



## TIME OF GRACE®

### Week 2: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing Study Notes

#### Summary

What does "hark" even mean? And what about "herald"? Those answers are somewhat easy. But it's the rest of "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" that will get our brains working and our hearts swelling as we realize just how amazing it is that Jesus came down to earth for us. Pastor Mike continues this series that digs into the meaning of our favorite classic Christmas carols.

- **Luke 2:13-14** —<sup>13</sup> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”
- Verse 1 —  
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 angelic host proclaim  
Christ is born in Bethlehem
- **Philippians 2**— “Jesus...being in very nature God...made in human likeness.”
- Verse 2 —  
Christ by highest heaven adored  
Christ the everlasting Lord  
Late in time behold Him come  
Offspring of a virgin's womb  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see  
Hail the incarnate Deity  
Pleased as man with man to dwell  
Jesus our Emmanuel



- Verse 3 —

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

## Points to Ponder

1. Have you picked out your Christmas Eve worship time?
2. Listen to *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* at least five times this week. As you enjoy the music, focus on the message of who Jesus was and what Jesus did for you.
3. Now is the time to invite just one person to join you on Christmas Eve. Reach out this week, before holiday schedules are booked, and invite someone to hear the good news of Jesus' birth.

## Homework for Next Week

Read Luke 2:1-20

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Hark! The Herald Angels Sing**  
Luke 2:13-14, Philippians 2  
December 17, 2023

*Pastor Mike Novotny*

If you're the kind of person who loves those peaceful Christian Christmas songs; the ones where the stars twinkle in the sky above that little manger with the peaceful baby and the cows are lowing but not too loud to wake him up. The ones that you just can push play and take a deep breath, just relax your mind after the end of a long stressful day, and just sense this heavenly peace washing over your soul. If you like songs like that, you're going to hate today.

Today I want to take you deep into one of Christmas' classic songs called, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." And I just want to warn you up front, as a pastor, this song is the exact opposite of all that. "Away in a Manger" has a lot of time for the stars, and the baby Jesus, and the cows, and his beautiful mother. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," has zero time for that.

There are some Christmas songs that spend about half of the measures and the beats with, 'Gloroooooooooooo-ria' "Let's do it again." 'Gloroooooooooooo-ria' I didn't hear you the first time. 'Glorooooo' Hark says, "No! No! Those are precious measures. I only have so many beats until this song ends and I want to fill your heart with something much more than repetition."

I want to be really up front today that this is not the Sunday to relax. If you're watching at home and have your phone on, you're kind of two-screening it. This is the moment where you need to shut your phone off and put it away. If you're slouching in your chair, I need you to sit up straight. If your pen is somewhere else, I need you to grab it, click it, grab a bulletin, get ready to take notes. Because what we're about to study is the opposite of a theological twinkie, alright? It's not light, it's not fluffy, it's not convenient, it's not easy, it's more like a barrel-aged bourbon stout. A rich robust cabernet. You don't chug it, you don't slam it, you just sip it, and you shouldn't drink too much of it too fast. What we're about to study actually has so much theology, and so much meaning, and so much depth; that I'm going to spend this entire message not with some fancy introduction, but digging in verse by verse by verse. All three verses of what I think is the most profound and perhaps spiritually helpful song that Christmas has to offer.

I want to warn you, because your brain is going to need to work. But I also want to entice you, because if your brain is willing to do the work, your heart might just reap the rewards. Because this song, which was written by Charles Wesley back in the early 1700s, is about to offer you this. If there's just 1% of your heart that wonders where you're at with God, if maybe you started following Jesus too late, or there's just too much in your past to get over and past; Hark wants a word with you. If you're one of those people who feels misunderstood and overwhelmed, like your mom doesn't get it, your dad doesn't get it, your best friend doesn't get it. What you're going through, the stress, and the pressure, the day-to-day things that you feel, that's you, this song

wants to speak to you. And if you're one of those rare people who has actually thought not just about life, but about death. If you've come face to face with your own mortality because of a sickness, or age, or you've just realized that maybe there's more behind you than in front of you. And if that makes you feel uneasy, or uncertain, instead of excited, and exuberant, man this is the perfect song for you.

So, I'm not going to promise you the next few minutes are going to be easy or convenient. This is not the church service to relax. Instead, I need you to power up your brain as much as you can. Slam that coffee real quick, because I want to unpack for you the words of the classic song, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." I think if you pay attention, you will not regret it.

