

# Under the Fig Tree

More Hymns  
and a Few Poems

by  
Rae E. Whitney



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Under the Fig Tree: More Hymns  
and a Few Poems by Rae E. Whitney  
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# Introduction

This volume contains many of the hymns of Rae Whitney written since her first collection, *With Joy Our Spirits Sing*, was published by Selah Publishing Co. in 1995. It also includes some earlier hymns and poems.

Whitney's hymns have attracted the attention of many hymnal editors, composers, musicians, and congregations for the way her texts shed new light on our understanding of the stories in the Bible, the way she challenges and informs our understanding of living the Christian life, and the way her poetry is so comfortably simple (not simplistic). The subjects of her texts are wide-ranging, as are her choices of meters and rhyming schemes, but all are written with something of value to say to the contemporary Christian. Every time I read or sing her hymns, I am drawn into a greater conviction of God's love for us, and a better understanding of how to show God's love through our actions and relationships. She deeply loves God and neighbor, and her texts reflect that love and her hope for a better world that begins with each individual believer.

*Under the Fig Tree* gives you new hymns for all occasions of worship, and for individual devotion. I think you will find that God's wondrous grace is beautifully expressed in the hymns of Rae Whitney, and I am privileged to present them to you in this volume.

David P. Schaap, publisher  
Selah Publishing Co., Inc.  
November 2007



# Foreword

For many decades Rae Whitney's tireless devotion to baptismal ministry has enriched the life of the Episcopal Church in Nebraska. With this new volume of hymns she continues to bless and inspire us, as well as the wider Christian community throughout the world. Her texts give fresh and eloquent expression to the heart of the gospel in ways that can transform congregational song into a sacrament of God's justice, mercy, and love. I am proud to count her as both friend and colleague, and I am delighted to commend this collection for use in worship, study, and prayer.

The Right Reverend Joe Goodwin Burnett  
Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska

Rae E. Whitney is a widely published contemporary author of five hundred hymns. Her poetic texts are characterized by elegant simplicity and vivid imagery, strongly grounded in Biblical story, liturgical tradition, and the Christian faith. Whitney's hymns are also reflective of her diverse experiences as a teacher, author, and clergy spouse. Born in England, Whitney moved to the High Plains of western Nebraska in 1961 following her marriage to the Rev. Clyde E. Whitney, an Episcopal priest. A Nebraskan ever since, she continues to write, publish, and lead workshops and hymn festivals. Her texts appear in hymnals in the United States, Canada, England, Scotland, Hong Kong, and Australia.

Through her hymns, we learn about this remarkable woman: her care for God's creation; her commitment to social justice; her scholarly depth; her lifelong interests in church history and ecumenism; her celebration of women's ministries. Whitney's works avoid mindless repetition, sentimentality, and an exclusive focus on personal devotion. Rather, her texts are clearly intended for the life of the Christian community. Often starting with a familiar Biblical image, Whitney's hymns relate the gospel to the present age and invite singers to join in the ongoing faith story.

I am honored to introduce and commend Rae Whitney's hymns to you. Through this collection, you may also come to know her life and work. Her hymns provide fresh images for singing the faith, shaping a new generation of believers.

Marty Wheeler Burnett  
Director of Fine Arts  
College of Saint Mary, Omaha, Nebraska

# Dedication

This book is dedicated with gratitude and joy to those with whom I have shared a glimpse of that vision of our Lord in his prayer the night before he died: “Father, I pray that they all may be one... so that the world may believe,” (John 17) and who have been constant to that vision.

In particular I remember those in the Student Christian Movement, including Avis Swarbrick, and friends in various churches who refused to be trapped by denominational barriers, especially S. G. Hedges, Redvers J. Reynolds, and the Ray and Nellie Montacute family. I also rejoice in the witness of Church Women United, and all others fired with the same spirit.

