

# AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

KATHARINE LEE BATES  
1895, 1911

## TEXT (1911)

- (1) O Beautiful  
For spacious skies,  
For amber waves of grain,  
For purple mountain majesties,  
Above the fruited plain.  
America, America,  
God shed His grace on thee,  
And crown thy good with brotherhood,  
From sea to shining sea.
- (2) O beautiful for pilgrim feet,  
Whose stern, impassioned  
stress A thoroughfare for  
freedom beat Across the  
wilderness!  
America! America!  
God mend thine every flaw,  
Confirm thy soul in self-control,  
Thy liberty in law!
- (3) O beautiful for heroes  
proved In liberating strife,  
Who more than self their country  
loved, And mercy more than life!  
America! America!  
May God thy gold refine,  
Till all success be  
nobleness, And every gain  
divine!
- (4) O beautiful for patriot  
dream That sees beyond the  
years Thine alabaster cities  
gleam Undimmed by human  
tears! America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee  
And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!

## POST-SESSION REACTIONS

Scan the QR code or go to [tinyurl.com/faith250](https://tinyurl.com/faith250)-reactions to answer a few brief Questions to help us understand your experience and better plan for future meetings.



## HISTORY

Katherine Lee Bates wrote “America the Beautiful” in 1893 and then revised it twice, combining the poem with music composed by Samuel Wald in the final version. Bates wrote the poem while traveling across the country and incorporated images from places she visited, including the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition (Chicago World’s Fair) and Pike’s Peak.

Bates was a social worker and advocate for social justice. She was deeply involved in the settlement house movement, through which educated women lived among and tried to improve the lives of poorer people. She was also an avid suffragist.

The period during which the poem was written coincides with the contentious transition from the Gilded Age to the Progressive movement. The former was filled with expansionist pride, while the latter denounced national problems. It was a period of growth and of turmoil for the country.

The poem combines the themes of the country’s grandeur and need for moral improvement through social change. The first and fourth stanzas celebrate America’s physical beauty. The lesser-known second and third stanzas raise questions about national power and success. Bates addresses the challenges of loving an imperfect nation experiencing political corruption and nativism sparked by increasing immigration.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When you hear “America the Beautiful,” what spiritual or moral values stand out to you, and how do they connect (or not connect) with your own beliefs or tradition?
- The song includes language like “God shed His grace on thee”—how do different traditions in this group understand the concept of divine presence in a nation?
- When people speak today of “mending America’s flaws,” (stanza 2) do you hear a connection with America’s beauty? How does such a connection affect your motivation for mending?
- What does nobleness (stanza 3) mean to you, and how should it affect the ways we use national power?
- The song speaks of ideals like grace, unity, and justice—how do these values show up in your faith or worldview?



**"How Beautiful, Our Spacious Skies"**

**How beautiful, our spacious skies, our amber waves of grain;  
our purple mountains as they rise above the fruitful plain.  
America! America! God's gracious gifts abound,  
and more and more we're grateful for life's bounty all around.**

**Indigenous and immigrant, our daughters and our sons:  
O may we never rest content till all are truly one.  
America! America! God grant that we may be  
a sisterhood and brotherhood from sea to shining sea.**

**How beautiful, sincere lament, the wisdom born of tears,  
the courage called for to repent the bloodshed through the years.  
America! America! God grant that we may be  
a nation blessed with none oppressed, true land of liberty.**

**How beautiful, two continents, and islands in the sea  
that dream of peace, nonviolence, all people living free.  
America! America! God grant that we may be  
a hemisphere where people here all live in harmony.**

(On her first trip west in the summer of 1893 the distinguished New England educator Katharine Lee Bates was inspired to write "O Beautiful for Spacious Skies." One hundred years later, in 1993, Miriam Therese Winter wrote new stanzas to clearly include all of the Americas.)

~ From the "New Century Hymnal" of the United Church of Christ Words: Miriam Therese Winter / Adapted from "America the Beautiful" by Katherine Lee Bates. © Medical Mission Sisters 1993.