



Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Carols of Christmas | 12.10.23

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We are in week two of a Christmas series we're calling Carols of Christmas. And this week I was reading about a short story writer named Bret Hart, not the wrestler. But another Bret Hart with last name H A R T. He lived in the 1800s. And he was a short story fiction writer who wrote often about gambling and the romantic figures of the California gold rush and about miners, those who are mining for gold those days, and he particularly had a story called The luck of roaring camp, the luck of roaring camp and he wrote the story about a small mining town called roaring camp down in this town were 100 men. And these were the roughest, toughest, meanest guys, you can imagine. They're all miners, but some of them were criminals. Others were fugitives. But everybody was reckless. It was literally the most unsafe community you could live in. No families live there because this was a highly crime infested city. Well, there was one lady who lived in roaring camp. Her name was Cherokee sow. And one day she gave birth to a baby. While these rough tough men harsh, unforgiving meant they were used to death. But they were not used to a birth, they had no idea what to do with the baby to begin to think what do we do with this child this infant do we give them away to we send them to another community. And after much deliberation, they decided to keep and raise this little boy. They named him Thomas luck. And here's the cover of the short story. It's this group of men trying to figure out what to do with this baby like most dads probably do. But here they are, what did we do with this child? to name them Thomas luck. And so they just placed his child in a box that had some old rags in it and they said, Okay, we'll just let this baby sleep here. This, this just doesn't look right. We need to get in a cradle. So one of the guys went 80 miles out and bought a rosewood cradle to put the baby and brought it back. And so there they are with this cradle, still the rags in it and place the baby inside of it. We got to remove the racks. Somebody got to Sacramento and go buy some clean silk blankets and they did they went out and got some new blankets, brought the baby blankets back and now cover the baby and blankets and put him in this Rosewood cradle. And now the floors look filthy. We gotta clean the floors. And these tough men got on their hands and knees began to scrub scrub scrub until the floors were spotless finally, how they looked around. Man, these walls and the ceilings are really really filthy. And there are no curtains. So these bed began to repaint the walls and the ceiling. They put some curtains down and they realize this baby loves to sleep. Now like we can't be fighting and arguing while the baby's asleep. So why the baby sleeps, we're gonna hit pause and all the arguments and all the fighting. And for the first time in roaring camp, there was a lot of silence and quietness and calm and the baby will wake up from the nap and they will take little Tommy outside on the village on the community steps to realize there is not a single flower or garden for the child to stare at. Let's go plant some flowers. And they did they planted the first garden ever in roaring camp. They came back and realize how dirty their hands were, and how clean the baby's hands were. They said we should probably start taking showers around here. So they went to the local Dollar General and bought out all their soap and shampoo and shaving gear. And for the first time these minors these men began to take showers thank goodness, right and they even came back and they said you know what? We don't want a little Tommy to grow up all by himself with no kids to play with. Let's build a community center. So the families from the region will move in. And our little Tommy would have friends. Story The luck of Rory camp is about Thomas luck and how the birth of this child is innocent baby changed a community of delinquent men and transformed why because the baby changed everything. Well, this Christmas season we are celebrating the fact that the world has been changed by the birth of a Savior. Amen. Not just because he was a cute eight pounds six ounces Sweet baby Jesus according to Ricky Bobby. But because he was God in the flesh, Emmanuel Almighty God took on flesh and he came to us and here's the reality. He not just changed a few people or one community he has changed the world meaning because he came in the flesh and now lives through His Spirit. He changes you. Changes me He reorients our whole life convicts us and He cleanses us, challenges us and comforts us. He erases our past and gives new

