

IN the year 1591, Palestrina published his *Missa Jam Christus astra ascenderat*. This Mass is based upon a **HYMN TUNE** used for many different texts. Incredibly, nobody has ever created a naming system for Gregorian tunes. (A musicology student out there should really make this into a dissertation!) Metrical hymns have a “flawed” naming system. It is flawed because sometimes there are numerous names for the same tune: e.g. HALTON HOLGATE is also called SHARON and JERSEY and BOYCE. The opposite problem is also true; e.g. WALTHAM refers to one melody in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (#324), a totally different melody in the *New English Hymnal*, and a totally different one in the *Episcopal 1940 Hymnal* (#259).

On the following pages, we present different texts that use *this same hymn tune*.

It is not a question of which text is “right” and which text is “wrong.” The choir in Los Angeles calls the Mass **TE SAECULORUM PRINCIPEM**—for two important reasons. First of all, those are the lyrics which the Saint Vitus Parish Choir already knew:

MODE I

T E saeculorum Princi-pem, Te, Chri-ste, Regem Génti-

um, Te ménti- um, Te córdi-um Unum faté- mur árbi-trum.

Secondly, it is problematic to call the Mass “Jam Christus astra_ascenderat,” and not just because the first line contains an ellision. Owing to the presence of the word “ascenderat,” many people erroneously believe it’s for ASCENSIONTIDE (which it isn’t). For example, the Wikipedia article on Palestrina Masses **erroneously** calls it a “hymn for ascensiontide”:

Missa Inviolata	4	11	Transposed hypolydian		Official melody from Ac
Missa Iste confessor	4	14	Hypodorian	Cantus firmus	Latin hymn
Missa Jam Christus astra ascenderat	4	14	Transposed dorian	Cantus firmus	Ascentiontide hymn

This is not an Ascension hymn. It comes from the season of Pentecost. Written in the fourth or fifth century, it summarizes the second Chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. We can see it isn’t an Ascension hymn from the English translation:

Christ had already ascended to the heaven He had left, to send the holy Spirit Who was to be received as the Father’s gift. The day appointed was now at hand that would mark the beginning of the age of blessedness, for the cycle of seven days had revolved in the holy number of seven, when suddenly at the third hour of the day a mighty sound is heard on earth, telling the Apostles at prayer that God had come. From the Father’s light there comes the kindly, gracious fire of love to fill with burning eloquence those that believed in Christ. And they (their hearts filled with the inspiration of the holy Spirit) rejoice, speak in different tongues, and tell of God’s wonders. They are understood by men from all parts, whether civilized (Greek or Latin) or not, as they speak, to the universal astonishment of those present, in their respective languages. Then the Jews, still faithless, are possessed by the spirit of blind anger and hate, and accuse Christ’s sober servants of being drunk with new wine. But Peter confronts them with his Master’s miracles and shows the falsity of what the perfidious ones are saying, proving it to them from the words of Joel.

In ancient manuscripts, we see how this melody was often used for **AD COENAM AGNI PROVIDI**, and notice how this particular scribe wanted to treat the hypermetric syllable on “cum Patre et” (scrawled in the margin) :

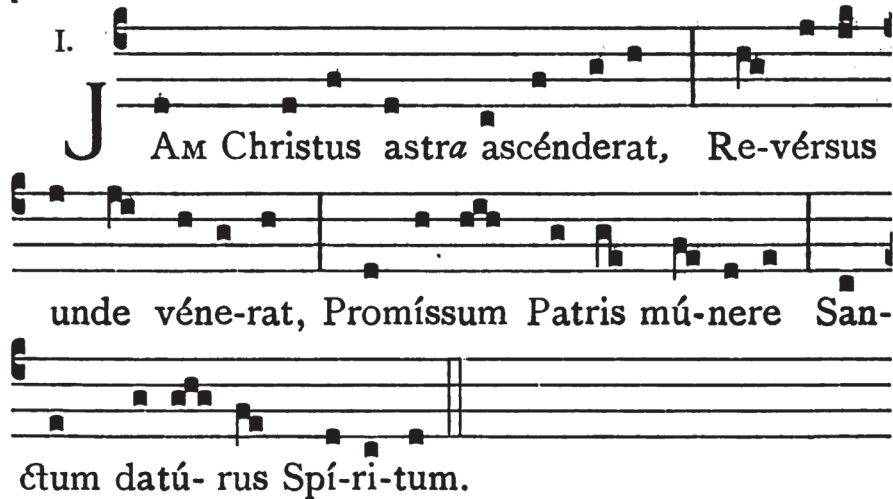
Ad cenam agni
providi et stolis albis can
didi post transitum ma
ris rubri xpo canam pncipi.
Quis corpus scilicet
in ara crucis torridum cru
ore emens rursus cruetandum in
paradysum. Quiesumus
actor oim in hoc paschali
gaudio ab omni mortis
impetu tuu defende pplm.
Gloria tibi dñe qui sur
rexisti a mortuis cu pa
tre et sco spu in sempiter
na secula. Amen. Isti duo
vsus scilicet Quis actor et Gl
ria tibi dñe qui sur. dicantur i
fine oim ymnorum eide me
tri usq ad pmas vespas
ascensionis nisi i ymnis
Que tra. et O gloria. qm an
nuatio m pascha celebra

