

Hymns for the Easter Season

David Quinn was asked by Phil Groves to put together a selection of five or so Easter hymns to share via the website. This was both a pleasure and a headache for him, but here is the result!

It has been wonderful to choose some music to celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, and to listen to groups of worshippers presenting differing versions of the hymns. But which ones to include? I know I could have chosen many more, and while your own favourite may not be there, please just enjoy what there is!

I have given a short narrative against each choice and a link to a YouTube version.

1. Jesus Christ is risen today

To start this selection, a hymn which unequivocally states the message of Easter Day, with a stately yet joyful tune. The words and tune are first found in a manuscript dated 1708, but the words are based on a text dating back to at least 1400.

I've picked two versions – first, a traditional presentation from King's College, Cambridge <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMwPEmUMP7U>

And as an alternative, a more complex setting of the same traditional tune, from Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nrl2sBiIDxE>

The handbells and young people and numbers in the congregation in the Coral Ridge version emphasise the celebratory aspects of this great hymn.

2. Love's redeeming work is done

The traditional tune for this hymn ("Savannah") is simple but attractive, leaving the words to speak for themselves. Themes of redemption, death overcome, sharing in the suffering and resurrection of Christ and celebration, all packed into five verses. That's Charles Wesley for you!

The choir of St Edmundsbury Cathedral (Bury St Edmunds) have recorded this:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2uTm3L52eQ&list=OLAK5uy_niUAMjPCGPYkFgLD7n5y4RzfVsF0XmGJQ&index=11

And for a modern take on the words, in modern worship style, listen to High Street Hymns on

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qzmjFmXZVo8>

3. Crown him with many crowns

Another grand hymn, written in the nineteenth century, an expression of praise in four verses each beginning "Crown him". And if the message is not clear enough, the fourth verse also cries out "All hail, Redeemer, hail!".

I have picked "The Big Sing" in the Albert Hall https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7OCs0d_4vM as an appropriately large gathering – thousands of people joining their voices in praise and celebration.

4. Here is love vast as the ocean

A hymn which always moves me, and a version which underlines the powerful gentleness of the sentiments. The final line of the second verse is packed with meaning – “[Heaven] kissed a guilty world in love.” The kiss is an expression of real affection, the world receives this sign even though it is undeserved (because the world is guilty), and the kiss is more than affection, it is a sign of love.

The hymn was composed in Welsh and the version we sing in St Mary’s and other churches in the benefice is a translation by William Edwards. This very beautiful version gives us both languages, and a simple story to boot: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZJmTVdDyLY>

5. Thine be the glory

The final hymn is a celebration of the resurrection, written (in French) by the Swiss writer Edmond Budry to music by Handel, and translated into English by Richard Hoyle. Don’t miss the loving greeting Jesus extends, amidst all the magnificent and supernatural breaking of the bonds of death.

I’ve picked a recording from Coventry Cathedral. There’s a bit of a lag between the singing and the organ, but it seemed appropriate at this time to hear this song of resurrection sung in the cathedral which rose from the destruction of a war. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SlkzXIXPtLs>

6. Postscript

And if you would like something completely different, try this. The famous jazz pianist Oscar Peterson wrote a piece entitled “Easter Suite” with nine movements

- The Last Supper
- The Garden Of Gethsemane
- Denial
- Why Have You Betrayed Me (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qSZzxl_1O8)
- The Trial
- Are You Really King Of The Jews
- Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me
- Jesus Christ Lies Here Tonight
- He Has Risen
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2SscPET28E&list=PL846941C7B436FE93&index=9>)

You can find them all on YouTube or on a CD from Naxos. The final movement celebrating Easter – “He is Risen” – is an exciting and virtuoso piece of jazz. It is set right in context in the whole piece, because it follows some slower and moving segments – listen, for example, to “Why have you Betrayed Me”.

Wishing you all a joyous and happy Easter,

David Quinn