meaning and purpose to life He saves us and He sends us most likely you are here, because the coming of Jesus changed your story A rewrote your life. And you can be a lot of things about Jesus. But one thing you cannot be is be indifferent about who he is, and the claims he made about himself. This child changed the world. And we're picking into this Christmas Story, the birth of the Savior, by looking at well known Carols or hymns, these songs that are written right out of the scripture that tell us the amazing story of who Jesus is. And last weekend we began with Oh, come O Come Emmanuel, which taught us that it's possible that this season, you can have both joy and longing. And that's the reality for many of us this Christmas season. But today, I want us to look at this hymn, hark, the Herald Angels Sing, Hark the herald angels sing. This hymn was written by Charles Wesley in 1739. Charles Wesley, along with John Wesley started the Methodist movement now, which is a denomination. And Charles Wesley if you didn't know, he wrote over 6500 hymns, a preferred prolific author, over 6500 hymns. And this particular him he wrote just a year after he came to Christ. So as he's reflecting back on his new felon faith, he began to think about the wonder of God coming to earth. And he began to write this hymn. Though he had published it, it took several years for it to actually be well known, until a god in the hands of another preacher by the name of George Whitfield came alongside and began to tweak some of the lines and change the title of this hymn, to Hark the herald angels sing. And then it just became an incredible anthem for the Church of Jesus during this season. I want you to read with me the first lines of this hymn, and it goes like this, hark, the Herald Angels says, Read with me. So let's try it again. Hark, the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn king, peace on earth and mercy mile, God and sinners reconciled. I imagine that none of you this week, use this word. Hark. Don't not one. All right. It's an old English term, which simply means listen up. Pay attention, something amazing is about to be told. So listen up, and I will actually challenge you this week. Look for opportunities to use this word hark. Just look for random opportunity. Use it with your kids. hark children, dinner is ready. Use it with the coworker you don't like all that much. Okay, Susie, hark, let's go to lunch to see what they do. Use it with your spouse say it in the most beautiful, romantic way. Hark, honey, I gotta tell you, you mean so much to me, I love you. Use it with a stranger and see how quickly they run away from you. Ha ha Hark, the Herald Angels in notice there's an exclamation mark at the end of heart, because it is an imperative invitation for us to come together and listen to the announcement that's about to be made. Hark the herald Herald means an official messenger, someone who is delivering really important official news and who is the Herald Angels, heart they Herald, the angels sing, and the response to the newsletter bringing his glory to the newborn king. The response is worship. It is singing about this new born king. Well, if you're somewhat familiar with the Christmas story, you will realize, okay, this is a moment where the angels came to the shepherds with a really amazing message and announcement about the new born king. And yes, you're right, it is bringing us back to Luke two, and the scene of an angel and the shepherds. And here's how Luke two records that and even if you read this many times, I want you to hear it afresh. And see the power and the wonder of this moment where the greatest announcement was made. Luke records like this in verse eight of Luke two. In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields, and keeping watch at night over their flock. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shown around them. And they were terrified and So would I.

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But angel said to them, don't be afraid for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people Today in the city of David's estate A beer was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord, this will be assigned for you, you will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger. Suddenly, all of a sudden, there was a multitude of the heavenly hosts, one angel brought the message and immediately 1000s of angels gathered around with the angel, what did they do, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth, to people, he favors glory to God, and peace on earth. The heart of this passage, and the heart of this hymn is twofold. This hymn this passage invites us first of all, into the wonder of who this message is about. And second of all, it invites us into the wonder of who this message is for. Who is this? Who is this message this announcement about? And second of all, who is it given to? Who is it for? So let's answer the question of who is this message about? Who was this announcement about? Help me out? Jesus, when you ask the question, if you're doubting, just say Jesus is usually the answer, not all the time, but most of the time he has answered. This message is about the announcement of a king who has been born to us, it's about the coming of Jesus. But what I love about this passage, and the uniqueness of this message is that it's the angels bringing this announcement. And the angels hear me the angels have an absolutely unique perspective on Jesus, the Son of God, that no one else in the Christmas narrative had. Like all of the other individuals in the narrative like Mary and Joseph or Zacharias and Elizabeth or Simeon and Anna, the shepherds, the Wiseman, they're all meeting the Son of God for the first time. And they're meeting him in the flesh. Their first visual experience with the Son of God is as a baby, in human form, as a child of the helpless infant. That's their first impression. But the angels have a totally different vantage point. Why? Because for 1000s and 1000s of years, they have seen Jesus as the Son of God, before he became the Son of Man. They have been spending years and eons worshipping Him,

