

Kreuzleich

Heinrich von Meißen – Frauenlob

translated by Barbara Newman, Holy Week 2017

The Trinity and the eternal generation of the Word

- 01 O sweet and wonder-working Source!
Name of the high emanation, freely aligned
cause derived from the First Cause:
its essence, its eternal, ever-moving Mind!

Creative advent, mirrored gaze
of kin to kin, transmuting time to event:
his victory bound fast in the sacrament—
its tangible, visible, ever-giving trace.

- 02 As your everlasting peer
before time gave counsel, and took
with you your eternal treasure-hoard,

So your uncreated star,
not made but caused by you, awoke
to shine on the birth of your only Word.

- 03 As splendor beams from the sun;
as a stream from a spring gushes, rushes, flushes
the roots with water, luscious, liquid and fine;

As out of the heart's shrine
a word in the will slings, flings, and brings
its sense to the tongue; so the Father's mind

- 04 Begot the Son. David says in the psalm:
"with you is the beginning,
the angels' light.
I never ceased to give you form
here Lucifer had life or being:
my lively wonder without tinder, after the order of Melchisedech!"

Speak, my majesty divine!
"You are my wisdom; I am you

and you are I.

My Spirit has sprung forth from you,
constrained by your love, as you by mine.

I end the rites of fiery vice: my Word renews the sacrifice."

05 Hear what God the Father claims:

"‘I, me and mine.’ The Son: ‘thou, thee and thine.’ The Spirit: ‘he, him and his.’
And I am all, you now shall see."

The Son in majesty declaims:

"O Father mine before all time, I am always yours:
now find the heir of your mind in me."

The Holy Ghost from both proclaims:

"He, you; I proceed from you to you; what’s yours is ours:
one Source, one God in Trinity."

06 The ice, the water, and the snow are one;
the apple’s flesh, its core, its crimson skin.

Mind, hand and strings in harmony play just one tune.

From wick, wax and fire shines a light like the sun.

To know the Three, from threes I learn.

This begetting and unfolding into three,

God learned before time in eternity,

and so, when Adam took a bite that made God curse bitterly,

though Lucifer fell eternally, God shaped for us a remedy—

manna baked so cunningly.

Old Testament types and figures

07 Who fed you, Jonah, in the fish’s frame?

Who helped Daniel in the hungry lions’ cave?

Who twice sent Elijah food by means of a bird?

Who slew the Egyptians with afflicting flame?

Who soothed your soul, Joseph, sold as a slave?

Isaac, speak! "Father, who restrained your sword?"

08 Isaiah, what seraph appeared to you

and met Moses on Sinai when the Law was new?

What scourge of sinners, on the Law’s behalf,

sternly avenged the Golden Calf?

When the transgressors tasted the brew of ordeal,

the gold in their beards revealed their betrayal.

Ezekiel, who stole through the Temple's portal?
 John, who appeared on Zion as a Lamb immortal,
 with twelve tribes thronged in tight array
 to serve their God as knights that day?
 From every clan twelve thousand came;
 they bore the *tau* to exalt the Name.

- 09 Israel, tell me:
 who led you mightily through the sea
 before the foe?
 Its reviving flow drowned the host of Pharaoh.
 It proclaimed God's power in the hour
 of the towering waves, fierce with the flood of death.

Whom did you praise,
 Abednego, in the blaze when all around the furnace raged?
 Who calmed the fire
 for you, child of valor, as its flames rose higher?
 It was the Son of the gracious, tender one,
 free of stain—hurled into the garden of her breast.

The Incarnation

- 10 The hunt of the Father's anger
 and the comeliness of our form
 drove the Son to the Maiden,
 fleet as the unicorn, freely trapped in her lap.

He gave himself, Aaron,
 to your blossoming wand.
 How cleverly Gideon
 took the fleece in hand, heavy with dew at heaven's cue.

- 11 He who is strong and good and pure and wise
 from the high cliffs of heaven
 fell to earth. What he wished to reserve, as we observe,
 from the prophets' wares, see! he shares in his sacred birth.

Now in a blossoming Maid he lies.
 The Creator kept from his world the year
 and place where he'd appear. And so down here
 as in a flawless mirror, he flamed from her.

- 12 No charm can harm the radiant flower
 that sends its scent from its sweet bower.
 Jeremiah boasts:

she bore so pure the Counsellor above all angel hosts,
the Maiden undeflowered.

God's joyous cry shines through our clay, though dim,
like light once white when it must pass
through colored glass.
Then to undo our human woe, he drained death's brew
in battle grim.

- 13 God leapt from his Father in eternity!
He leapt right into the Word
and then to the Maid. The fourth time he
came as food like an eel, Cross, by your high dignity.

The fifth, into infinite misery;
the sixth, to Solomon's treasury—
his seat, his throne, he found prepared.
The seventh leap is his real presence in pure community.

The Cross

- 14 Since he wished to wind himself like the snake around the tree,
he let them bind his body to the stake in agony.
It was in his mind to die for our sake and set us free,
twisting himself on the Tree, the Cross, just as the snake had done.