Back in 1739, Charles Wesley was reading this verse in the Bible, and it inspired him to write this classic song. In Luke 2, he found these words, "Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host --" host means army. "A great company of heavenly host appeared with the angel," who was speaking to the shepherds about Jesus' birth. "And all of them together were praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.' Those are the verses that inspired the song.

And now if you're ready, here's what the song says. verse one,  
 "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 angelic host proclaim  
 Christ is born in Bethlehem"

You might be the black sheep of your family or the best of the bunch. You might have been super religious your whole life or brand-new to this. You might have tons of regrets or a few. But because you and I are human, and because humans are flawed, and because on our -- even our best days we stumble and we sin. The difference between you, and me, and God, is greater than the difference between you, and me, and the sun in the sky. Could you stand on the surface of the sun? Uh-huh. There's something about the way the sun is and the way that we are that just doesn't fit together. If you put on SPF 1000, could you make it? If you tried harder, wore the right clothes? No, there's something about you and it that can't fit together.

And the Bible says the same thing is true spiritually with us and God. He's not just like the best version of us. He's not like 50% nicer and 75% wiser. The gap between humans and the holiness of God, he blazes with love, and patience, and goodness. He's good with a caps lock "G-O-O-D." He's infinitely wise, and pure, and holy. And because He's so good, even if you're the best of us here on earth, you are light-years away. And that's why the angels are saying, "Hark, you're not going to believe this. God and sinners reconciled." This newborn King, Jesus, was born to bring peace to people on earth, so we wouldn't panic and think there was no chance. So, we won't just

hope for the best, that God forgot about the bad things that we did. Jesus was born, he lived, and then he died so that this crazy phrase could be true. Me and you, God and sinners reconciled.

I recently heard that Oprah back in 2013 was giving this speech at Harvard. And in the speech, she was telling this really intelligent, a talented graduate, something about human beings. Oprah in her very, very long interviewing career had met all kinds of people; multiple presidents, pop stars, military heroes, and she revealed that after her interviews were done almost everyone, no matter who they were, asked her the exact same question. Once the camera stopped filming, once the microphones were cut, people would lean into her. President Bush leaned in and asked her, President Obama leaned in and asked, Beyonce leaned in and asked her the exact same question. The question was, "Was that good? Did I do okay?"

In fact, she said, "One time Beyonce is giving a show. You can imagine the Oprah crowd going crazy for Beyonce. I mean she kills it, she got the backup dancers, everyone's going wild, you know, she is their idol. The cameras cut, Beyonce hands the mic to Oprah and what did she say? "Was that okay?" And Oprah pointed out to these Harvard Students, "It doesn't matter how smart you are, it doesn't matter how talented you are, it doesn't matter how beautiful you are, how powerful you are. You could be the President, you could be the Queen B, you could be anyone, but at the end of the day there's this voice inside of the human heart that whispers, "Am I okay? Did I do good enough?"

And if we asked that about Oprah, imagine God. And that's why the angels declare -- a whole army of them came with news that was so good that Jesus was born so that you and God could be good. Now some of you, you can't get past that one thing in your past. The one thing you said before your dad died. That one moment of infidelity in your relationship. The words that just haunt you in the back of your brain. Others of you came to church so late in your life, you just have a wrecked relational history and there's no rewind button to fix it. For a thousand different reasons all of us with a whisper or a shout in our heart wonder, "Am I okay?"

Here's the angel's answer, "If you have Jesus, God leans in and says, 'We're good.'" If the problem with God and you was sin, light-years of sin, and if Jesus came to take every last bit of it away, then there's nothing in the way of you and God being good. You're safe. You're saved. You can sing with the angels.

This is why it says, "Joyful all ye nations rise." I don't care where you're from. You could be Asian, you could be American, you could be Mexican, you could be Hmong. Wherever you are from, get up with joy, sing with the angels, Christ has been born, the Savior of the world who makes God and sinners reconciled. Philippians 2 in the New Testament describes that Jesus in this way. It says, "Jesus, being in very nature God." Is God from his very nature "was made in human likeness." He was made human. The Father never became human, the Holy Spirit never became human, but Jesus, God the Son, became human.

God, human, one person that's what Hark verse two wants to tell you.  
 "Christ by highest heaven adored  
 Christ the everlasting Lord

Late in time behold him come  
 Offspring of a virgin's womb  
 Veiled in flesh the Godhead see  
 Hail the incarnate Deity.  
 Pleased as man with man to dwell  
 Jesus our Emmanuel.”

