

## Singing Jerusalem at Weddings

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### 1. A popular hymn

- One of the most popular musical choices at weddings is William Blake's poem And did those feet in ancient time.... sung to Hubert Parry's rousing tune Jerusalem.
- A favourite of the Last Night of the Proms (and the Womens' Institute!), Jerusalem is very much part of the British cultural fabric.
- How appropriate, though, is the hymn for Christian worship and, in particular for a marriage service?
- Opinion on the matter is strongly divided.

### 2. Objections

- One priest once remarked that the answer to the question 'And did those feet ..... walk upon England's mountains green?' is 'No!' And in a literal sense, he was correct: Jesus did not come to England.
- But to approach the hymn in this way is to miss the point. Jerusalem offers us the chance to ask 'what if...?' 'What if Jesus walked the hills of this country? What would he find – and what would our response be?'
- Blake's poem offers vivid pictures and metaphors which ask us to look beyond the literal meaning of the words.

### 3. A pastoral issue

- Recent research has shown that ministers who invest time and energy to make a marriage service 'special' (while working within the authorized liturgy) are most likely to forge a positive and lasting relationship with wedding couples.
- Part of this 'customisation' of weddings involves meeting a couple half way when it comes to their choice of wedding music and hymns.
- It is possible to respond to a couple wishing to include Jerusalem in their marriage service in one of two ways: negatively ('banning' the hymn, as some have done) or positively (including it, and using it as a helpful springboard from which to explore themes during the address).
- Being able to say 'yes' – or rather 'yes, and.....' might be the preferable decision from a pastoral point of view.

### 4. The hymn and its tune

- A major reason for the popularity of Jerusalem as a hymn is Parry's excellent tune – it's known far beyond the walls of the church: it's a 'good sing' at a marriage service.
- However, the skills of the local musician(s) need to be equal to the task.
- The organ part is not easy and a less-than-confident congregation might struggle without the support of a choir.
- But what of the words? The hymn poses a series of questions, to which the poet responds with a pledge to  
    '[build] Jerusalem  
    in England's green and pleasant land.'

### **'Building Jerusalem'**

- Blake's resolve to 'build Jerusalem' is an idea which can be adapted in a number of directions. The following bullet points offer some basic ideas which – in the address - might be expanded or developed, depending on the background and nature of the congregation.
- In the Bible, Jerusalem is the holy city, the dwelling place of God
- Jerusalem houses the Temple, which speaks powerfully of the God who is present among his people
- Christians point to faith in God who shares our life fully in Jesus
- A Christian marriage needs Jesus at its heart
- 'Building Jerusalem' in a marriage means putting God at the centre
- This is hard work ('I will not cease from mental fight.....') and takes time
- We need to be equipped to 'build Jerusalem' ('Bring me my bow....')
  - o The 'tools' of a good marriage
- John (Revelation 21) writes of the 'New Jerusalem' as the place where God 'makes all things new'
  - o The need for renewal in marriage – the place of the Holy Spirit