With his utmost breath he cried out, God-forsaken,
to end the debt of death and make our weakness waken,
bowing low his head in extremest love there broken.
In the grave, in hell, in the Father's wrath, the Spirit stayed with the Son.

- 15 Adam understood; he did what he could. He cried
as his sickness galled until he died.
In hopeful mood,
he sent his son to Eden
for a branch from the garden,
from the fateful tree of that food
that launched the eternal fall.
He died before it came for his good—
bearing rich blessing, that saving wood.

- 15 Yet need, unallayed, called it salvation's stream.
Seth planted the bough on Adam's tomb.
It would become the Cross's beam.
When the time had come,
the Sibyl told Solomon

mysteries she alone could know.
 He freely honored it, and more,
 for it would open heaven's door.
 The Father shot from that bow his spirit's arrow.

- 16 Lift up your hand! You'll understand the Cross's worth.
 Touch your brow. God before time brought forth
 the Word, his only Child,
 whom he sent to the Virgin undefiled.
 Now touch your breast below
 and let your hand sink to the left.
 The Son, since we had sunk so low,
 willed to drink vinegar and gall
 to steal the richest spoils from hell.

Sweet his bonds, bitter his pain, precious his gain.
 Glorious now in the heavenly land,
 he dwells at his Father's right.
 Now move your hand to that side.
 So strong is the plumage of this holy sign:
 at the beating of its wings,
 the gate of heaven open springs!
 Let no one limp behind
 when God stoops low in the mass-priest's hand.

- 17 The cypress, the cedar, and the palm tree—
 these three form just one stock, I see.
 Noble winepress, in you all honor's weight
 was pressed and stamped down utterly
 with sharpest nails, unsparing hate.
 O famous shield, framed for victory—
 your knight will conquer in each sortie.
 Hail, honored anvil!

On you our heaven was forged,
 our healing hammered like an iron wedge.
 Fertile branch, your fruit relieved our hunger's edge.
 Seal, engraved by the Father's file—
 on you he stamped the Word, his Child.
 Banqueting table, richly laden—
 a feast for angels, souls' delectation.
 Holy altar, on you God spilled

- 18 His oil and chrism. O table fated,
 by his own glory consecrated,
 on you Death

broke his bread.
 This is what God's humanity did;
 his divinity felt no pain, no dread.

You can be called God's butcher-block;
 on you the Lamb sustained Death's shock—
 his flesh and blood
 a drenching flood.
 Hail, royal banner bold! Upon the Rood
 the Son inherited the Father's good.

- 19 So the One who died awakened,
 the standards were fastened.
 They were splendidly welcomed
 when the Man from Bosra stormed the infernal gates.
 Now look upon the house of faith!
 With the Cross as a lock firmer than rock,
 that house can mock all impudence of thievish crime.

The Cross, the Church's pasture,
 advisedly I call a mother.
 She bore the Life that lives forever,
 a spotless Child in mortal vesture
 and precious light of the sacraments.
 Her conquering sword, her umpire's rod,
 is the mark of God; the Cross we bear is heaven's sign.

- 20 Two banks bounded a valley steep:
 grim was that field of slaughter
 between God's wrath and Adam's sin.
 Many great ships sank in the deep;
 small ones drowned as if they'd never been.
 No one had good fortune on the water
 until the Cross became an everlasting bridge,
 forged by the living God on his own back,
 to make the heights and depths a level track.

A ladder descended to earth from heaven,
 as Jacob saw in prophetic vision,
 with angels climbing both high and low.
 You are that ladder, Cross, I know,
 to touch both earth and sky appointed.
 When the Old Law's hip was disjoined,
 we escaped from our perpetual disease
 and held Christ fast until he blessed us in peace—
 then climbed your wall, O Cross, to our ancestral place.

21 St. Helena found
 the Cross! It bound
 us fast against fearsome fiends
 who blow with false winds
 against heaven's friends.
 On you, Cross, unbroken chain,
 the mighty Lion's cub was tamed.
 Those who belong to heaven say
 no wood has ever borne a tree
 to equal this one. See!
 with its living mast,
 freighted with our spirit's cargo,
 our ship sails safely over the sea of woe.

The flowing pool
 brought joy to those
 restored to health, who rose
 from its rippling waters.
 Cross, by an angel guarded!
 Whenever he stirred the pool
 its waters, freshly parted,
 had such strength against sickness,
 they banished its bitterness.
 O Cross, Christ's coat of arms—
 he bore you and you too bore him,
 to scatter the acrid smoke of sin—
 God's pilgrim staff and shrine of his martyrs.

Closing prayer

22 Bless us Christians, Cross, in Christ's name,
 that he may set us free from blame
 and renew our lives, reclaim
 our souls, with wit to overcome our vices wild.
 What honor can the King extend us with our souls defiled?

May he let our spirit strive
 for the Holy Spirit, thrive
 with the gifts the good receive.
 So holiness will love us, from which all virtues tend,
 and may Father, Son, and Spirit grant us a holy end!