

Food for Thought— *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*



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Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

*Hark! The herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King
Peace on earth and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled!
Joyful all ye nations rise
Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim
Christ is born in Bethlehem
Hark! The herald angels sing,
Glory to the newborn King.*

*Christ by highest heav'n adored
Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come
Offspring of the virgin's womb
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
Hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel
Hark! The herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King.*

*Hail, the heaven-born Prince of peace!
Hail the Son of righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in his wings.
Mild He lays his glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
Glory to the newborn King.*

Charles Wesley (John Wesley's brother) wrote *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* and a number of other truly great hymns (the worship choruses of their day). And the lyrics of this Christmas carol make for excellent contemplation. I won't even try to cover all the lessons—even in just this one hymn, there are too many. Let's look, however, at just a few.

Often the first word in a book or poem or speech is very important, and this is one of those cases. The first word in this carol is "Hark," and that is an important word. It means, "listen." In our walk with God, it is truly important to listen to Him. Often, much of what we need in our spiritual walk is not so much learning new things (sometimes it is) but remembering things we already knew but hadn't thought about in quite some time. Jesus spoke to us with His words and the example of His life and actions. They show what God values, what is important and what is not. And we are also to listen to His promptings in prayer and otherwise in our daily lives.

This carol speaks of a King who came in peace and who is characterized by mercy ("mercy mild"). The gods of other religions and belief systems are not really much about mercy. They are often about judgement or fairness (even the karma of reincarnation is about judgment), but there is not much place for mercy in them. Jesus's mission was about mercy and about reconciliation between God and mankind.

The carol reminds us too that this good news is to "all nations"; this idea--a Lord whose coming and mission were for all nations--was something that had not been well understood before. Luke tells us that the angels said that they were bringing "tidings of great joy which would be to all people"—not just to the perfect people or to this or that country, but tidings of great joy to all mankind.

At the end of the first verse we see that this glory and joy was about a "newborn King." It would be 33 years before Jesus fulfilled His mission on earth—33 years before his death and resurrection. Yet the beginning of this story—His birth—is celebrated greatly. With His entrance, the story is unfolding. There is no part of Jesus's life that was unimportant. There is no part of our lives that is unimportant either. The beginnings, the middle sections, and the ends of our stories are all important to God.

The word "everlasting" near the beginning of the second verse stands out. Our relationship, the one Jesus came to seal into place, is a relationship with an "everlasting God." There is no place in time where He will not be with us. This verse of the carol also says "Late in time, behold Him come." People may have wondered why He didn't come earlier. When Isaiah was prophesying about the coming Messiah, his listeners might've assumed the Messiah would come during Isaiah's lifetime or soon thereafter. There were likely many predictions (as there still are now) about when the Messiah would come. But we find that we do not know God's timing and should not be discouraged by that fact. He knows when He will do His various works, and his timing will be right.

When Moses received the law and came back down the mountain, his face—because he'd seen a small part of God's glory--was glowing so brightly that the Israelites could not look at him--the light was too blindingly bright. So Moses wore a veil (to reduce the incredible glare and make them able to look at him) until the glory eventually faded. When the Lord came to earth, he too, in a sense, used a veil to protect our mortal eyes from the blinding glory, but his veil was the human form He came in: "Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity." This verse declares that Christ was "pleased as man with man to dwell"—He *wanted* to do this; He volunteered to do this. The gods of other religions had no desire to become human—to do so would be far beneath them and contemptible. But our Lord was pleased to do it. He willingly became our Emmanuel ("God *with* us").

In the last verse we are reminded that Jesus was "born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth." Jesus came to make the spiritual new birth a reality and to give humans eternal life. He also came to "raise the sons of earth." He came not only to bring us life after death but also to give us a new type of life, to make a new and better type of being. He raised up us from being what we were naturally and left to our own devices and raised us up to become a **new type** of persons, new creations in Him. And He showed the world (and each individual who follows him) a new way of living, a way that could've only been made possible by Him.