

Jerusalem the Golden

Urbs Sion Aurea, Bernard of Morlaix, 1146
Translated by John M. Neale, 1818–1866

Janèt Sullivan Whitaker

Soprano I
Soprano II

Alto

mp

Je - ru - sa - lem the Gold en, *n.b.*

unis. *n.b.*

With milk and hon - ey blest,

With milk and hon - ey blest,

div.

Be - neath thy con - tem - pla - tion, Sink heart and voice op - pressed.

Be - neath thy con - tem - pla - tion, Sink heart and voice op - pressed.

p unis. *div.*

I know not, O I know not, What joys a - wait us there;

p

I know not, O I know not, What joys a - wait us there;

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f what joy, _____ What ra - dian - cy of glo - ry, _____

f what joy, _____ What ra - dian - cy of glo - ry, _____

n.b.

what joy, _____

p what _____ bliss be - yond com - pare.

p what joy, what _____ bliss be - yond com - pare.

Je - ru - sa - lem the Gold - en!

rit.

Composer Notes

“Jerusalem the Golden” is a setting of the first verse of a John Mason Neale hymn text by the same name. Neale’s poetic translation is of an earlier Latin hymn, “Urbs Sion Aurea,” attributed to Bernard of Morlaix (Bernard of Cluny) in the early twelfth century.

This piece was originally conceived as a prelude for the feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica in Rome, which is celebrated on November 9. While this feast invites us to remember the dedication of a specific important building in the life of Christendom, the prayers for this day focus as much on the spiritual temple that is the people of God throughout the world. Each of our parish church buildings is a gathering place for this spiritual temple, and each is related to the others. In liturgy we express joyful hope for reunion with the body of Christ that feasts at one table in eternal glory. In the antiphons and prayers for this feast day we ask God to make of us a holy people, that in proclaiming the Gospel by the way we live our lives, we might be granted companionship with God in the eternal temple that is heaven.

This fervent longing for the Holy City has stirred the heart and imagination of many composers of sacred text and melody. The theme is always with us, recurring many times in our liturgy and throughout the Church year. As such, this chant could be sung for numerous occasions other than the Lateran celebration, including parish feast days and the anniversary of the founding of a parish. It can also be quite effective as a simple call to worship for the solemnity of All Saints, the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, Sundays of Lent, and on Sundays with Scriptures that evoke longing for the reign of God. While it is scored for women’s voices, it can also be sung by a small ensemble of men or by a children’s choir. If sung by men or children, I recommend experimenting with an alternate transposition.

—Janet Sullivan Whitaker