

The Songs of Christmas

ADVENT: Day 8

"HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING"

*Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"*

*Joyful, all ye nations, rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With th'angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"*

*Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!"*

Did you know that this song could have been titled "Hark! How All the Welkin Rings"? In its original version, that was the first line.

Thankfully, a pastor saw fit to update a few words so that his congregation—and Christians today—could understand what the original writer intended.

Had he not, I have to imagine this celebratory song might have faded away, just like our usage of the word welkin.

The story behind the song

George Whitefield was a powerful preacher in England in the 1700s. When he created his hymnal called *Collection*, he made several changes to ancient hymns.

In "Hark!", he knew that welkin meant the heavens or angels, but most of the people in his church didn't. The word had already faded from popular usage by then.

Consequently, Whitefield rewrote the first line so people would better understand the meaning of the hymn. ("Welkin rings" essentially meant "angels making a loud noise.") Aren't you glad he did?

Celebrating Easter at Christmas

An old joke in Christian circles goes something like this: "I attend church religiously: every Christmas and every Easter."

A bittersweet truth resides in such a statement: A lot of people come to church during the Christmas season who don't come very often the rest of the year. They may come because they like to think about the birth of Christ and sing the Christmas hymns. Or they may have been dragged along by family or friends.

Still, they're there, in church, hearing about Christ at Christmas. Yet, we ought to invite people to experience Jesus *all year*.

We may celebrate Jesus' birth at Christmas, but the last stanza of "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" reminds us of why he was born:

*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 son of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! The herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!"*

Jesus was born so we could one day be raised again to eternal life. Christmas is about Easter too. Jesus came to give us "second birth."

Will you look around and help others know?

If so, you announce the same *glory* the "welkin" announced that first Christmas.

"The Songs Tell the Story"
An Advent Devotional By: Janet Denison