

Hymn Study

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Background

- First published in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* in 1737 as “Hymn for Christmas-Day”
 - Appears as ten stanzas of four lines, eight of which have been combined to form the present text.
- Text Author – Charles Wesley (1707-1808)
 - Aided his brother John in forming the Methodists in the mid-1700's.
 - Wrote over 6,500 hymns
- Tune Composer – Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
 - German composer of classical music.
 - William Cummings adapted the tune in 1855 from Mendelssohn's 1846 cantata *Festgesand an die Kunstler*.
- Technical information
 - Meter – 7.7.7.7.7.7.7.7 (rare) or 7.7.7.7 D with refrain
 - Rhyme – AABBCDDEE
 - Refrain – Some books have it repeat the last line of the verse.

Text Analysis

- Verse 1
 - Hark! the herald angels sing, “Glory to the newborn King.”
 - Luke 2:8-14
 - These first lines were famously altered by George Whitefield in 1753. Wesley's original was “Hark how all the welkin [sky/heaven] rings, Glory to the King of kings”
 - Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!”
 - Romans 5:10, II Corinthians 5:19
 - Joyful, all ye nations, rise; join the triumph of the skies;
 - Psalm 67:4, Isaiah 49:13
 - with the angelic hosts proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!”
 - Luke 2:11
- Verse 2
 - Christ by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord,
 - Micah 5:2 – “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”
 - late in time behold Him come, offspring of the virgin's womb.
 - Galatians 4:4, Isaiah 7:14
 - Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail the incarnate Deity,
 - John 1:14, Romans 1:20
 - Incarnate – “embodied in human form”

- pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.
 - Matthew 1:23
 - Emmanuel – “God with us”
- Verse 3
 - Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness!
 - Isaiah 9:6, Malachi 4:2
 - Light and life to all He brings, ris'n with healing in His wings.
 - John 1:4, Malachi 4:2
 - Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die,
 - Romans 6:10-11, Philippians 2:7-8
 - born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth.
 - John 3:3, I Peter 1:3
- Verse 4
 - Come, Desire of nations, come, fix in us Thy humble home;
 - Haggai 2:7, John 1:14
 - rise, the woman's conqu'ring Seed, bruise in us the serpent's head.
 - Genesis 3:15
 - Adam's likeness now efface, stamp Thine image in its place;
 - I Corinthians 15:49
 - Second Adam from above, reinstate us in Thy love.
 - I Corinthians 15:45