

Worship Christ the newborn King  
December 26, 2021 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

Given that today is the day after Christmas, I thought that it would be appropriate for us this morning to look at a carol that brings together the whole of the Christmas story. Everybody's here – the angels, the shepherds, the wise men – they're all crammed together into this carol.

And they're not the only things crammed into this carol – James Montgomery, who wrote the words, clearly knew his Bible because there are a ton of biblical references in this song – so I want to go through and highlight them all for you.

So let's look together at 'Angels from the realms of glory' and think about what the angels, the shepherds, the wise men, what WE are ultimately called to do in light of Christmas.

So, verse 1 –

Angels, from the realms of glory  
wing their flight o'er all the earth;  
Ye who sang creation's story  
now proclaim Messiah's birth.

So right off the top, Montgomery puts us in the fields around Bethlehem. It's Christmas Eve, the very first Christmas eve, and angels are filling the skies around Bethlehem with song. Normally, the angels would be in the heavens – the realms of glory – but now they've come to earth to announce some incredible news – the Messiah, the long awaited Messiah – has been born.

Now that's a pretty amazing event, but it's not the only amazing event that these angels have seen. When the author calls them 'y'all who sang creation's story,' he's reminding us that they were there when God created the world. Job 38 tells us that the angels were there when God created the heavens and the earth and guess what they were doing? Singing.

Job 38:4-7 – God is interrogating Job, reminding him who's God and who's not and He says:

4 "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand.  
5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it?  
6 On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone--  
7 while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?  
(Job 38:4-7 NIV).

God gives us this detail in Job that is missing from Genesis 1 and 2; when God spoke the world into being, when He laid its foundations and its cornerstone, the angels were there. They were the heavenly choir providing background music for the creation of the earth in all its goodness.

James Montgomery takes that detail and says – 'You angels, you privileged beings, who watched God create the earth, you are now bearers of the news that God is going to redeem the earth.' That's why God sent the Messiah – He sent the Messiah to deliver His people. And now that the Messiah has come, the angels who sang for joy on day one of Creation are now singing for joy on Day one of redemption.

And what does our carol call them to do in light of that? Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ the newborn king.

The angels aren't above the Messiah; far from it. They worship Him, just like we do. In fact, Hebrews 1:6 says - <6 And again,> when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." (Heb 1:6 NIV). That's exactly what the angels were doing when God brought His firstborn into the world; they were singing to worship this newborn king. They saw God create the world; now they're seeing Him redeem the world and in light of that, the carol calls them to worship the king.

So that's verse 1. Verse 2. We move from the angels to the shepherds –

Shepherds, in the fields abiding,  
Watching o'er your flocks by night, (Ok, so we're in Luke 2 – the shepherds are out watching their flocks by night, when all of a sudden, the angels appear and they start singing -).

God with man is now residing / Yonder shines the infant Light:

Now Luke doesn't record the angels saying that, but they very well could have, because those are very biblical words to describe what was going on in Bethlehem, aren't they? God with man is now residing – where have we heard that before? John 1:14 – The Word became flesh and dwelt among us; God resides with man, ie. 'God is with us' – that's Matthew 1:18 - 23 "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"--which means, "God with us." (Mat 1:23 NIV). And of course John 1:9 says that the light of the world entered the world to lay in a manger and that carol says 'Over yonder shines the infant light.'

In short then, this verse tells the shepherds that Immanuel has come, that the light of the world has entered the world and that God Himself has come in the flesh to rescue them.

And what does our author call them to do in light of these realities? Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ the newborn king.

In light of the news that God has come in the flesh to be with His people, to rescue His people, this carol calls the shepherds to worship the newborn king.

That's verse 2. Verse 3.

Sages, leave your contemplations / Brighter visions beam afar;

Who's this talking about? Who are the sages? The Magi, the three wise men. These were Babylonian astrologers who studied the sky in order to predict what would happen on earth. Montgomery though here says 'Guys, lay aside your pagan philosophies because something better, someone better has come.' And then he advises them -

Seek the great Desire of nations / Ye have seen His natal star;

Montgomery essentially says 'get your head out of clouds and seek the great Desire of nations – the star has already told you where to find Him.'

Now this is really interesting. The reference here – the desire of nations - is from Haggai 2:7. In the KJV which Montgomery would have used, it said ‘I will shake all the nations and the desire of all nations shall come and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts.’

This idea of ‘the desire of the nations’ who would come from God really caught on with song writers of this era and it appears again and again in their carols. It’s in ‘O come, o come Emmanuel’ – O come Desire of nations come... It’s in a lesser known verse of Hark! The herald angels sing – ‘Come, Desire of nations, come! Fix in us Thy humble home.’ Charles Wesley actually wrote a carol called ‘Come desire of nations come.’<sup>i</sup>

So what exactly is this great desire of nations? Well, I’ll put it to you like this. The period when Haggai 2 was written was a really turbulent one. Everything seemed up in the air, everybody was in flux and it seemed that there was no end to the problems that the people of God faced. In Haggai 2:7, God says ‘I will send the solution to all of your problems; I will send you a ‘great white hope’ as it were’ and He calls that solution ‘the desire of nations.’

The ‘desire of nations’ then is the person sent by God to set things right; who is that person? It’s Jesus. He’s the desire of the nations. He’s God’s solution to the problems of conflict and turmoil and death.

And Montgomery uses that language here to say – ‘Wise men – the answer you’re seeking is right under your nose. Well, technically He’s under a star – which you have seen – His natal star – that is, His nativity star, His ‘birth star.’

