

# [HOLY, HOLY, HOLY]<sup>1</sup>

REGINALD HEBER

HOLY, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!<sup>2</sup>  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;  
Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty<sup>3</sup>  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

5 Holy, holy, holy, all the saints adore Thee,  
Casting down their golden crowns<sup>4</sup> around the glassy sea;<sup>5</sup>  
Cherubim<sup>6</sup> and seraphim<sup>7</sup> falling down before Thee,<sup>8</sup>  
Which wert and art and evermore shalt be!<sup>9</sup>

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,<sup>10</sup>  
10 Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see,<sup>11</sup>  
Only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee,<sup>12</sup>  
Perfect in power, in love, and purity!

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!  
All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea.<sup>13</sup>  
15 Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

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<sup>1</sup> In Heber's collection, this hymn is labeled only "Trinity Sunday" (the church service for which it is intended).

**Text:** Reginald Heber. "Trinity Sunday." *Hymns, written and adapted to the weekly church service of the year*. London: John Murray, 1827. 84. *Google Books*. Accessed 22 January 2016.

**Notes:** Adam McCune; all biblical quotations are from the King James Version.

<sup>2</sup> *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty*: direct quote from Revelation 4:8, praise given to God by the "beasts."

<sup>3</sup> *Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee; / ...merciful and mighty*: Compare Psalm 59:16: "But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning."

<sup>4</sup> *all the saints adore thee, / Casting down their golden crowns*: Compare Revelation 4:10: "The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne." This stanza's imagery of humans and angels worshipping at the throne of God in heaven is largely drawn from from the Revelation, chapter 4.

<sup>5</sup> *around the glassy sea*: Compare Revelation 4:6: "And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal."

<sup>6</sup> *cherubim*: Hebrew plural of cherub, a kind of angel. The prophet Ezekiel describes cherubim as having four faces (cherub, man, lion, eagle) and many wings, and being covered with eyes (Ezekiel 10:12,14). The "beasts" which worship before God's throne in the Book of Revelation are described similarly (Revelation 4:6-8).

<sup>7</sup> *seraphim*: Hebrew plural of seraph, a kind of angel. The prophet Isaiah describes seraphim as having six wings and crying out "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts" above the throne of God (Isaiah 6:1-3), much like the "beasts" in Revelation which have six wings and say "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty" (Revelation 4:8).

<sup>8</sup> *Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee*: Compare Revelation 5:8: "the four beasts... fell down before the Lamb." (In the Book of Revelation, the Lamb represents Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, sacrificed to remove human guilt for sin.)

<sup>9</sup> *Which wert and art and evermore shalt be!*: In Revelation, the "beasts" praise God as one who "was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:8), living eternally in past, present, and future.

<sup>10</sup> *Though the darkness hide Thee*: Heber may be drawing on passages in the Psalms that describe God surrounded by dark clouds, wielding fire and lightning: "Clouds and darkness are round about him" (Psalm 97:2), "He made darkness his secret place" (Psalm 18:11). More likely, in light of the following line, this "darkness" may be a way of describing God's invisibility and/or a metaphor for human limitations and sin preventing perfect communion with God. Compare the comments of the medieval theologian Anselm (1033/4–1109): "Why does my soul not perceive you, O Lord God? ... It cannot see more because of its own darkness. Why is this, Lord, why is this? Is its eye darkened by its own infirmity, or is it dazzled by your splendor? Surely it is both darkened in itself and dazzled by you" (Anselm, *Proslogion* 14, translated by Thomas Williams).

<sup>11</sup> *Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see*: Compare Exodus 33:18-20: "And [Moses] said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.... And [the Lord] said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live." The Apostle Paul similarly describes God "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Tim. 6:16).

<sup>12</sup> *Only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee*: Compare Rev. 15:4: "thou only art holy"; and 1 Samuel 2:2: "There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee." (Due to a switch between third and second person, both "the Lord" and "thee" refer to God.)

<sup>13</sup> *All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea*: Compare Psalm 145:10: "All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord"; Psalm 69:34: "Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas, and every thing that moveth therein"; and Revelation 5:13: "And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."