I am grateful for so many friends in the Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, especially Dr. Nicolas Zernov, Fr. Lev Gillet, Joan Ford Rutt, Fr. C. Eric Hampson, Bishop Oliver Tomkins, Canon Donald Allchin, Abbé Emile Meura, Marjorie Milne, Gerald Bonner, Fr. Basil and Margaret Minchin, and all who have sought for greater understanding between the Churches of the East and West.

And I continue to appreciate the work of The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada, and of the many who have seen in hymns a sturdy bridge between churches, where the denomination of the hymn-poet or composer has little significance when we join in singing their hymns. Finally I give thanks to David P. Schaap of Selah Publishing Co. and all Editors and Publishers of Hymn Books, who discover and make known new texts and tunes to be sung to the glory of God.

–Rae E Whitney

# Hymns

# A New-Born Child Is Crying

76 76D

A newborn child is crying  
upon a bed of hay;  
he weeps for all that's broken  
within our world today.  
He comes from God in heaven,  
this bleak December night,  
with news of liberation,  
of peace and hope and light.

A newborn child is listening  
and hears his mother sing  
of journeys, dreams, and angels  
who holy tidings bring.  
He then hears shepherds' voices  
delighting in his birth;  
the coming of this baby  
will bring God's reign to earth.

A newborn child is watching  
as Joseph feeds the fire;  
the ox and donkey guard him,  
while visitors admire.  
Three wise men come to worship  
the king they long have sought:  
compared to this true Godsend,  
their rich gifts seem as naught.

A newborn child is smiling,  
young Mary's precious boy;  
he gazes at his mother,  
responding to her joy.  
Forgiveness he will offer,  
restoring brokenness,  
and then, with truth and justice,  
will all creation bless!



# A Woman Bent Towards the Ground

CM

A woman, bent towards the ground  
for eighteen crippling years,  
was straightened by the hands of Christ,  
and loosened from her fears.

But since it was a holy Day,  
the Healer was chastised;  
the ruler of the synagogue  
said he was scandalized.

“Though it’s the Sabbath,” Jesus said,  
“you give your creatures food;  
I too must care for those in need,  
and none will I exclude.”

The ruler then drew back ashamed:  
he’d heard the crowd rejoice;  
they, with the woman, gave God praise  
with heart, and soul, and voice!

# After He'd Wrestled All Night with an Angel

11 11 10 10

After he'd wrestled all night with an angel,  
Jacob went limping, though wounded, yet stronger,  
Jacob went limping to face the new day.  
(Jacob went limping to face the new day.)

After she'd crossed the Red Sea with her people,  
Miriam went singing, and danced to God's glory,  
Miriam went singing, to praise and to pray.  
(Miriam went singing, to praise and to pray.)

After he'd spoken with God on the mountain,  
Moses went down to his mutinous people,  
Moses went down teaching them a new way.  
(Moses went down teaching them a new way.)

After he'd answered God's Voice in the temple,  
Samuel went, fearful, to Eli, his teacher,  
Samuel went, fearful, but he must obey.  
(Samuel went, fearful, but he must obey.)

After we've given our hearts to Christ Jesus,  
will we go seeking to share him with others?  
Will we go seeking all those gone astray?  
(Will we go seeking all those gone astray?)

# Age Sets a Limit to My Strength

CM

Age sets a limit to my strength,  
and curbs mobility,  
but God grants freedom to my soul  
to tap heaven's energy.

Since Jesus touched me with his grace  
I've known that I am his,  
and so my prayers can leap the fence  
of any boundaries.

To serve my God as he would ask  
does not depend on wealth,  
nor do I need to base my worth  
on my own body's health.

But I can claim the world as home  
with everyone my kin,  
and let God's joy flow from my heart,  
for Jesus dwells therein.

# Another Garden, Yet the Same

84 8884

Another garden, yet the same  
to Mary's eyes,  
for Magdalene still comes to see  
her Lord as brought from Calvary,  
but finds instead the stone rolled free  
and Jesus rise.

Yet we in unbelief can't hide  
our doubts and fears;  
we heard Christ in Gethsemane;  
we saw him die in agony;  
we took his corpse from Calvary  
with many tears.