honoring him, he has been the object of their worship. They saw him as powerful, mighty and glorious, before we meet him in the manger as meek and mild. Oh, they have a perspective on Jesus because they've seen him in an eternity pass. Job. 38 says, When God established the Earth, the angels shouted for joy. The angels shouted for joy. When Jesus made the world, they were they're the same angels. We meet in Luke two with this announcement. They were there when Jesus created all things visible and invisible. They shouted for joy. They were there in the garden, when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and sin entered the story. And they're also right there when God made the promise that the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. And for 1000s of years, they have been wondering, how is God going to do this? How's he overcome? How's he gonna overcome sin and death and the grave? How was he going to reconcile humanity back to Himself? When is he going to do it? I imagine every generation they wonder, is it now? Is it here is it with this people? So with that people, they have been longing to see the fulfillment of this promise. Peter says in First Peter one, chapter 12, verse 12, but even speaking about our salvation, that even the angels longed to catch a glimpse of how God would save people. So Peter says, looking at our salvation, so he's, the angels have been longing to get a glimpse of how God would do this. I imagine they were just as shocked as Isaiah, when Isaiah was told by God, that a virgin will conceive and give birth. They'll call him, Emmanuel, God with us. It must have blown their mind. This is really the plan. So the angels aren't all knowing. They're not omniscient. They don't know the whole story beforehand. So just like us, the redemption narrative is unfolding to them piece by piece, just like it is for us except that there Living on a different plane, they have a different sphere of existence. We meet Jesus from here below, but they have seen him from there above. And now finally, one angel gets tapped on the shoulder to go and announce the birth of Jesus that they've been longing for. And the one that had been singing about for all of these years, they get to finally, pick a group of people and come to them, and tell them that the Savior has been born. That's why I had this message is worth listening to paying closer to who is this Jesus that is coming to us? What is this announcement all about? And talk to us, at the beginning of this hymn, begins to write about the titles of Jesus that the angels would have been all too familiar with. So he writes in the next verse, let's say together, Christ by highest heaven, adored Christ, the Everlasting Lord, laid in time behold him come, offspring of the virgins, womb, Christ, the Everlasting Lord. And that's a perspective all of angels could have had. The he is what Isaiah would call our everlasting father. He has been the object of Heavens worship. So I cannot imagine this moment when one angel comes to deliver this news. And immediately at every host of angel comes in response, it wasn't like there was a countdown in heaven, or some keuken. Now you go. They're just doing here what they were doing up there, singing, worshiping exalting Jesus, just at the mention of their name, or the name of Jesus, they know they can't help but worship. So that was one angel reveals to the shepherds who Jesus is their immediate and only appropriate responses to worship Him. So they show up on planet Earth, singing about this newborn king, not because they had to, while you're waiting for a cue, the mention of Jesus deserves worship. Then now announcement of his arrival, deserve singing and honoring and all the thought of Jesus, the message of Christ revealed, our only response is to worship and angel says, Well, if you're gonna go announce Jesus, we're coming and saying behind you, because that's how glorious and mighty and powerful he is. laid in time behold him come. So words of Paul in Galatians four, verse four, when he said, In the fullness of time, just at the completion of time, right, according to God's plan, God sent His Son born of a woman born under the law, so that we who are under the law can be redeemed, as sons and daughters of God. So he came to us. Next verse reads like this, let's say together, hell, the flesh, that God had seen, hail the incarnate deity, pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel, the word that John says in chapter one that was with God at the beginning, now took on flesh, and literally tabernacled he lived as one of us among us. And Paul would say in Colossians, two verse nine, that the entire fullness and this is something I still have a hard time getting my mind around, the entire fullness of the Godhead, now is found in Jesus in bodily form, all of the glory, all of the nature all of the all inspiring nature of the Godhead, all encapsulated, in bodily form, in the Christ who was born. Spray stuck out to me this week, pleased as man with man to dwell, pleased. Jesus didn't lose a betting game or was coerced or forced to come, it pleased him to come. For God so loved the world. He sent His Son, writer of Hebrews would say in Hebrews four, that Jesus is our high priests who empathizes with us in our weakness. Why? Because he was one of us. It pleased him to come this way, and to pursue us in this way. The next line reads like this, let's say together, hail the heaven born Prince of Peace, hail, the Sun of Righteousness, light and life to all he brings risen with healing in its wings in his wings. The last book of the Old Testament is the book of Molokai

