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The Lord’s Dance

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A Prelude on the melody *Simple Gifts*

This now familiar tune was written by the Shaker Elder Joseph Brackett (1797-1882) in 1848. Brackett, a lifelong resident of Maine, first joined the Shakers at Gorham, Maine; his father's farm helped to form the nucleus of a new Shaker settlement. The original "Simple Gifts" words were written by Elder Joseph at the Shaker community in Alfred, Maine. Many have assumed that the tune of "Simple Gifts" was a traditional Celtic one but both the music and original lyrics are actually the compositions of Brackett.

The song was largely unknown outside Shaker communities until Aaron Copland used its melody for the score of Martha Graham's ballet *Appalachian Spring*, first performed in 1944. Copland used "Simple Gifts" a second time in 1950 in his first set of *Old American Songs* for voice and piano, which was later orchestrated.

"Simple Gifts" has been adapted or arranged many times since by folksingers and composers. Probably the best known version is by English songwriter Sydney Carter, who adapted the Shaker tune for his song "Lord of the Dance", published in 1963. In this form it appears in many recent or contemporary hymn books.