Alright, Jesus is God. He's not just a guy, he's God. I think this verse says that in six different ways. First, he's by the highest heaven adored. Go to Heaven, go to the highest ranks, the most experienced angel and that angel is adoring someone that's even higher than him, who's Jesus. Which must mean that Jesus is God. Number two, he's everlasting. He lasts forever, no beginning, no end. He's eternal unlike any created thing or human being. Which means he's God. He's the Lord, which means he's the ultimate authority. He gets the last word which must be God. If you see Jesus, you see the Godhead. That's a fancy phrase that just means God. He's called the incarnate Deity. Deity is a word that just means God and his nickname is Emmanuel. So, EL in Hebrew means God.

So, if you have a name like Michael, or Rachel, or Nathaniel, or Daniel, the Hebrew name God is in your name. Emmanuel is just Hebrew for God with us. So, who is the one who's with us? God. Emmanuel. One, two, three, four, five, six different ways this verse is trying to say to you, "Hey, if you think Jesus was just a nice guy, uh-huh he's God. If you think he just started some religion 2,000 years ago. Nope, he's more than that. He's God. If you think he was a wise teacher who taught us to love our neighbor, turn the other cheek, be nice to our enemies, those things are all true times a million because he is God and he's human.

Did you catch that too? It says, "Late in time behold him come." So, in time, God is outside of time and space but he entered into it. And I could be wrong about this, but I think late in time means that Jesus was born as a human later than Old Testament believers thought. So, it's kind of a quirk of the Hebrew. Adam and Eve when they had their first kid, Cain, they thought he was going to be the promised Messiah cause God made them that promise. No, the Messiah was a little bit later than that. And Abraham thought he was right around the corner. And David wrote songs about the coming Savior. Isaiah had all these prophecies 700 years before it happened.

So later in time, God kept his promise, but later than expected. Behold your God is coming in human flesh. He's the offspring of a virgin's womb. Born of a woman named, Mary, a human, because he is human. I love this line, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see." Wives, how many of you wore a veil on your wedding? Yeah, you know what a veil does? A veil -- you can see a veil, but you can see something else behind a veil. And so veiled in flesh means that if you look at Jesus you could see his flesh, he's a human being. His hands, you can give him a hug, you can shake his hand, touch his feet. And yet behind his humanity you could see something more. "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see."

When Jesus would walk on water you would see his body and say, "He's not just like my buddies. He's so much more." When he would multiply fishes and loaves you would say, "My brother can't do that." So, behind his humanity you could see his divinity. "Veiled in flesh the

Godhead see. Hail the incarnate Deity" Deity means God. Incarnate. There's a word to impress your friends with next time you're out for a drink. Incarnate means "in flesh". So, a carnivore is something that eats flesh. Incarnate is God in flesh. Incarnate Deity is a way of saying God in human flesh.

And finally, "Pleased as man with man to dwell," so he dwelled with us as a human being, but he was truly man. God, man, one person, that's Jesus. Give me double thumbs up if you got it. If you don't, I'm going to start over and it's going to take a long time. Now, some of you are not going to say this out loud, but you're thinking, "Boring. That part was kind of boring. Thank you for the technical definition of who Jesus is." It seems, you know, theological and technical, but I would tell you this, when you think about it, it's actually profoundly, emotional, spiritual, and beautiful.

I thought of this theological truth last summer. My family and I took this epic road trip. We stopped in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We went to this incredible museum of the American Revolution and there we saw with our very own eyes the tent of George Washington. You should really google this. For over 250 years the tent of George Washington has been passed on, bought, and sold by pastors, and slaves, and people. It's actually made -- they have it on display at this museum. But before the curtain came up and we got to see the tent, we got kind of the museum hype about it.

And to be completely honest I kind of thought they were over selling it more than just a little bit. The printed brochure was like, "An unforgettable experience that will move you to tears." I thought, "I dare you." I should not have dared them. Before the curtains come up this video starts playing and it tells the story of George Washington and the Revolutionary War. He's this really respected, gifted general. But instead of, you know, living, dwelling away from his soldiers, he sets up his tent right in the midst of them. And even though he could have been at Mount Vernon, even though he could have run away to the comfort of family and friends, he didn't. When the winters were bitterly cold, right there in the midst of them was the general. When the summers were sweltering sweaty hot, he didn't run for cooler climates, he stayed right in the midst of them. Who does that? He's like the CEO of the company having a cubicle in the midst of the interns, instead of the corner office. This is like mom and dad sleeping on the camping mats that deflate in the middle of the night while the little kids are in the master bedroom. Who has the authority and the position, but gives it up for the sake of others?

