

Hymn of the Week

Lent II

**Love Divine, all loves excelling**

Words: Charles Wesley (1707 -1788)

Tune: Blaenwern – William Penfro Rowlands (1860-1937)

Our hymn this week and indeed our first hymn this Sunday is not a Lenten hymn as such but is one that is consistently in the “Top Ten Hymns” and in my experience there was, at one time, hardly a wedding at which it was not sung. It may surprise you therefore to know that when written the hymn caused a good deal of controversy even between the writer, whom as you will know as an Anglican priest and prolific hymnwriter, and his brother John who is recognized as the founder of the Methodist Movement. Thy text is thought to be based on “The Song of Venus” (Fairest Isle) in Dryden’s play King Arthur but it is not this that caused a flutter in the dovecotes rather the fact that Charles Wesley’s original text contained clear expression of his doctrine of perfectionism which suggests that, in **this** life, Christ can transform us completely into the children of God and thus completely free of sin which is contrary to the view of most Christian religions. This point of contention led to many revisions of the text and indeed (as in our hymnbook) the total omission of Wesley’s second verse.

The doctrinal debaters have not diminished the popularity of the text in one form or another nor the number of tunes to which it has been set of which there are at least five to my knowledge including of course Blaenwern to which it is sung here and which we will use on Sunday. The composer of the tune was a school teacher and church musician from Porth in the Rhondda The tune is named after Blaenwern Farm near Tufton, Pembrokeshire, where Rowlands sent his son from Porth to stay with friends of the family to convalesce as it was thought the fresh air would assist his recovery: he named the tune in honour of them.

The hymn is sung here by the choir of Wells Cathedral, just rejoice in the perfect enunciation and clarity of their singing.

<https://youtu.be/XAJbMcQRfy0?list=RDXXAJbMcQRfy0>

Keith Day

25<sup>th</sup> February 2026