So when we wake on Easter Day,  
accept surprise!  
The third day's come; he is not dead;  
his blood is warm that once was shed;  
so watch, as Mary lifts her head  
and "Master!" cries.

Lord, speak my name and then my fears  
you will destroy;  
no longer will I need to grieve,  
but in your Risen Life believe,  
and in my heart your grace receive  
with Mary's joy.

# Behold the Tree

76 76D

Behold, the Tree of Knowledge  
of evil and of good,  
that stood within the Garden  
and bore forbidden food;  
Eve disobeyed, with Adam,  
who then gave God the blame;  
they left the joys of Eden,  
bowed down with guilt and shame.

3  
Behold, in Sinai's desert,  
the Bush that ever burned,  
where, in amazement, Moses  
the call of God discerned.  
A voice proclaimed the "I AM,"  
words mystical, profound,  
while Moses stood there, shoeless,  
his feet on holy ground.

5  
Behold the Tree of Sorrow  
Christ bore to Calvary,  
on which he died to save us,  
and from sin set us free.  
Then seek the Tree of Healing  
which John in visions saw,  
and join with those who worship  
the Lamb in love and awe.

2  
Behold, the oak at Mamre,  
where Abram in that place  
met three angelic strangers  
and greeted them with grace.  
They told him of the future,  
to Sara's disbelief,  
but Isaac, born from laughter,  
brought wonder out of grief.

4  
Behold, when small Zaccheus  
climbed up a sycamore  
to better see Christ Jesus,  
the friend of rich and poor,  
he heard the Savior tell him  
he'd dine with him that night,  
and then Zaccheus promised  
to make his errors right.

Text: Rae E. Whitney, 2001

Scripture reference: Genesis 3:1-24, 18:1-15, 21: 1-6;

Exodus 3:1-6; Luke 19:1-9; Acts 5:30; Rev. 22:2

Topics: Biblical Names and Places (Abram, Adam,

Calvary, Eve, Isaac, John the Divine, Moses, Sara, Zaccheus)

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# Bethlehem Baby

57 57

Bethlehem Baby,  
they are kneeling before you;  
shepherds and wise men  
now have come to adore you!

Bethlehem Baby,  
you arrived as a stranger,  
helpless and harmless,  
yet to Herod a danger.

Bethlehem Baby,  
in the warm manger sleeping,  
over you Joseph  
a long vigil is keeping.

Bethlehem Baby,  
the delight of your mother,  
to all earth's children  
you are born as their brother.

Bethlehem Baby,  
we are kneeling before you,  
brothers and sisters,  
now have come to adore you!

# Betrothed to Me for Ever

*God speaks through the prophet (Hosea)*  
76 76D with refrain

What shall I do, O people,  
what shall I do with you?  
Like clouds that swiftly vanish,  
your love fades with the dew.  
I do not need burnt offerings  
designed to force my hand,  
for my love falls like showers  
to bring to life your land.

*Refrain*

Betrothed to me forever,  
in love and righteousness,  
in steadfastness and mercy,  
in joy and faithfulness.

I love you as a lover  
desires to love a mate,  
surrounding you with beauty,  
through all that I create.  
Protecting you from evil,  
and freeing you from sin,  
I pledge that life abundant  
for you can now begin.

*Refrain*

# Blest Are the Souls Who Mourn

66 66

Blest are the souls who mourn:  
God's comfort will be theirs;  
blest are the poor and meek:  
they will possess the earth.

Blest are the ones who thirst  
and long for righteousness,  
and those who work for peace:  
they too belong to God.

Blest are the merciful,  
blest are the pure in heart;  
they will encounter God,  
who fills them with his grace.

And all who are reviled  
for being friends of Christ  
may still rejoice and sing,  
for they are blessed by God.



# Blest Be Our God

47 47D

Blest be our God  
who gave us Christ our Savior!  
Come, let us sing  
and praise God's name forever!  
We who were dead  
in trespasses and sinning  
now are alive  
to witness to God's glory!

