**O God Beyond All Praising**
Text: Michael Perry (1982)
Tune: JUPITER, from The Planets, Gustav Holst (1918)

Jupiter, the equivalent of the Greek Zeus, was the chief deity in the Roman Empire—the king of the gods in ancient Roman religion—until Christianity rose to prominence in the 4th century. Jupiter is also the name of the 4th movement of a symphonic suite titled “The Planets,” the most well-known work by 20th-century English composer Gustav Holst. As the title would suggest, it is a seven-movement orchestral suite in which each section corresponds to one of the planets (earth is not included). Holst depicts the character of each planet through orchestral color, and attempts to evoke the human emotions and psyche in response to each planet. The movement devoted to the largest planet is entitled “Jupiter, the bringer of jollity.” Bookended by music of effervescent cheerfulness is the Jupiter theme, and it is a melody that you go home humming. The suite, as a whole, has been incredibly popular and enduring, but it is Jupiter that has received the most attention. True to the planet’s gargantuan dimensions, Holst’s Jupiter theme has drawn many into its orbit…. and, it has found its way into [many hymnals], paired with a text by English hymn writer Michael Perry. The title is fitting: “O God, beyond all praising.”

Two things are worth contemplating here. First, we are singing music that was an attempt to capture incomprehensible grandeur and awe. Jupiter could hold within itself more than 1,300 Earths, and is 2.5 times the total mass of all the other planets in our solar system, which God sang into existence on the 4th day of creation (Gen. 1:16). When pondering the sheer immensity of Jupiter, and the fact that God created it and calls it by name—along with all the other millions of stars and planets (Isaiah 40:26)—a proper response would be found in Psalm 8: “When I consider the work of your hands, the moon and the stars that you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?”

The second thing I would like to highlight is the role that the text plays in orienting our affections toward true north. Music is a powerful tool, and a tune such as this, by itself, can arouse great emotion. But, as Bob Kauflin states in his book Worship Matters, “music is a carrier of God’s truth, not the truth itself. Jesus said the truth, not emotional highs, will set us free.” This hymn text orients our affections toward Christ, THE Truth, by whom all things were made (John 1:3). This frees our hearts and minds from the idolatry and hopelessness of worshiping created things rather than the Creator. Our opening Psalm in this week’s liturgy declares, “O Lord, before the gods I will sing your praise.” We are not so different from the Romans and Greeks in our tendency to make “gods” of all sorts of things; but, by the power of the Holy Spirit, our hearts and minds are illuminated, and we can trumpet the truth that the one, true God in Christ is the “maker of all things” (Psalm 121:2). May our doctrine and devotion rightly be pulled into the overwhelming gravity of Christ’s saving love, and may we, His people, declare with one voice “O God, beyond all praising, we worship you today; we marvel at your beauty, and glory in your ways, and make a joyful duty our sacrifice of praise.”

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