

The Songs of Christmas

ADVENT: Day 20

"ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH"

*Angels we have heard on high
Sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply
Echoing their joyous strains.*

Gloria, in excelsis Deo!

Raise your hand if you've ever lip-synched a hymn at church.

Yes, I'm raising my hand right now.

I distinctly remember the guilt I felt one Sunday morning during the Christmas season when the congregation stood to sing "Angels We Have Heard on High." When we got to the chorus—"Glo-oooo-oooo—oooo—ooria, in excelsis Deeee—eeee-oooo!"—I just pretended to sing all those syllables.

"Angels" is a beautiful song, but I'm not a very talented singer. I love the words of this French Christmas carol, but I wish it had come with more "singable" music.

The story behind the song

What does "Gloria, in excelsis Deo" mean, anyway?

I looked it up: "Glory to God in the highest."

When we sing (or lip-synch with focused intent) the chorus of "Angels We Have Heard on High," we are echoing the words of the angels who proclaimed to the shepherds that their Messiah had been born. The chorus and music were written to feel like a mountain "echo" of the joyous words the angels sang.

An invitation to worship

"Angels" was written as an invitation for others to join with the church in a celebration of Christ during the Christmas season. One stanza says:

*Come to Bethlehem and see
Him whose birth the angels sing,
Come, adore on bended knee,
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.*

We often invite people to Christmas parties during this time of year. “Angels” reminds us that we need to invite them to worship the Christ of Christmas. He is the most important “reason for the season.”

Who would come to church with you this Sunday, if you asked?

Who would enjoy singing carols with a congregation and the chance to go to your Bible class?

Who might hear and understand the real story of Christmas for the first time if you give them an invitation?

Pray about asking.

Then, be brave and ask.

There are a lot of people in your church who are there every Sunday because someone invited them to come. (Tell them it’s okay if they can’t really sing. This preacher’s wife has been getting away with it every week!)

Gloria, in excelsis Deo.

Glory to God in the highest.

Jesus invites all of us to worship—even if we can’t sing.

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