Power has been giv'n  
by God the Holy Spirit  
to those who trust  
and follow in Christ's footsteps.  
So never fear  
the snares of sin and evil,  
but share with all  
the riches of God's kingdom.

Glory to God,  
who was in the beginning,  
God who is now,  
and God, who ever shall be!  
In love and joy,  
our hearts are singing praises  
to God alone,  
Creator, Son and Spirit!

# Canticles

## *Magnificat* – My Soul Declares the Greatness of the Lord

10 10 10 10 10 10

My soul declares the greatness of the Lord;  
my spirit sings, rejoicing in his name;  
for God our King has stooped to honor me,  
and all who bless me will this deed proclaim.  
The proud, and rich, who persecute the poor,  
he will rebuke and welcome them no more.

God's mercy reaches those who thirst for him;  
they offer worship, thankfulness and praise;  
the weak and hungry will be satisfied,  
and to his heart the humble he will raise.  
Our Savior God, whose love is wise and sure,  
will keep his promises for evermore.

Text: *Magnificat*, para. Rae E. Whitney, 2002  
Scripture reference: Luke 1:46ff  
Topics: Biblical Names and Places (Mary)  
Possible tune: SONG ONE

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## *Nunc dimittis* – Lord God, You Now Have Set Your Servant Free

10 10 10 10 10 10

Lord God, you now have set your servant free  
to go in peace as promised in your word;  
my eyes have seen the Savior, Christ the Lord,  
prepared by you for all the world to see,  
to shine on nations trapped in darkest night,  
the glory of your people, and their light.

Text: *Nunc dimittis*, para. Rae E. Whitney, 1982.  
Scripture reference: Luke 2:25–32  
Topics: Light  
Possible tune: SONG ONE

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*Doxology*  
**We Praise You,  
Maker of the Universe**

10 10 10 10 10 10

We praise you, Maker of the Universe;  
we praise you, Christ, our Savior and our King;  
we praise you, Holy Spirit, Lord of Life;  
in thankfulness our songs of love we bring.  
O God, to you, forever, glory be:  
the One, Eternal, Holy Trinity!

Text: Rae E. Whitney, 2002  
Topics: Doxology, Praise and Adoration, Trinity  
Possible tunes: SONG ONE, UNDE ET MEMORES

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*This Magnificat and Doxology were written as requested by Carson Cooman. They are intended to match the Nunc Dimittis, as paraphrased by Rae E. Whitney in Hymnal 1982, no. 499, set there to SONG ONE.*

# Christ Came to Save Us

CM

Christ came to save us from ourselves,  
his own life was the cost;  
as shepherd, woman, father, he  
went forth to find the lost.

He valued every human soul,  
and brought them to his feast,  
especially those considered poor:  
the weak, the maimed, the least.

Some follow'rs called him, "Lord," and yet  
by these Christ Jesus passed;  
he did not greet the first in line  
but blessed those who came last.

And so the last, the least, the lost,  
those by the world ignored,  
find welcome at the kingdom's feast,  
as guests of Christ the Lord.

# Christ Chooses Us to Follow Him

LM

Christ chooses us to follow him  
at risk of failure, pain or loss;  
the road we started on will change  
when we stand where the highways cross.

Christ chooses us, though we have doubts,  
and recognize our faith is flawed,  
but yet, when friends say we are fools,  
we take the risk, and trust in God.

Christ chooses us, and we accept,  
responding to our Savior's voice,  
and, at the crossroads, follow him,  
assured we've made the rightful choice.

# Christ Has Called Us Friends

87 87

Christ has called us friends, not servants;  
no fixed hours, nor fees have we;  
our reward is just to love him,  
as we serve most willingly.

When our deeds convey forgiveness  
and dispel another's shame,  
or bring comfort where there's sorrow,  
we show love in Jesus' name.

Words and hugs, and tears or laughter,  
help put anxious souls at ease;  
we convey the Savior's goodness  
through such simple acts as these.