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and Malika at the closing of this book, writes about the Sun of Righteousness su N. Sun of Righteousness Now, mind you, the end of Melaka then begins what is called the 400 years of silence. There is no new word from God no prophet, no sighting of an angel. It's 400 years of absolute silence and people are wondering and wondering. And curious is God going to keep his promise. But the last word they had was from the Prophet Malecon, who said, that the Son of God appearing S O N, Son of

God appearing would be like the sun as you in the Sun of Righteousness rising with healing in its wings. Now, look, I say, it's gonna get dark, it's gonna get lonely, it's gonna get silent, but just when you least suspect him, the Son of God will rise like the sun in the morning, out of the dark night out of the mystery out of the chaos, he is rising, as the sun's and when he comes, he brings healing on his wings. Melaka would describe the healing he brings us, the heart of the Father and the Son, or reconcile the mother and the daughter, parent child, every estranged relationship is reconciled, because he brings healing in its wings. John, one verse For John would say in Jesus was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. He was the appearing of the sun, for those of us who lived in the dark. And when he came, we could finally find light, and come out of the dark and join him in this incredible light. Os verse reads like this, let's say together, mild, he lays his glory by born that man, the moon, no more may die, born to raise a sons of Earth, born to give them second birth, mild, he lays his glory by it's literally the imagery of Jesus, taking off this garment of glory, the laying at a side. Remember, in John 13, Jesus is there in the upper room. John says he removed his outer clothing and laid it aside and went to wash the feet of the disciples. He was literally in the garment of a servant, in the uniform of a servant, or a slave with just his inner clothes. It was a visual for the coming of Jesus and the cross. I believe it's that moment that Paul writes about in Philippians two, where he says Jesus, though he was God and equal with God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself. What does that mean? Not that he stopped being God, but He laid aside His glory. He laid aside the benefits of being God, the privileges, the prerogatives of being God, he laid it aside temporarily still being God, he laid aside the benefits of glory. And he became part of humanity. And he humbled himself how by being born, but not just being born, but being born to serve it, not just to serve it by being born a servant who would die, not just one who would die, but being born a servant who would die on a cross, a criminal's death, the lowest he could go, he went. This is incredible humility of God, who would lay aside His glory. This baby that was born in Bethlehem would die as an adult in Golgotha, this child that was laid in a cradle would hang on a cross. And he would taste death, as the writer of Hebrews says, taste death. Why, so that you don't have to? So that he can overcome it. Not that we won't die. But the death won't be the end of our story. Death will just be the beginning of a face to face relationship with God for all eternity. Because why Jesus there hung on the cross, and then he beat death and he overcame the great, amen. This Christmas, we celebrate that a Savior is born, and the Lord is risen. He was born he died. And then he beat the grave and rose from the dead. We had to give God a huge praise this morning for that. Savior is born and the Lord is risen. And that means if you place your faith in Jesus, if you have of you do you experience a second birth, a birth that's better than your natural birth, but a spiritual birth that never dies. And though this life is removed, our life was God. Our spiritual birth, never dies, and we will be with God for all eternity. He was born to die die, so that men and women that we would never experience the stain and the power of death he overcame. This is the god we're celebrating Apollo a was the historic mission in 1968, where human beings for the first time, left the earth orbit, went to the moon and orbited around the moon for the first time in human history, this iconic moment of humans leaving the orbit of the Earth. three astronauts James Lavelle, Frank Borman and William Anders were part of the three our astronauts who first human beings ever leave Earth. And they took off from the Kennedy Space Center on December 21 1968. And the objective was to go to the moon orbit around it and land back safely. And they did on December 27 1968, which meant that for the first time, not only were humans out of the earth in outer space, but that these three men would spend Christmas in outer space. So before they left, they decided to do a live broadcast back to Planet Earth on Christmas Eve. And they began to think what are we going to say? Because this, at that time in history would be the greatest broadcast ever in history. live broadcasts from outer space, more human beings will listen to the voice of one person at one time than ever in history at that time. It's a big deal all over the world. People will be tuning in to hear this broadcast on Christmas Eve. What do we got to say do we sing Jingle Bells? Do we, you know, read a singer Carol. So they go off outerspace. And they gave the most fitting and appropriate words as they are there on Christmas Eve orbiting the moon and seeing from the distance our planet the expanse of the universe, hear the message that they these astronauts gave Christmas Eve 1968. And the images that were captured on this Apollo eight mission.