I'm hearing about George Washington, but my Christian brain is thinking of Jesus. Who had all the comforts of Heaven and gave it up to dwell among his people? Who had every right to escape from the pain of the human experience but instead chose to enter in it, so he could lead us to a great spiritual victory, who would do that? George did it for a little bit. God in human flesh did it for 33 straight years. As I'm thinking about the profound humility and beauty of Jesus, of course that's a time when the music swells, and the curtain comes up, and the lights flash on, and I'll show you a picture of what I looked at, the tent of General George Washington. Stunning, it was moving -- the brochure did not over sell it.



And "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing," isn't over selling Jesus either. Hail, worship him, bend a knee, and weep over the manger of Jesus. Who being in very nature God would be made in human likeness. The Bible says that because Jesus did that.

He gets you. I think it's Hebrews 2. It says, that "He himself suffered when he was tempted." He knows what it's like to feel human weakness. Have you been hungry? Jesus was too. Thirsty? Yeah. Tired? Yeah. You ever had a long exhausting day you just collapsed at the end of it? Jesus did. Ever had drama with your family? Jesus did. Ever been betrayed by a friend? Jesus did. Ever been hurt by the church? Jesus did. Ever been taken out of context, your words twisted? People thinking about things about you that are simply are not true? You ever felt pain? Excruciating pain? Torturous pain? Because God didn't stay comfortable in Heaven but made his dwelling among us, because he was Emmanuel, God with us, he gets it.

The Bible says, "He sympathizes when you're hurting. He feels compassion when you're suffering." When you've been through it, you're not the first. Your pain is not un-understandable because Jesus took on human flesh. He's God, human with us. Man, that thought makes me want to say amen and sing but I got one more verse to cover today.

"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."

If I asked you in the church lobby who is Jesus, you would say God and man in one person. If I asked you why was Jesus God and man in one person, this would be a great answer, he was born to give me second birth. It's a technical Bible term. You might have heard of the phrase, being born again. Same idea. The concept is that when someone is born, they're pushed into a whole new kind of life, right? You probably don't remember this, your mother does. The first time you were born you were pushed by her into a whole new kind of existence. Brand-new life outside the womb. Everything was different.

The Bible says that when you're born again, not your mother, but the Holy Spirit pushes you spiritually into a whole new kind of life where everything is different. What you value is different. What you love the most is different. How you think, how you behave, what you believe. This is really Bible slang that's talking about being a Christian, repenting of sin, trusting in Jesus. The reason he came is that so you could have a whole new kind of life. And I'm going to steal a kind of famous phrase that I didn't invent that says this, "When you're born just once you die twice, but if you're born twice, you only die once."

Can you crack that riddle? Born just once. You're just born physically but you have no spiritual connection to Jesus you're not born again. You'll die physically of age, or cancer, or an accident,



or whatever, and then because there's no Savior to save you, you'll die eternally. You'll be separated from God. You're not good enough to stand in his presence no matter how good you might feel.

But, if you come to faith in Jesus and you're born again, if you have not just a physical birth but a spiritual rebirth, you only die once. You still die physically. The cancer still comes to Christians. The tragedy still happens to believing families. But after that death is over there is no second death, there is just eternal life. The reason the news of Jesus is such good news that the angels want your attention is because if you look at the birth of Jesus, and then his life, and then his death, and then his resurrection; what you end up with through faith is a second birth.

Today could be your day to come to Jesus to receive the light of the world, to be born again, a whole new kind of life where you give up a little, but you gain so much more. Some smart angels. "Hark, hey, you and God good." God and man, Jesus in one person born so that you could be born again. What a song and what a Savior. Let's pray.

Oh God this news is -- it almost feels too good to be true. If there's some commercial, some YouTube ad that told us our pain would be over forever, we wouldn't believe it. We'd skip it. But you're telling us that maybe not today, or tomorrow, or next year but you have promised us a life of happiness, and peace, and hope, and joy. That seems hard to believe, God, and so you give us the faith to believe it. And for all of us who follow Jesus, we are one step closer to a happiness that words simply could not describe.

God, I'm praying big for people here today who are just uncertain. They've been watching at home, they been coming to church, they're not all in with Jesus. Open their eyes to see that what he's offering is infinitely better than everything this world treasures. And I pray God that you would hold on to us in the difficulties of this earth. Jesus, you know what it's like, you know what it's like to be here and to walk in our shoes. You did for 33 straight years.

So, sustain us, and strengthen us, give us everything that we need to get up in the morning with joy and to lie down at night with peace. We pray all these things God, with confidence and with hope, because we know who we are, those who've been born again, and we know who you are, our Heavenly Father who's given us new life. So, we pray all these things in Jesus' name. And God's people say, Amen.