

Amazing grace!

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my Shield and Portion be,
As long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun forbear to shine;
But God, Who called me here below,
Shall be forever mine.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

John Newton (1725-1807).

Note: The 7th verse was added by an unknown author.

Born: July 24, 1725, London, England.

Died: December 21, 1807, London, England.

Buried: Originally at St. Mary Woolnoth Church, Lombard Street, London. In 1893, John Newton and his wife Mary were reinterred in the southeast corner of the graveyard at St. Peter and St. Paul's Church, Olney.

Pseudonym: Omicron.

Newton's mother died when John was seven years old. At age 11, with but two years schooling and only a rudimentary knowledge of Latin, John went to sea with his father. His life at sea was filled with wonderful escapes, vivid dreams, and a sailor's recklessness. He grew into a godless and abandoned man. He was once flogged as a deserter from the navy, and for 15 months lived, half starved and ill treated, as a slave in Africa.

A chance reading of Thomas à Kempis sowed the seed of his conversion. It was accelerated by a night spent steering a waterlogged ship in the face of apparent death. He was then 23 years old. Over the next six years, during which he commanded a slave ship, his faith matured. He spent the next nine years mostly in Liverpool, studying Hebrew and Greek and mingling with Whitefield, Wesley, and the Nonconformists. He was eventually ordained, and became curate at Olney, Buckinghamshire, in 1764. It was at Olney that he formed a life long friendship with William Cowper, and produced the Olney Hymns.

A marble plaque at St. Mary Woolnoth carried the epitaph which Newton himself wrote:

JOHN NEWTON, Clerk
Once an infidel and libertine
A servant of slaves in Africa,
Was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour
JESUS CHRIST,
restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach
the Gospel which he had long laboured to destroy.
He ministered,
Near sixteen years in Olney, in Bucks,
And twenty-eight years in this Church.