

Where Dark Descends

Genevieve Glen, OSB

Michael Joncas
FLAMMA VIVENS, 88 88 8

INTRO Moderately flowing (♩ = ca. 70)

Organ [SW.] *pp* legato throughout *p*

5 *mp* **VERSE 1: All**

1. Where dark de-scends, the liv - ing Flame A - ri - ses far be - yond the

[GT.] *mp*

9

1. night To fill the shad - owed u - ni - verse With riv - ers of un - con - quered

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13

1. Light, With riv-ers of un-con-quer-ed Light.

[SW.] *p*

VERSE 2: Sopranos and Altos
(Assembly women only, *ad lib.*)

mp 18 2. And prom-ised free-dom for the

2. The Fire that burned in an - cient branch And prom - ised free - dom

[GT.] *mp*

21 2. slave bursts a - sun-der stone and

2. for the slave Re - turns to burn in hu - man flesh That bursts a - sun - der

25 2. grave,

2. stone and grave, That_ bursts a - sun - der stone and grave.

[SW.] *p*

VERSE 3: Tenors and Basses
(Assembly men only, *ad lib.*)

3. Leads cap - tives_ from the

29 *mf*
(Melody)

3. The Fire_ that led through des - ert waste Leads cap-tives from the hid - den

[GT.] *mp*

3. hid - den realm

33

3. realm Where death once reigned un - til the cross Broke e - vil's hold up - on the

37

3. helm, Broke e - vil's hold up - on the helm.

[SW.] *p*

VERSE 4

41

S/A unison *mp*

4. The Fire no hu - man hand dared touch Burns bright - ly now in earth - en

T/B unison *mp*

4. The Fire no hu - man hand dared touch Burns bright - ly now in earth - en,

[GT.] *mp*

45

4. clay; The Lamb of God, the world's one light, Is heav-en's lamp at close of

4. earth-en clay; The Lamb of God, the world's one light, Is heav-en's lamp at close_ at

49

4. day, Is heav-en's lamp at close of day.

4. close of day,

[SW.] *p*

VERSE 5

53

mf
S
A

5. The Fire that filled Je - ru - sa - lem And dwelt with - in, with - in the

T/B (melody) *mf*

5. The Fire that filled Je - ru - sa - lem And dwelt with - in the ho - ly

[GT.] *mf*

57

5. ho - ly place Now flows in liv - ing streams of light From Je - sus Christ, God's

5. place Now flows in liv - ing streams of light From Je - sus Christ, God's hu - man

61 5. Je - sus Christ, God's hu - man face.

5. hu - man face, From Je - sus Christ, God's hu - man face.

5. face, From Je - sus Christ, God's hu - man face.

[SW.] *p*

65 **VERSE 6: All** *mf*

6. O Trin - i - ty of

mf

mp [GT.] *mf*

69

S
A
T
B

6. burn - ing love, Whose light out-shines the stars and sun, We sing our praise as

73

6. Fa - ther, Son and Spir - it, One,

6. dark de-scends To Fa - ther, Son and Spir - it, One, } To Fa-ther, Son and Spir - it,

6. Fa - ther, Son and Spir - it, One,

6. Fa - ther, — Son and Spir - it, One,

77

6. One, A - men. A - men.

mp rit.

mp rit.

Play only if needed
mp rit.

The image shows a musical score for a vocal and piano setting. It consists of four staves. The top two staves are for the vocal line, with lyrics '6. One, A - men. A - men.' written below. The bottom two staves are for the piano accompaniment. The score includes dynamic markings 'mp rit.' and a note 'Play only if needed mp rit.' in the piano part. A large 'PREVIEW' watermark is overlaid on the score.

Composer Notes

Circumstances of composition: Having had such a good experience in composing a concertato setting of “O God of Past and Present” (OCP 20618 and 20618-Z), I was inspired to set another of Benedictine Sister Genevieve Glen’s texts. Initially composed 19–20 February 2008, this version of “When Dark Descends” is considerably simplified in comparison to my initial work on the text. Since this hymn is primarily intended for Compline, a time when communities typically have fewer musical resources available and when the musical settings should be moving us toward sleep rather than stirring us up, I believe the simplifications requested by editors at OCP improve this setting.

Textual issues: “Where Dark Descends” is one of Sister Genevieve’s more poetically dense texts. I find both the artistic crafting and the spiritual insights of this talented hymnographer firing my imagination and leading me to prayer. This hymn strikes me as a form of *lectio divina* in verse, a meditative savoring of the biblical resonances found in the images of light and fire. These stanzas effectively extend the Service of Light of the Easter Vigil throughout the Great Fifty Days.