In Christ's service, we find glory;  
all our senses come awake;  
as his Spirit floods our being,  
we love others for his sake.

Christ, who promised us his friendship,  
never will that pledge destroy,  
so we serve, as friends of Jesus,  
filled with gratefulness and joy!

Text: Rae E. Whitney, 1996

Scripture reference: John 15:15

Topics: Charity, Christian Life, Love (of God), Ministry and Service

Possible tunes: CROSS OF JESUS, CHRISTLIGHT (Gay)

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*Taken from John 15:15: "not servants...but...friends,"*  
and the Book of Common Prayer pg. 57 (Collect for Peace)  
"*...whose service is perfect freedom.*"

# Christmas Has Come! The Child Is Born!

88 68 77

Christmas has come! The Child is born!  
There's joy in Bethlehem this night!  
News first reaches shepherds,  
and they are dazzled with delight,  
when they hear angels singing,  
when they hear angels singing!

Christmas has come! The Child is born!  
The Wise Men, traveling from the east,  
bring the baby homage;  
with Mary, Joseph, bird and beast,  
they join the angels' singing.  
They join the angels' singing!

Christmas has come! The Child is born!  
The long-awaited Christ is here,  
bringing love and beauty.  
A song of peace, and not of fear,  
with angels we are singing.  
With angels we are singing!

# Christmas Has Its Cradle

65 65 D

Christmas has its cradle  
where a baby cried;  
did the lantern's shadow  
show him crucified?  
Did he foresee darkly  
his life's willing loss?  
Christmas has its cradle;  
Easter has its cross.

2

Christmas has its cradle;  
shepherds came to see  
little son of Mary,  
Lamb of God to be.  
Had his Father warned him  
none would grant him room  
save in the Christmas cradle  
and in the Easter tomb?

3

Christmas has its cradle;  
Wise Men came to bring  
myrrh and gold and incense,  
offerings for a King;  
myrrh alone stayed with him,  
death's balm for this Boy,  
from the Christmas cradle  
to his Easter joy.

4

Christmas has its cradle  
where that Baby cried;  
in the Easter garden,  
Christ lay crucified;  
When death's power was con-  
quered,  
God's life through him poured;  
Christmas has its cradle,  
Easter has its Lord!

Text: Rae E Whitney, 1981

Scripture references: Matthew 2:11; Mark 5:23, 16:1; John 19:39-41

Topics: Christmas, Easter

Possible tunes: KING'S WESTON, PETHEL (Stan Pethel)

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*This text links the events of Christmas as told in Matthew and in Luke, and of the Easter Story in all four Gospels. A painting, based on lines 3 and 4 of this text, was published in The Church Musician, October 1992, as a pull-out poster for use in churches.*



# Come and See, Said Jesus

65 65 D with refrain

Come and see, said Jesus;  
find out that I am  
both the Lion of Judah  
and the Pascal Lamb.  
I am your Good Shepherd;  
with my sheep I stay;  
I am Resurrection,  
Life and Truth, and Way.

## *Refrain*

Come and see, said Jesus.  
Lord, I'll come and see;  
I will always follow  
when you're leading me!

2

Alpha and Omega,  
I am First and Last;  
always with the Father,  
present, future, past.  
I am fully human,  
equally divine:  
bread, for those who hunger,  
for the thirsty, wine. *Refrain*

3

Come and see, said Jesus,  
listen to your heart;  
though my friends forsake me,  
I will not depart.  
When I say, I love you,  
I do not pretend:  
I have room for Judas,  
Peter is my friend. *Refrain*

4

Come and see, said Jesus,  
what I offer you:  
life that's rich and boundless,  
merciful and true;  
when you help another,  
in God's work you share,  
and I'll keep my promise  
to be always there. *Refrain*

Text: Rae E. Whitney, 2000

Topics: Assurance, Shepherd (God as), Love (God's), Redemption

Possible tune: ST. GERTRUDE

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