

February 11

Frances Jane (Fanny) Van Alstyne Crosby

Hymnwriter, 1915

Fanny Crosby, a lifelong Methodist, was the most prolific writer of hymn texts and gospel songs in the American evangelical tradition of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She wrote more than eight thousand sacred texts in addition to other poetry.

Frances Jane Crosby was born in Putnam County, New York, on March 24, 1820. Although not born blind, she lost her sight as an infant as a result of complications from a childhood illness. At the age of fifteen, she entered the New York Institute for the Blind, where she would later teach for a number of years. In 1858, she married Alexander van Alstyne, a musician in New York who was also blind.

Crosby's texts were so popular that nearly every well-known composer of gospel music of the period came to her for words to accompany their melodies. In most hymn writing, the words come first and then a composer sets them to music, but for Crosby the words came so quickly and naturally that composers would often take her their tunes and she would immediately begin to shape words that fit the music.

Perhaps the best example of this process led to the creation of Crosby's most well known hymn "Blessed assurance." On a visit to the home of a friend, the composer Phoebe Knapp, a newly composed tune was played for Crosby. After listening to the tune several times, the text began to take shape, and in a very short time one of the world's most popular gospel hymns was born.

The American gospel song is a unique genre of sacred music that combines words expressive of personal faith and witness with tunes that are simple and easily learned. Fanny Crosby's contribution to this genre is unequalled. Dozens of her hymns continue to find a place in the hymnals of Protestant evangelicalism around the world.

Fanny Crosby died on February 12, 1915, in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where she is buried.



Rite I O God, the blessed assurance of all who trust in thee: We give thanks for thy servant Fanny Crosby, and pray that we, inspired by her words and example, may rejoice to sing ever of thy love, praising our Savior; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Rite II O God, the blessed assurance of all who trust in you: We give you thanks for your servant Fanny Crosby, and pray that we, inspired by her words and example, may rejoice to sing ever of your love, praising our Savior; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

For Liturgical Celebration: [Common of an Artist, Writer, or Composer, A27] [Common of a Saint, A23]