Verse 1 evokes the image of the paschal candle “bravely burning” (as the Exsultet text sung at the Easter Vigil prays), connecting it to the Christ whose rising from the dead transforms the darkness of this world “with rivers of unconquered light,” a resonance of the *Christus Victor* theology beloved of the patristic writers.

Verse 2 connects this fire with the exodus from Egypt, yoking and contrasting the fire that accompanied Jews escaping from their slavery with the blaze of the resurrection by which humanity escapes from bondage to sin.

Verse 3 yokes the fire that marked the desert wanderings of these escaped Jewish slaves with the pilgrimage of humanity from the dominion of sin and death whose power was definitively shattered by the Crucified One.

Verse 4 calls to mind both the burning bush encountered in the call of Moses and the Old Testament adage that “no one can see God and live” (Exodus 33:20) under the image of a fire “no human hand can touch.” But this divine fire is, in fact, alive in the flesh (“clay”) of Jesus, lauded under the sacrificial paschal image of the Lamb of God (who, with a very daring clash of images, becomes the “lamp of heaven,” the Evening Star guiding nighttime wanderers).

Verse 5 calls to mind the dual manifestations of God’s presence during the time of the desert wanderings: a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21–22). The building of the Jerusalem Temple localized this previously nomadic presence, symbolized by the two detached pillars at the Temple’s façade. In Jewish belief, the *Shekinah*, a luminous presence of יהוה (YHWH) combining fire and cloud, settled upon the Temple, indicating God’s on-going presence there. The poet forthrightly identifies an even more permanent divine presence in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, “God’s human face.”

Verse 6 concludes this biblical meditation by turning praise and adoration to the triune God, whose burning love-light “outshines the stars and sun.”

Musical issues: “Where Dark Descends” may be sung by an assembly as a strophic hymn completely in unison with unchanging organ accompaniment. Slightly more musical interest could be fostered by having the first and last verses sung by the assembly in unison, the second and fourth verses by women, and the third and fifth verses by men. Take note that this is not the pattern to follow if the piece is adorned by choral singing. My preference is that the piece be sung with SATB choir offering its enhancements of the melody, with the assembly singing in unison on the first, fourth and final verses, the women singing on verse 2, the men on verse 3, and the assembly tacet on verse 5. Given its association with prayer at the end of the day, it should be sung with restrained volume.

Ritual issues: Notice that the octavo setting includes a longer instrumental introduction/interlude before the first and final verse than is the case before the other verses; an assembly would need to be clearly directed to allow the longer interlude to happen before singing the final verse since they may have become accustomed to the shorter interludes before the other verses. While intended for Eastertide Compline, I could see “When Dark Descends” being sung at other services during the Easter season (perhaps as a vespers hymn or during a Lucernarium service).

—*Michael Joncas*

Assembly Edition

WHERE DARK DESCENDS

Michael Joncas
FLAMMA VIVENS, 88 88 8



1. Where dark de - scends, the liv - ing Flame A -
2. The Fire that burned in an - cient branch And
3. The Fire that led through de - sert waste Leads
4. The Fire no hu - man hand dared touch Burns
5. The Fire that filled Je - ru - sa - lem And
6. O Trin - i - ty of burn - ing love, Whose



1. ris - es far be - yond the night To fill the shad - owed
2. prom - ised free - dom for the slave Re - turns to burn in
3. cap - tives from the hid - den realm Where death once reigned un -
4. bright - ly now in earth - en clay; The Lamb of God, the
5. dwelt with - in the ho - ly place Now flows in liv - ing
6. light out - shines the stars and sun, We sing our praise as



1. u - ni - verse With riv - ers of un - con - quered Light,
2. hu - man flesh That bursts a - sun - der stone and grave,
3. til the cross Broke e - vil's hold up - on the helm,
4. world's one light, Is heav - en's lamp at close of day,
5. streams of light From Je - sus Christ, God's hu - man face,
6. dark de - scends To Fa - ther, Son and Spir - it, One,



1. With riv - ers of un - con - quered Light.
2. That bursts a - sun - der stone and grave.
3. Broke e - vil's hold up - on the helm.
4. Is heav - en's lamp at close of day.
5. From Je - sus Christ, God's hu - man face.
6. To Fa - ther, Son and Spir - it, One.

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