So the carol ultimately says – Wise men, you’ve seen the answer to all your problems; you’ve seen the star that marks the place where He lays. In light of all that, what does the carol say they should do?

Come and worship, come and worship,  
Worship Christ, the new born King.

The carol calls the magi to leave behind their pagan philosophies and to come and worship this newborn king. And we know from Matthew 2:2 that’s exactly what they did. They get to Jerusalem and then ask: "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." (Mat 2:2 NIV). And then when they get there, verse 11 –

11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. (Mat 2:11 NIV).

The wise men leave their pagan pursuits to find the desire of nations and when they get there, they worship Him. That’s verse 3, verse 4 -

Saints before the altar bending  
Watching long in hope and fear,  
Suddenly the Lord, descending,  
In His temple shall appear:

Now, weirdly, a lot of hymnbooks leave this verse out. I don’t know why – maybe we don’t associate the people it’s talking about with the Christmas story – but we should. I mean, if we’re going to include

the wise men, who came, like two years after Jesus was born, then surely we should include Simeon and Anna, who met Jesus when He was about a month old.

That's who these 'saints before the altar bending' are. Remember Simeon and Anna in Luke 2? Simeon is a devout man, waiting for the consolation of Israel. Anna is a prophetess, who prays at the temple day and night. They're the ones who have been watching, waiting, long in hope and fear for the Lord to come and make things right.

You see, in Malachi, in the midst of another time of turbulence and tribulation, God promised that He Himself would return to deliver His people. Malachi 3:1 says -

"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. (Mal 3:1 NIV).

In Malachi, God promised that He would suddenly appear in the temple. And then one day, as Simeon and Anna were waiting, the Lord appeared suddenly in the Temple. (Probably not what anybody expected, but there He was). Mary and Joseph brought Jesus in to present Him to the Lord, and these two elderly saints, who had given their lives to the Lord, recognized that this was in fact God, come to save His people. The Lord DID suddenly appear in His temple, just as He had promised in Malachi 3.

(And by the way, did you recognize someone else in that passage? I will send a messenger, who will prepare the way. Who's that? It's John the Baptist right? John the Baptist came and then Jesus appeared suddenly in the temple, on the day of His dedication, and will appear suddenly there again at the end of the age. Malachi 3:1 is one of those two level prophecies – fulfilled in part when Jesus first came; yet to be fully fulfilled when Jesus comes again, as quick as lightning<sup>ii</sup>).

And in light of that, what does the carol call the saints to do?

Come and worship, come and worship,  
Worship Christ, the new born King.

And that's exactly what Simeon and Anna do. Luke 2:28 says that 28 Simeon took [Jesus] him in his arms and praised God, saying:

29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.  
30 For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people,  
32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."  
(Luk 2:28-32 NIV).

In light of Jesus' sudden appearance, the saints are called to worship the king.

Now let's pause here to take stock of what we've seen. We started with the angels, and in light of Jesus' birth, what does the carol call them to do? Worship Christ the new born king. Then we saw the shepherds and in light of Jesus' birth, what does the carol call them to do? Worship Christ the newborn king. Then the wise men. What does the carol call them to do? Worship Christ the newborn king. And then the saints before the altar bending; what does it call them to do? Worship Christ the newborn king.

In light of Jesus' birth, what do you suppose the carol calls US to do?

Worship Christ the newborn king.

The coming of the Messiah, of God with us, of the Desire of Nations, the coming of the Lord to His people is reason to worship, to pour out our hearts in thanksgiving to God. After all, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, to humble Himself to the point of death, even death on a cross, to reconcile us to God. The baby in the manger is the Saviour of the world. And the most appropriate response to this reality is to worship Him. To worship Christ the newborn king.

And not just with our lips, but with our lives. Herod said he wanted to worship Jesus but his actions clearly said otherwise. Instead, the Bible calls us to worship the Lord with all that we do – to make our work worship, to make our leisure worship, to do all that we do out of reverence for God Romans 12:1 says it best - Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual – literally the word is 'reasonable' - act of worship (Rom 12:1 NIV).

That's why I would sum up this carol's message like this – Whoever you are, whatever you do, do it to honour the newborn King. Whoever you are, whatever you do, do it to worship the newborn King.

The fascinating thing about this carol – about the Christmas story, really – is how it brings together these very different people from all walks of life. You've got angels from the realms of glory, shepherds from the margins of society, you've got royal scholars from pagan nations and elderly saints from the nation of Israel and they all find their place in the kingdom of God. Immanuel truly came to be with us – all of us – and to give us everlasting life.

We all then should worship Him. But not as cookie cutter versions of one another. We are each unique people, with unique abilities in unique circumstances and God calls us to use those abilities, in all that we do, as worship to Him.

So the royal magi bring royal gifts; the elderly saints bring heartfelt prayer; extend that to us and what do you get – farmers who farm as stewards of Creation, educators and support staff who act with compassion and grace, medical professionals who care for the whole person, retailers and public officials who do their jobs with honesty and integrity.

'Whoever you are, whatever you do, do it to honour the new born King.' Just like the final verse says -

All creation, join in praising  
God the Father, Spirit, Son;  
Evermore your voices raising  
To th' eternal Three in One:  
Come and worship, come and worship,  
Worship Christ, the new born King.

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<sup>i</sup> [https://hymnary.org/text/come\\_desire\\_of\\_nations\\_come](https://hymnary.org/text/come_desire_of_nations_come)

<sup>ii</sup> Matthew 24:27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.