

Thank the Lord, For He Is So Rich in Favor

Danket dem Herren denn er ist sehr freundlich 11.11
Attr. Johann Horn, 1544
Tr. Christopher J. Neuendorf, 2014

Danket dem Herren denn
Ludwig Senfl, 1534
Arr. Johann Spangenberg, 1538, alt.

The musical score is presented in two systems. Each system consists of a vocal line (soprano) and a piano accompaniment line (tenor). The music is in a common time signature (C) and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are: 'Thank the Lord, for He is so rich in fa - vor, For His good - ness and truth en - dure for - ev - er.'

- 2 In His mercy our God both good and blessed
With His hand us poor needy creatures hath fed.
- 3 Sing to Him from the heart with ev'ry fiber:
Thanks and praise be to Thee eternal Father!
- 4 Thou who dost as a Father, good and gentle,
Feed and clothe Thy poor children, making us full:
- 5 Grant that we all may learn to know Thee rightly,
Everlasting Creator, longing for Thee.
- 6 Through Christ Jesus, Thy one and only dear Son,
Who as our Mediator dwells at Thy throne.*
- 7 *May He help each of us and all together
To inherit the kingdom of His Father.*
- 8 *To the praise of His holy name by all men,
Let all who truly love Him now say: Amen!*

A Note on Performance

There was some confusion in the past as to the melody of this hymn. Until late in the sixteenth century, it was conventional when arranging hymns to place the melody in the tenor. In keeping with this convention, the tenor line in the arrangement provided here is in fact the original melody of the hymn. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, the melody had generally moved to the soprano, a convention that continues to be observed today. As a consequence of this shift, the soprano line in this arrangement has at times been treated as the melody of the hymn. Popular performances of this tune in the present day generally treat the soprano line as the melody.

One way to take this inconsistency into consideration is to sing the hymn in the form of a call and response. The head of the household may sing each stanza once using the soprano line as the melody, lowered one octave. The household may then respond by singing the stanza again in four parts. Alternatively, if the hymn is to be sung entirely in unison, each stanza may be sung twice, first to the soprano line, second to the tenor line.

* The hymn originally ended here. Stanzas 7–8 are later additions.

“Thank the Lord, For He Is So Rich in Favor” (*Danket dem Herren denn er ist sehr freundlich*) is intended as a “Gracias,” i.e., a musical post-meal prayer. The first stanza is patterned after the refrain of Psalm 136, “O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: For His mercy endureth forever.” The hymn first appeared in the 1544 hymnal of the Bohemian Brethren, edited by Johann Horn (c. 1487–1547). The text is commonly attributed to him, though it is also possible that it was a posthumous composition by Michael Weisse (c. 1488–1534). It entered the Lutheran tradition via Valentin Babst’s *Geistliche Lieder*, Leipzig, 1545, and became a fixture in German Lutheran hymnody.

The tune, which is properly the tenor line in the arrangement here provided, began as a tool for teaching the meters of Latin poetry. It was joined to the text of Martial, *Epigrams* 10.47, “*Vitam quae faciunt beatiorum, / Iucundissime Martialis, haec sunt.*” The form of the meter is “Hendecasyllabic Phaeacian,” each line consisting of eleven syllables in a regular pattern of long and short, reflected by the note values of the tune. The tune first appeared in print as the tenor line in two arrangements by Ludwig Senfl, *Varia Carminum Genera*, Nürnberg, 1534. Soon thereafter it appeared again as the tenor line in a four-part arrangement by Johann Spangenberg in a collection of melodies at the end of his Latin grammar, *Grammaticae Latinae Partes*, Wittenberg, 1538. From there it was adopted as the tune for “*Danket dem Herren denn er ist sehr freundlich*,” which given the unusual nature of the meter was probably written with this tune in mind. Choral arrangements closely followed Spangenberg until late in the sixteenth century, when composers began placing the melody in the soprano line, though Spangenberg’s arrangement remained influential.

Interestingly, Spangenberg’s arrangement was used almost exactly (the soprano, tenor, and bass lines are identical) for the Christmas hymn “Gaudete,” found in the Swedish/Finnish collection *Piae Cantiones*, Greifswald, 1582. Ever since English folk-rock band Steeleye Span performed the song in 1972, it has been a staple of the early music revival, as well as modern popular music.

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presents

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commonly attributed to

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