

Behind the Hymn: Jesus, the Light of the World

Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; the one who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."
(John 8:12, NASB)

African-American spirituals often enlivened and reinvented the hymns of writers like Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, and John Newton. After emancipation, some white hymn writers continued that tradition.

George D. Elderkin (1845-1928) was one of those. He took Charles Wesley's "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing" and added refrain lines and a refrain, and gave it a musical setting with the flavor of a gospel waltz.

The popularity of "Jesus, the Light of the World" prompted composer-arranger Tom Fettke to call me on June 16, 1998. He was compiling a choral songbook titled *Magnify the Lord*. Since "Jesus, the Light of the World" had a non-seasonal refrain, he wanted me to give it non-seasonal verses. That request resulted in the hymn below.

--Ken Bible

Hymn: [Jesus, the Light of the World](#)