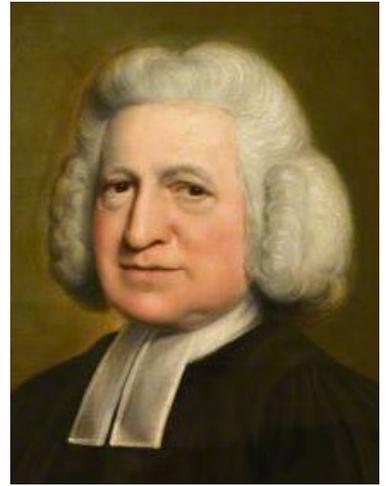


## ***Prayer of the Month • March 2017***

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven, to earth come down;  
fix in us thy humble dwelling;  
all thy faithful mercies crown!  
Jesus, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation;  
enter every trembling heart.

Charles Wesley, 1707–1788



It is hard to part a hymn from its tune, and this goes so well with the tune 'Love Divine', a slightly more joyous tune than 'Blaenwern'. It is one of the most memorable first lines, and simply because of that line, is often chosen for weddings. Having recognised the source of love, and the fact that such love has come down to earth, the prayer then requests that love should find its home in the individual. Noting that Jesus is 'pure, unbounded love' it then invites Jesus to 'enter every trembling heart'. A lot of thoughts are captured in just a few lines, a great facility that Charles Wesley had.

His brother John is considered the organising genius of Methodism, but the hymns of Charles provide ample theology and inspiring encouragement in the faith. Charles composed some of the most memorable and lasting hymns of the church, such as: 'Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,' 'And Can It Be,' 'O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing,' 'Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,' 'Jesu, Lover of my Soul,' 'Christ the Lord is Risen Today,' 'Soldiers of Christ, Arise,' and 'Rejoice! the Lord is King!' It is said that he wrote an average of 10 lines of poetry a day for fifty years. He wrote 8,989 hymns, ten times the amount written by Isaac Watts.

Charles Wesley was the eighteenth of Samuel and Susannah Wesley's nineteen children (only ten lived to maturity). He was born prematurely on 18 December 1707 and appeared dead. He lay silent, wrapped in wool, for weeks. Initially, he studied at home, where his mother, Susanna, who knew Greek, Latin and French, taught the children for six hours a day. Then he went to Westminster School, then on to Oxford, where he received a master's degree. Unsatisfied by the spiritual tepidity of the college, Charles formed the Holy Club, with several others. They celebrated Communion weekly, and kept a strict regime of spiritual study. Because of their strict routine, which included early rising, Bible study, and prison ministry, the members of the club were called, pejoratively, 'methodists'.

In 1735 he went with his brother John, as a missionary to the colony of Georgia. They both returned, dejected, the following year. After returning to England Charles taught English to the Moravian, Peter Böhler, and was prompted to look at the state of his soul more closely. During May 1738, Charles began reading Martin Luther's volume on Galatians while ill. He wrote in his diary, 'I laboured, waited, and prayed to feel "who loved me, and gave himself for me."' He soon found himself convinced, and wrote, 'I now found myself at peace with God, and rejoice in hope of loving Christ.' Two days later he began writing a hymn celebrating his conversion.

He undertook a great deal of preaching, and ventured into the open air, preaching to crowds of up to 20,000. On a trip to Wales in 1747, at the age of forty, he met twenty-year-old Sarah Gwynne (also known as Sally), daughter of a local Methodist, whom he soon married. By all accounts they had a happy marriage, and Sally usually travelled with him. Of their eight

children only three survived infancy, the other five are buried in Bristol. Charles continued to travel and preach until 1756, when poor health led him gradually to withdraw from itinerant ministry. He spent the rest of his life in Bristol and London, preaching in Methodist chapels. Throughout his life he wrote hymns, publishing 56 volumes in 53 years. One contemporary observer remarked, 'The song of the Methodists is the most beautiful I ever heard ... They sing in a proper way, with devotion, serene mind and charm.' Charles died on 29 March 1788 in London. His house in Bristol still stands, and has been restored, but his home in London has been demolished. The church commemorates him on 24 May, with his brother John.

Colin Lunt