darkness  
That kept the earth in fear.  
True God and yet true man,  
He came to save his people  
From earth's dark night of sin.*

This stanza expands the metaphor of the Rose image, adding fragrance. Is this mixing metaphors? Not really, because this Rose gives off both a fragrance and a light that fills the darkness of earth's night everywhere. Of course, this is no ordinary rose and it represents Christ, the Light of the World. The verse ends with an allusion to the Nicene Creed—“True God and yet true man”—and reaffirms that Jesus was born to save his people from earth's dark night of sin.

For centuries before the song appeared the rose had been used as a symbol for Christ, and sometimes for Mary, the mother of Jesus. Through His human birth, Christ is connected to the family of King David, “from the stem of Jesse,” David's father. Indeed, as men of old have sung, “it came a flower bright amid the cold of winter when half gone was the night.” We love the extraordinary beauty of the rose and the lovely fragrance it offers as well. The rose is therefore a fitting image of the multiple levels of magnificent beauty revealed in our Savior. This Christmas allow His ever-blooming beauty and bouquet to fill your home, for His glory.

***Come and worship this Sunday and lift your voice in the songs of the Advent of our Lord  
10 AM***