Unknown Speaker 27:11

Now Brooking.

Speaker 1 27:15

For all the people back on Earth, the crew of Apollo eight has a message that we would like to send you the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void. And darkness was upon the face of the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light, and there was light. And God saw the light. They went good. And God divided the light from the darkness

Unknown Speaker 27:56

that God called the light and the darkness and the evil in the morning was a free day.

Speaker 2 28:05

And God said let there be in the midst of the water. Let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament and divided the waters which were under the waters which were above

Unknown Speaker 28:24

and the in the morning, second day

Speaker 2 28:34

I haven't been gathered together into one place and let the dry land And

Unknown Speaker 28:41

God called the dry land.

Unknown Speaker 28:45

Together the waters called The Godfather and it was good. From the crew have a good night. America. And God bless all of you. All of you.

Libin Abraham 29:06

Wow, isn't that amazing? Man, I got chills the first time I heard that. For millions, even billions on planet Earth, this broadcast on Christmas Eve would be the defining moment of their life. As on Christmas Eve they're hearing from the first astronauts ever to leave Earth and see the glory. The expanse, the breadth, the width of the universe that God spoke and created the glory the power of Almighty God. They're hearing the words of how God created and formed the universe on Christmas Eve and then on Christmas morning, they would wake up to celebrate that this Creator God became an infant. He stepped into creation this ever lasting Lord entered into time. The Godhead who was full of majesty and power, it could create all things just for the spoken word would now take residence in the womb of a teenage girl for nine months and be born as a child. The Son of God, the One who is unloved and glory will lay it aside for humanity. King of Kings and Lord of Lord, the Prince of Peace, would enter our story, how fitting, and how appropriate. This is a wonder of who we are celebrating the season. This Jesus, this God came to us and he came for us, it's a wonder of who the message of the angels is about. But want to remind you quickly, the wonder of who it's for. This announcement was not given to the religiously elite or the successful, or the powerful. This announcement came to the shepherds, the shepherds. Today, we sort of sentimentalized the shepherds are kind and trustworthy, all the children go and be shepherds. The shepherds were seen as thieves and robbers in the first century, when a shepherd came into town, the people of that town went the opposite way because they felt uneasy being around a shepherd. A shepherds testimony was not even held in court because it was seemed to be unworthy or unreliable. They couldn't help but lie. They were estranged from any normal relationships, because they didn't just work in the fields. They lived out in the fields, and they didn't smell all that great. So they live there for the rest of their lives. They were even considered ceremonially unclean, no access to God, no access to the temple. And it's fascinating that this announcement by the angels takes place about a month on the Jewish calendar, a month before Passover. So these shepherds are taking care of a large herd of sheep that are going to be used during the week of Passover. And these sheep are going to be offered a sacrifices to God. But the irony is, the shepherds don't get to participate. They won't get to be part of the blessing of the sacrifice. They're always on the outside, looking in hoping, wondering if there was ever a plan of God that included them. And it's to them, the angels come first, because God is making it abundantly clear that God comes to those who feel the least deserving. He comes to the outcast, he comes to sinful, he comes to whoever you think you might be, because there might be some of you feel like the shepherd this morning. Jesus is for everybody else, but not for me. Because she entity, God is for my neighbor, for the person that knows all the right lyrics and the verses, but not for me. But God is sending a clear message that whether you're religious or not, churchd or not, whether you feel horrible about what you've done, or who you've been with, no matter what you feel where you've been, or you feel great about what you've done. We are equally undeserving of Jesus. Equally. Regardless of our attractions or actions, whatever we've done, apart from Jesus, we are all hopeless. The Bible says, All have sinned, and fallen short of His glory. No one is righteous. We're all the shepherds in the story. And God says, it's for you that I came if you feel disqualified or discounted, he had you particularly in mind. I love the way that Wesley wrote this piece on Earth, and mercy, mild, God and sinners,