Ancient manuscripts also show the melody being used for **AURORA LUCIS RUTILAT** (changed in 1631 to *Aurora Caelum Purpurat* by Pope Urban VIII) and **SERMONE BLANDO ANGELUS** (a continuation of the same hymn) :

et uoti uoti copotes nos tuo uultu
facies. Gloria tibi dñe.
Aurora lucis ymnus
rutilat celu laudibz in
nat mundus exultas ubi
lat gemes infernus ululat.
Sermone blando ange
lus predixit mulieribz in ga
lylea dominus uidendus
est quantocius. Ille dum
pergunt concite aplis hoc di
cere uidentes eu uiuere oscul

Composers such as Thomas Tallis (d. 1585), Father Cristóbal de Morales (d. 1553), and Robert Parson (d. 1572) set this same hymn melody. The melody appears in an 1885 Hymnary by the monastery of Solesmes for **JAM CHRISTUS ASTRA ASCENDERAT**:

In tono sequenti cantantur Hymni Horarum & Completorii per totam Octavam.

I. 

JAM CHRISTUS astra ascénderat, Re-vérsus
unde véne-rat, Promíssum Patris mú-nere San-
ctum datú-rus Spí-ri-tum.

The 1962 *Liber Usualis* uses the melody for **VEXILLA CHRISTUS INCLYTA**, a modern hymn:

Hymn. 1. 

VEXILLA Chrístus inclý-ta La-te tri-úmphans éxpli-
cat : Géntes ad-éste súpli-ces, Regíque ré-gum pláudi-te.

Dom Mocquereau's 1904 *Liber Usualis* uses it for **TE LUCIS ANTE TERMINUM**:

I. 

TE LUCIS ante términum, Ré-rum Cre-átor pósci-
mus, Ut pro tú-a cleménti-a Sis præsul et custódi-a.

“A Manual of Gregorian Chant” (Solesmes, 1903) with a 9 October *Imprimatur* from Rome also uses it for **TE LUCIS ANTE TERMINUM**:

AT COMPLINE.

Hymn.

T E lúcis ante términum, Ré-rum Cre-átor pósci-
mus, Ut pro tú- a cleménti-a Sis præsul et custódi-a.
2. Procul recédant sómni-a, Et nócti-um phantásmata,
Hostémque nóstrum cómprime, Ne pollu- ántur córpora.
3. Dé-o Pátri sit gló-ri-a, Et Fí-li-o, quí a mórtu- is
Surréxit, ac Pa-rácli-to, In sæcu-ló-rum sæcu-la.
Amen.

The Saint Vitus Parish Choir often sings the melody with **VERBUM SUPERNUM PRODIENS**, a text by St. Thomas Aquinas:


5. O sa - lu - tá - ris hó - sti - a, Quae cae - li pan - dis ó - sti - um,
Bel - la pre - munt ho - stí - li - a; Da ro - bur, fer - au - xí - li - um.

Editors of the NEW ENGLISH HYMNAL (1986), a Protestant hymnal, associate the tune with “Lucis Creator Optime.” Unaware of the melody’s provenance, they erroneously say it comes from the 17th century:

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

150 Second Tune

LUCIS CREATOR LM 17th century Angers Church Melody
Harmony by Martin Shaw 1875–1958



The ENGLISH HYMNAL (1906), uses the melody as an Epiphany hymn:

FROM THE EPIPHANY TILL LENT

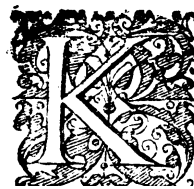
LUCIS CREATOR. (L. M.) **51** (MODERN TUNE)

*In moderate time ♩ = 144.
To be sung in unison.* Angers Church Melody.



The part books (1591AD) make it much easier to notice the plainsong melody:

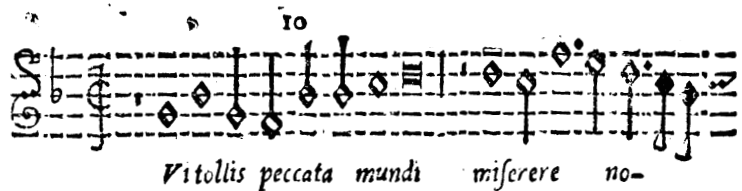
How the Soprano part appeared in 1591AD :



How the Bass part appeared in 1591AD :



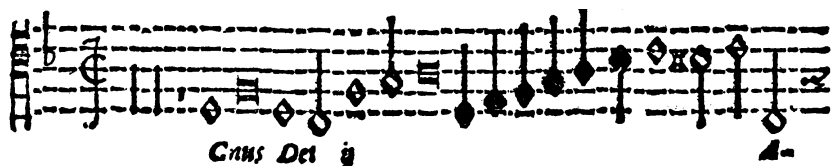
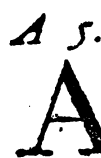
How the Soprano part appeared in 1591AD :



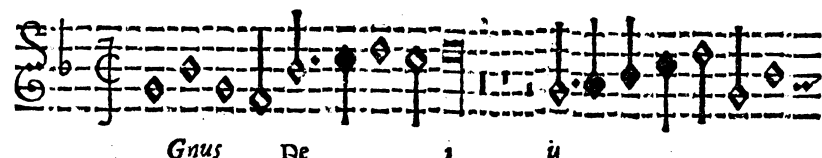
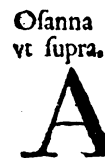
How the Soprano part appeared in 1591AD :



How the Bass part appeared in 1591AD :



How the Soprano part appeared in 1591AD :



How the Soprano part appeared in 1591AD :

