

## Day 14: Go, Tell It on the Mountain

Dec. 11

Refrain: *Go tell it on the mountain,  
over the hills and everywhere;  
go tell it on the mountain  
that Jesus Christ is born!*

*1 While shepherds kept their watching  
o'er silent flocks by night,  
behold throughout the heavens  
there shone a holy light. [Refrain]*

*2 The shepherds feared and trembled  
when lo! above the earth  
rang out the angel chorus  
that hailed our Savior's birth. [Refrain]*

*3 Down in a lowly manger  
the humble Christ was born,  
and God sent us salvation  
that blessed Christmas morn. [Refrain]*

**How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” (Isaiah 52:7)**

John Wesley Work, Jr. was a pioneer in the study of African American folk music, with a special emphasis on spirituals. In 1907 he published the rousing Christmas song, *Go, Tell It on the Mountain*, whose original author is unknown. It is suspected that Work himself penned the lyrics to the song's three verses, but attached these to an existing African American chorus that dates back to at least 1865. The chorus was commonly heard in the Appalachian Mountains during that period.

*Go, Tell It on the Mountain* is unusually arranged in that it both begins and ends with the chorus. That chorus calls every believer to serve as an evangelist, “Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere; go tell it on the mountain ...” And indeed, we have a message to tell, one that is urgent and must be distributed to everyone, everywhere. And what is that message? “That Jesus Christ is born!”

The image of a messenger on the mountains reflects the Appalachian roots of the song, yes, but it reflects farther back, all the way to Scripture itself. Isaiah 52:7 asserts that the very feet of messengers bearing good news are beautiful. Their message is of peace and salvation, declaring, “Your God reigns.” Later the prophet Nahum (1:15) also speaks of messengers on the mountains, as does the apostle Paul in Romans 10.

The scriptural allusions are on point because in every case, the announcement concerns our deliverance from some form of slavery, whether to an invading power or to the dominion of sin and death. This adds both power and poignancy to a song grown from the depths of pre-Civil War African American soil.

The first verse of *Go, Tell It on the Mountain* notes the shepherds' first encounter with the good news while tending their flocks out in their fields that night. That's when they experienced "a holy light." Having seen this, everyone belts out the chorus, once again urging us all to "Go, tell it on the mountain," as a natural outgrowth of this marvelous visitation.

Verse 2 recounts: "The shepherds feared and trembled" at seeing the light, which was then followed with an even more powerful "angel chorus that hailed our Savior's birth." And again, we must: "Go tell it on the mountain."

In the final verse, we see the humble babe himself, born "in a lowly manger." But make no mistake, what was really happening is this: "God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn." Ultimately, Christmas is not merely a homey, warm-hearted story of a humble birthday. Instead, it marks the amazing appearance of our one true deliverer, Christ the Lord who has come to free us and make us his own.

So, yes, "Go, tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere ... Jesus Christ is born!"

## Questions

1. In what ways do your family roots color your telling of the biblical story?
2. Who do you know that most urgently needs to hear the message of a deliverer?
3. What are two or three ways you can tell the good news of Jesus to someone today?

## Prayer

Jesus, you were born many centuries ago as the deliverer, and indeed in your name much deliverance has been accomplished. And yet we see peoples all around us who have not heard the good news or at least not heeded it. Help us today and for the remainder of our days to go as messengers bearing the good news of your coming, Jesus, until you come again. Amen.