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**Hymn Stories ~ His-story**

**Celebrating Our Land and Freedom**

**July 4, 2021**

**Opening Hymn: “O Beautiful for Spacious Skies”** (“America the Beautiful”)

Words: Katharine Lee Bates

Music: “Materna”: Samuel A. Ward

In early summer, 1893, a group of female professors from Wellesley College visited the Chicago World’s Fair on their way to teach summer school in Colorado. The women later compared the wonders of the man-made Fair with the glory of God’s handiwork in the Rockies. At the close of school, the teachers decided to visit Pike’s Peak, elevation 14,00 feet. One of them, Katharine Lee Bates, later wrote, “We hired a prairie wagon. Near the top we had to leave the wagon and go the rest of the way on mules. …[W]hen I saw the view, I felt great joy. All the wonder of America seemed displaed there, with the sea-like expanse….It was then and there that the opening lines of the hymn floated into my mind. When we left Colorado Springs the four stanzas were penciled in my notebook.”

 After some time passed, Bates completed the words of the hymn and sent them to “The Congregationalist” where they first appeared in print July 4, 1895.

Morgan, Robert J. (2010) *Then Sings My Soul:150 Christmas, Easter, and All-Time Favorite Hymn Stories*, p. 133.

**Communion Hymn: “Let Us Break Bread Together”**

 Words & Music: African American Spiritual

This hymn follows in the tradition of most negro spirituals in its simplicity in both words and tune. Negro spirituals were mostly composed by black American slaves with no western training in music. Some scholars believe that the slaves simply added words to African traditional folk tunes they had left behind in Africa. This song is mainly used during communion services. It reminds us of our spiritual food and drink presented through the bread and wine during holy communion.

[Let Us Break Bread Together Lyrics and Story: Famous Negro Spirituals (christianmusicandhymns.com)](https://www.christianmusicandhymns.com/2015/06/let-us-break-bread-together-famous.html#:~:text=%27Let%20Us%20Break%20Bread%20Together%27%20follows%20in%20the,folk%20tunes%20they%20had%20left%20behind%20in%20Africa.)

**Closing Hymn: “Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory”**

(Battle Hymn of the Republic)

Words: Julia Ward Howe Music: American Melody

“Battle Hymn of the Republic” was written by Julia Ward Howe, a leader in women’s rights and an ardent foe of slavery. In 1861, during the darkest days of the Civil War, she visited Washington and toured a nearby Union Army Camp on the Potomac in Virginia. There she heard soldiers singing a tribute to John Brown, who had been hanged in 1859 for attempting to lead an insurrection of slaves at Harper’s Ferry: “John Brown’s Body Lies a-mold’ring in the

Grave.” She thought the music was rousing, but she felt the words needed improvement. Her pastor, who was along on the trip, encouraged her to write new and better verses. That night, after retiring to her hotel, the words came ‘arranging themselves in my brain’. She wrote them down, ‘feeling that something of importance had happened.’

Julia gave her song to a friend who worked at The Atlantic Monthly. The magazine published it in February 1862, sending her a check for five dollars.

Morgan, Robert J. (2010) *Then Sings My Soul:150 Christmas, Easter, and All-Time Favorite Hymn Stories*, p. 131.

America the Beautiful: [This Photo](https://www.bethsnotesplus.com/2012/01/music-sub-plans-america-beautiful-fifty.html) by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)