

“Now Thank We All Our God” ~ Martin Rinkart

Martin Rinkart, a Lutheran minister, was in Eilenburg, Saxony, during the Thirty Years' War. The walled city of Eilenburg saw a steady stream of refugees pour through its gates. The Swedish army surrounded the city, and famine and plague were rampant. Eight hundred homes were destroyed, and the people began to perish. There was a tremendous strain on the pastors who had to conduct dozens of funerals daily. Finally, the pastors, too, succumbed, and Rinkart was the only one left—doing 50 funerals a day. When the Swedes demanded a huge ransom, Rinkart left the safety of the walls to plead for mercy. The Swedish commander, impressed by his faith and courage, lowered his demands. (cyberhymnal)

Early in the month of November, 1648, Rinkart sat at his study window reading, when he heard the sound of a trumpet. His first thought was that soldiers were coming to devastate the town, but on going out into the streets, he found the people weeping, not for sorrow, but for joy. The trumpeter had brought the joyful news that peace had been made, and that the Thirty Years War was over. Rinkart went back into his study to pray, and praise God, and opening his Bible his eye fell upon these words—“Now, therefore, bless ye the Lord God of all, which only doeth wondrous things” (Ecclus. 1:22). An angel seemed to guide his hand as he sat down and wrote out the inspired hymn—

*Now thank we all our God,
With heart, and hands, and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done,
In Whome His world rejoices.”*

Then, as he wrote the last line, a melody seemed to fall upon his ear, as if the angels had lent it to him from heaven, and he wrote that out also. He went out into the public square, where the people were gathered together, rejoicing with one another and kneeling down, he began to sing that wonderful hymn, which, with its grand chorale, has been sung at so many public thanksgivings for the last three centuries, and which Mendelssohn has worked with such great effect into his Hymn of Praise. Rinkart, though not a soldier, like Gustavus Adolphus, was as true a hero. A fearful plague had devastated the country, and he visited and cheered the poor people, and buried more than four thousand of them; and then, during the famine which followed the plague, he helped the poor sufferers as much as possible. ----- Hymns and their Stories, by A.E.C.

*Now thank we all our God, with heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done, in Whom this world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.*

*O may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in His grace, and guide us when perplexed;
And free us from all ills, in this world and the next!*

*All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given;
The Son and Him Who reigns with Them in highest Heaven;
The one eternal God, whom earth and Heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.*