

## Meditation

Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810-1876) was the son of Samuel Wesley (“the English Mozart”) and grandson of the great Methodist hymnodist Charles Wesley. He had a distinguished career as an organist at several English cathedrals: Hereford, Exeter, Winchester and Gloucester. Two of his hymn tunes, *Aurelia* (“The church’s one foundation”) and *Hereford* (“O thou who camest from above”) are very well known to us at Holy Apostles.

Wesley’s lengthy anthem *Ascribe unto the Lord* is based on our psalm for tomorrow, Psalm 96, with additional text from Psalm 115. Wesley was musically conservative for his time, repurposing old forms such as Fugues the Verse Anthems. Yet his writing is not anachronistic and makes full use of 19<sup>th</sup>-century chromatic harmony. He had a great gift for melody and his setting of texts is always direct and heartfelt. Wesley’s music can be viewed as a flavorful new wine in an old bottle.

*Ascribe unto the Lord* opens with a bold recitative for the tenors and basses, followed by an exquisite full-choir declamation of the words “Let the whole earth stand in awe of Him.” Following the Verse Anthem ideal, there is much alternation between solo singers and the full chorus. Of particular note is Wesley’s wonderful four-part writing for upper voices (sopranos and altos). Following a dramatic fugue condemning the “gods of the heathen,” the anthem closes with a melodious setting of this text from Psalm 115: “The Lord hath been mindful of us, and He shall bless us.” I hope you enjoy this gem of 19<sup>th</sup>-century English church music.

With all best wishes,

Tim Pyper  
Director of Music

Full text of *Ascribe unto the Lord*:

<https://www.allsaintskingston.co.uk/anthems/ascribe-unto-the-lord-2>

S.S. Wesley: *Ascribe unto the Lord*

<https://youtu.be/8Byh3RTDTZI>

544: Jesus shall reign wher’er the sun

<https://youtu.be/0E1QHaRkaYo>

665: All my hope on God is founded.

<https://youtu.be/sGogQRKLtcc>