

# 1 | hope

You are the hope of all the ends of the earth  
and of the farthest seas.  
—Psalm 65:5

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in  
believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power  
of the Holy Spirit.  
—Romans 15:13

Hope of the world,  
O Christ of great compassion,  
speak to our fearful hearts by conflict rent.  
Save us, your people, from consuming passion,  
who by our own false hopes and aims are spent.  
—Hope of the World, st. 1<sup>5</sup>

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5. “Hope of the World,” Georgia Harkness (1891–1974), alt., © 1954, ren. 1982  
The Hymn Society, admin. Hope Publishing Company.



Is hope an image for God?

In his book *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics*, Vanderbilt professor John McClure defines a gross of terms relating to the practice of preaching.<sup>6</sup> Technical terms like *semiotics* and *hermeneutics*, Greek words like *pathos* and *logos*, and “genres” of preaching (law and gospel, narrative preaching, expository preaching) stand next to common words with particular significance for the homiletical art: *humor*, *proclamation*, *celebration*, *memory*. Absent from McClure’s list is the subject of this chapter: hope.

It isn’t an oversight that hope is excluded. Hope should be assumed, as hope is foundational to preaching, a bedrock on which a good sermon—like worship itself—is built. Christian faith is Christian hope. In hope we are saved and, hoping “for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rom. 8:24). When we gather around word, font, and table, we gather in a posture of hope. The forgiveness of sins, the promise of resurrection, the life of the world to come—these are our hope.

Hope undergirds myriad hymn texts even when it is not overtly stated. Entire genres of hymnody, like Black spirituals and German Lutheran chorales, could be said to be built on themes of hope. Yet, many of these texts (*O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright!*; *Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying*; *My Lord, What a Morning*; *Give Me Jesus*) never use the word itself. Likewise, sundry Christmas carols describe the hopefulness of the nativity’s cast of characters (*The First Noel*; *As with Gladness Men of Old*) or ruminate on the theological hope of the

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6. John S. McClure, *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

incarnation (*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing; Good Christian Friends, Rejoice*) but likewise do not employ the word.

Still, one needn't think too hard to come up with hymns that feature the word *hope*: *My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less; All My Hope on God Is Founded; O Christ, Our Hope; Hope of the World*. In those first two examples, hope is something humans possess, and God, the foundation on which it is built. Hymns like these are statements of faith in the mold of Romans 8. Though towers and temples fall, though storms rage, though the creation groans in its labor pains, we stand firm on the solid rock of Christ.

In the latter two examples, Christ is the hope. As in Psalm 65:5 and Romans 15:13, hope becomes an image for God's self. Georgia Harkness's *Hope of the World* is particularly clear in this regard. Written to fit the theme of the second assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1954,<sup>7</sup> the hymn is addressed to Jesus and begins each of its five stanzas by naming him "Hope of the world." The stanzas then enumerate the ways in which Jesus is our hope: by walking beside us, feeding us with the bread of life, and saving us from sin and death.

The Episcopal priest and civil rights activist Pauli Murray wrote, "Hope is a song in a weary throat."<sup>8</sup> For Christians, that hope is Christ. Amid life's storms, "when all supports are washed away," we sing of and to Jesus, our sure and certain hope.

*Some hymns with this image:*

- All My Hope on God Is Founded – ELW 757
- As with Gladness Men of Old – ELW 302

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7. See Paul Westermeyer, *Assembly Song Companion to All Creation Sings* (Augsburg Fortress, 2023), 254.

8. This quotation is a line from Murray's poem "Dark Testament," in Pauli Murray, *Dark Testament and Other Poems* (Silvermine, 1970).

SING MANY NAMES

- Come to Be Our Hope, O Jesus  
*Tú, Jesús, nuestra esperanza/Vem, Jesus,  
nossa esperança* – ACS 904
- Day of Arising – ELW 374
- Give Me Jesus – ELW 770
- Good Christian Friends, Rejoice – ELW 288
- Hark! The Herald Angels Sing – ELW 270
- Hope of the World – ACS 1085
- Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song  
*Jésus, je voudrais te chanter* – ELW 808
- May the God of Hope Go with Us  
*Dios de la esperanza* – ACS 984
- My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less – ELW 596, 597
- My Lord, What a Morning – ELW 438
- O Christ, Our Hope – ELW 604
- O God, Our Help in Ages Past – ELW 632
- O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright! – ELW 308
- The First Noel – ELW 300
- Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying – ELW 436