

# O Day of Rest and Gladness

Lutheran Service Book 906 | study by Paul Gregory Alms

## Introduction

We all have special days that we mark and remember. We observe birthdays, anniversaries, days that remind us of loved ones or memories. Countries have holidays that bind their people together. In the United States, we can think of the Fourth of July or Memorial Day. The Church also has special days. In fact, we have an entire calendar year full of them: the Church Year. Some days are “more special” than others, like Christmas or Easter, but the Church Year calendar is full of days we mark to remember and give thanks to God for His many and diverse blessings.

But there is one church day that is easy to overlook, even though it is the foundation and chief of all church days: Sunday. We can take for granted that Sunday is simply the day we “go to church” and never think about it again.

## Exploring the Scriptures

There are many scriptural allusions and stories embedded in this hymn. The first is the theme of light. Read Gen. 1:1–5.

- How does the first day of creation open?
- How would you describe the scene?
- How does light enter? Where is God’s Word in all of this?

Another biblical theme in the hymn is rest. Read Deut. 5:12–15.

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Christopher Wordsworth (1807–85) is the chief author of this hymn text. (A modern author wrote stanza 3.) Wordsworth was a bishop in the Church of England in the 19th century. He was a rather prolific author and wrote books on church history, archaeology in Greece and biblical commentaries. He also wrote a book of hymns with one hymn for every Sunday of the Church Year (*The Holy Year*). “O Day of Rest and Gladness” takes up that theme of Sunday as the day of gathering and God’s actions for His people.

This hymn is placed in the *LSB* section for the “Beginning of Service.” It works well in that position since it explores the different ways God has acted and continues to act for His people on the first day of the week. Sunday is not

But there are depths of scriptural and theological meaning in that first day of the week. Christians have from the very first day of Easter been gathering on Sunday to be in the presence of Christ and receive His gifts. But Sunday is not a haphazard, arbitrary choice for a day of worship. Worshiping on Sunday connects us to every generation of Christians from every age and also to the very roots of the Bible.

- What days or holidays are especially meaningful to you? Why? How do you celebrate them?
- What sort of Sunday routines do you have? Early or late service? Brunch after church? Music to get ready with?

- What does God command the people of Israel to do on the seventh day?
- What reason does He give here in this text? (Notice this is different from Ex. 20:8–11.)
- How does Matt. 11:28–30 fit in for us as Christians?

Read Ps. 118:24.

- What day do you think this psalm has in mind?
- How does this “day” relate to Christ’s resurrection? To eternal life?
- How do we experience this new day?

legislated as the mandatory day of worship for Christians in the New Testament era, but the hymn does a good job of laying out the “specialness” of Sunday for us as Christians.

- Why do Christians worship on Sunday and not on Saturday?

### Text

The first stanza of this hymn is a description of what happens on Sunday for Christians.

- What gifts are mentioned that are given on this day?
- How do we receive these gifts?
- Read Is. 6:3. How does this stanza see this text as part of our worship?

- When do we sing “Holy, holy, holy”?

Light is the main theme of the second stanza. However, it is not light in general, but light in three Bible stories that happen on the first day of the week. These three stories, says the hymn, give a “threefold light.”

- What three stories are mentioned?
- We have looked at creation already. Read Matt. 28:1–10. How does light play a part in this text?
- Read Eph. 5:6–14. How does this passage connect resurrection and light?

## Making the Connection

This hymn text is a meditation on God’s actions for us that focuses on Sunday. Sunday is, of course, the day of gathering to receive God’s gifts. The themes of light and rest play a prominent part in the hymn.

- How do you experience rest during worship?
- How does God shine His light on you?

## In Closing

Sunday is a glorious day in the history of salvation. Creation, Christ’s resurrection and Pentecost all occurred on that “day of joy and light” (st. 1). But our hymn makes clear that the most wonderful thing about Sunday is that Christ is present among us now, renewing us with heavenly might. God’s people respond, singing, “Holy, holy, holy,” with all the company of heaven. Truly Sunday is “Most beautiful, most bright” (st. 1)!

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 906.

- Pentecost is the third story of light. Read Acts 2:1–4. Where do you see light in these verses?

The third stanza describes “this blest day of light” from our perspective. The mighty light-bringing acts of God in the Scriptures are now present among us.

- What actions of God are mentioned?
- How do we mark our sanctuaries with lights (candles, etc.) that accentuate what this hymn proclaims?

The final stanza pictures God’s people on a journey toward “our rest ... / Our endless Sabbath day.”

- How does Heb. 4:1 describe that final destination?

Our life is a “pilgrim way” (st. 4), journeying toward our eternal life with Christ.

- In what ways does our gathering together on Sunday give us strength for the journey?

## Prayer

Eternal God, Your Son, Jesus Christ, is our true Sabbath rest. Help us to keep each day holy by receiving His Word of comfort that we may find our rest in Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 4B).