

Meet the hymn-writer

The author of our hymn was Philip Doddridge, born on 26th June 1702, the last of the twenty children of Daniel and Elizabeth Doddridge. Before Philip could read, his mother introduced him to the Scriptures using the decorated Dutch chimney-tiles in their sitting room. Philip's mother died when he was eight, and his father died just four years later. It was a Presbyterian minister Samuel Clarke, of St Albans, who eventually took the young boy on, becoming not only his carer but an enormous influence and a lifelong friend.

In 1719, Doddridge entered the Dissenting academy at Knebworth, and in 1729 accepted an invitation to be pastor to an independent congregation at Northampton. He married Mercy Maris in 1730 and they had nine children, of which four survived into adulthood. He also held an academic position in the Northampton Academy and developed friendships with influential thinkers of the day, including famous theologian and hymn writer Isaac Watts.

Doddridge was a prolific writer, with his book 'The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul' being translated into seven languages (Charles Spurgeon referred to it as 'that holy book'). Besides a New Testament commentary and other theological works, he also wrote over 400 hymns, most as summaries of his sermons to help a congregation express their response to the truths they were being taught.

In 1751, Doddridge's health, which had never been good, broke down. He sailed for Lisbon, hoping the better weather might assist his recovery, but to no avail, as he died there of tuberculosis. His grave and tombstone is in the British Cemetery in Lisbon.

The Doddridge United Reformed Church (formerly the Castle Hill URC) in Doddridge Street, Northampton was the scene of his ministry from 1729 to 1751. The interior has galleries, box pews and a memorial to Doddridge and was Grade II listed by English Heritage in 1952.

It is always difficult to understand all that the writer of a hymn was trying to get across whilst singing their words just once or twice a year. Hymn-writers have packaged most of our traditional Advent and Christmas carols with nuggets of truth from Scripture, and now and then it is good to unwrap them and see where they might lead us in our understanding of worship of Jesus.

So, each of these studies takes a verse of this hymn, adopts a theme from within it and expands it a little so that we might understand something of what was going through the mind of the writer as he wrote the words, and widen our own understanding, as we look at verses from Scripture and in the discussions that follow. There will be some familiar Advent passages alongside others which explore the nature and ministry of our Saviour and how our own lives can reflect some of Jesus' light and love.



Come and worship!

*1 Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes,
the Saviour promised long;
let every heart prepare a throne
and every voice a song.*

*2 He comes the prisoners to release,
in Satan's bondage held;
the gates of brass before him burst,
the iron fetters yield.*

*3 He comes the broken heart to bind,
the bleeding soul to cure,
and with the treasures of his grace,
to enrich the humble poor.*

*4 Our glad hosannas, Prince of Peace,
your welcome shall proclaim,
and heaven's eternal arches ring,
with your beloved name.*

Don't feel that you have to answer every discussion question in one meeting - do what you can in the time you have, and allow folk to continue with the study at home if necessary!

These studies will print on two double-sided sheets of paper, and it can help if you print it in colour so the group can discuss the featured works of art. There's permission to distribute printed copies among a single group. For more tech-savvy groups, distribute the whole study for use on tablets.

You can find more Bible studies, on a variety of themes, at www.faithandworship.com.