

# FAIREST LORD JESUS

*Text: Munster Gesangbuch, 1677; Trans. By Joseph Seiss, 1873*

*Tune: CRUSADER'S HYMN, Richard Willis, Music, 1850*

The hymn, "*Fairest Lord Jesus*", has a somewhat elusive history. It is thought to have originated as early as 1607, possibly written by German Jesuit monks, and called, "*Schnaster Herr Jesu*". It first appeared in print in 1677, in a German Roman Catholic publication, the *Munster Gesangbuch*, but with author unknown. The music for this hymn that was most popular with 17th Century German peasants was from an ancient Silesian folk song tune: CRUSADER'S HYMN. The original three stanzas were translated into English by author unknown, in 1842. An arrangement of this version of by Richard Storrs Willis' appeared in his "*Church Chorals and Choir Studies*" in 1850. It has been published in numerous hymnals, sometimes under the title of, "*Beautiful Savior*". American Lutheran pastor and theologian Joseph Augustus Seiss added a 4th verse, in 1873, which was first published in the "*Sunday School Book for the use of Evangelical Lutheran Congregations*".

Joseph Seiss (1823-1904) was confirmed at age 15 as a member of the Moravian Church. After completing his theological study he ordained to a Lutheran ministry in 1844, holding pastorates in Virginia and Maryland, and then a position of the newly established Church of the Holy Communion in Philadelphia. Beginning at 22 yrs. old, he eventually published more than a hundred works, which were often reviewed in literary and theological journals.

Richard Storrs Willis (1819-1900) was an American hymn composer, His best known tune: CAROL is the standard tune, of the much-loved hymn, "*It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*" (1850), with lyrics by Edmund Sears. Richard Willis was brother of both poet Nathaniel Willis, and newspaper columnist Fanny Fern (born Sara Willis). He attended Chauncey Hall, the Boston Latin School, and Yale College where he was the president of the Beethoven Society. as well as a member of Skull and Bones. After graduation he went to Germany, where he studied for six years under Felix Mendelssohn. After returning to America, Willis served as music critic for the New York Tribune, The Albion, and The Musical Times, for which he served as editor for a time. He was a member of the New-York American-Music Association.

~ Tull