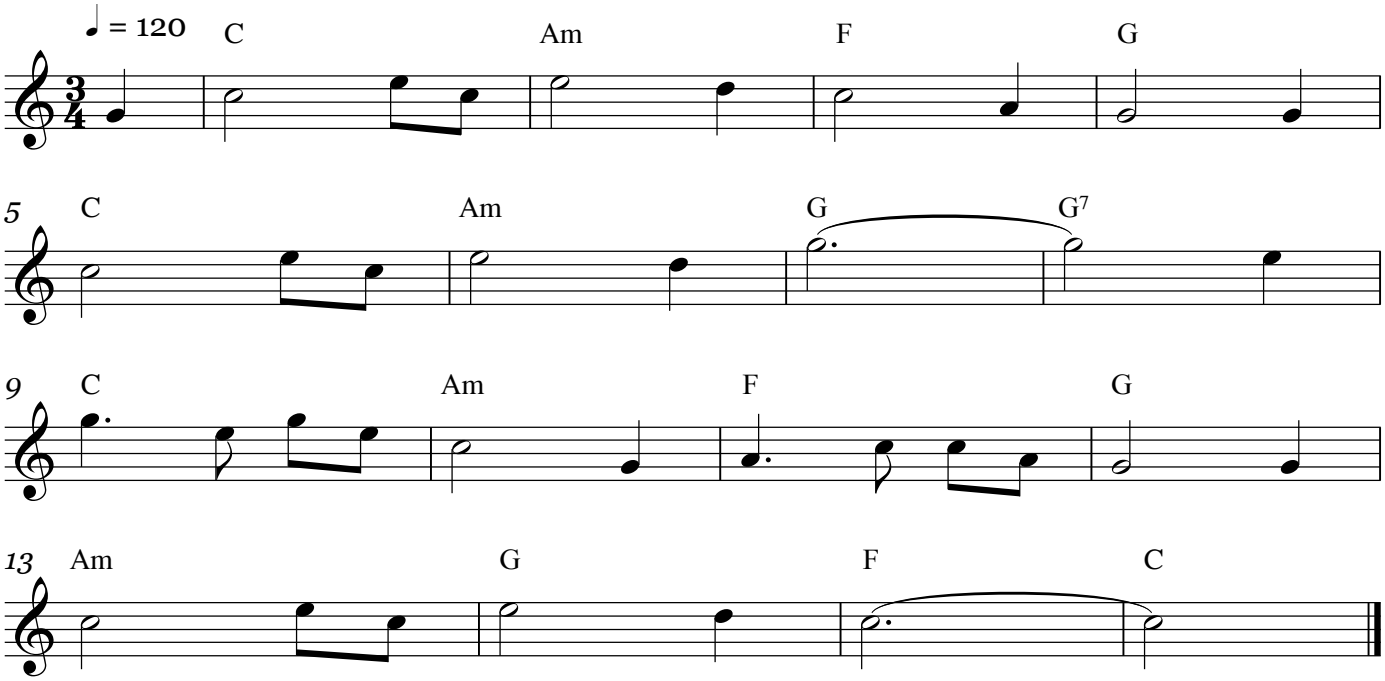
Amazing Grace

lyrics: John Newton

tune: New Britain



John Newton (1725-1807) was a sailor and slave-ship captain who, after a serious illness in 1754, renounced his slave-trading activities and sought to become an Anglican priest. After ten years of effort he received deacon's orders and took up a ministry at Olney (Buckinghamshire, England). There he began a collaboration with the poet William Cowper, and in 1779 published a volume known as the Olney Hymns, which includes Amazing Grace. The lyrics to Amazing Grace were sung to a number of tunes before they became linked to the melody of New Britain. New Britain first appeared in print in the American shape-note hymnal Columbian Harmony in 1829, and also appears in William Walker's 1835 shape-note tunebook Southern Harmony. The melody is pentatonic and may have Scottish or Irish origins.

arranged by Diane Moss, 2008. Group Tunes for Crystal Mountain Folk Harp Festival, June 2008