reconcile God and sinners reconciled. We broke the relationship. But God brought the reconciliation. We broke peace. But God establishes that we broke the trust, but he comes to restore it. And he comes into our story, as God as the only one who could fix the relationship of our brokenness and the darkness we feel inside. And He offers us a gift of a savior. He says if you would trusted me you can achieve this peace. You can work for it, you can perform for it. You can escape your role trying hoping you have it someday. The only way to receive this peace is to receive freely the finished work of Jesus. When you turn from your sin, and you turn to Him as your Savior, you turn from doing life your own way and being your own boss and you said Jesus, I trust in You to be my savior. And my Lord, I'm coming out of the dark. I'm joining you in the light. You have peace with God and that leads to peace with others and peace in yourself. Paul said it so beautifully in Romans five two and I love Romans five one and verse two and I love how the New Living Translation puts that he says Therefore we have been made right in God's sight by faith, not by works. Not by our lineage, nor by faith, we have peace with God, because of what Jesus our Lord has done for us. That's the only reason we have peace. It's all because of what he did for us. And because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege. We were the least deserving all of us. But Jesus has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege, his grace, where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing in God's glory. We don't stand fearfully, or timidly we stand joyfully. Because for us, and to us, a Savior was born. I think about the shepherds being the first to hear this announcement from the angels. And I kind of wonder if partly, they received this message, because they were the only group of people who would have actually listened. Like they're out in the night watching sheep, what else are they going to do? Not a lot of goat, not a lot going on. They're not all that busy or preoccupied or distracted, they've got the time is it God goes to those who were willing and available to listen. If he had gone to the religious leaders, they would have dismissed the announcement by the angels because it did not fit their theological box. If he had gone to the scholars and the philosophers of his day, they would have rejected this news because it didn't fit their human wisdom. If he had gone to the successful, the powerful the elite, they would have denied this invitation because it didn't fit their agenda. Just about every other group of people would have been unwilling to listen to the message of the angel. Because they were too preoccupied, building their kingdoms and accomplishing their empires and pursuing their dreams. But God found the small group of shepherds, the outcasts of the day, those who had no credit to their day. But simply because they were available. They were willing to do what no one else did, which was leave everything behind in search of an angel. I'm sorry, in search of Jesus simply because an angel told him to heal after everything, pursuing this newborn Kay. Are you willing today to listen to him? Are you available to hear his voice? Because this Christmas, God is speaking to you? This season, he is speaking directly to your heart. And here's the deal. Most likely an angel isn't going to show up in the middle of the night in your bedroom. Why? Because God doesn't need an angel anymore. His Kevin, you Jesus, and His giving you the Holy Spirit who always speaks and reveals Jesus to us. He sent His Son and He sent his spirit for you. And right now he is speaking to you. Are you busy preoccupied, building your own kingdoms too busy to listen? Or could we pause to hear his voice? Stand with him as you just wonder if you would pause and be willing to listen and respond. I want you to listen to the words of God that He is speaking to awaken a fresh wonder in your heart of who this message is about. Our majestic King born in a manger

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and to awaken a fresh the wonder that he came specifically for you. And for me, listen to even now. Close your eyes with me. Don't do it if you're driving. For most of us, close your eyes. hear His voice. Some of you are gonna have tears coming down your face. Some of you are going to remember the first moment where you heard his voice and you're surrendered your life to Jesus. For some of you. That's this moment where God is saying you're not disqualified. I came for you to save you, to redeem you to bite you back your mind. Will you be willing to listen? Hark to the message of the angel that night that for you in the city of David, a Savior has been born. listen and respond