

Hear the Angels Sing

Luke 2:8-14

Introduction

- Edmund Sears & The Mexican-American War & Slavery in America
 - As a solution to the wars and conflicts of his day, Sears wrote a poem pointing people to an event that occurred almost 2000 years prior. It's an event we read about in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 2.
 - TURN TO LUKE 2:8-14 and we'll begin there.
- In the poem that has become the popular carol, It Came Upon the Midnight Clear, Edmund Sears implores his contemporaries to hear the message of peace proclaimed by the angels and, in response, find encouragement and seek peace in their day.
- There are five stanzas to this carol, one of which is commonly omitted these days, through which the poet makes his case. Today I want to us to see that, when we sing this carol, it can help us remember and heed the message of the angels the night Jesus was born.
- The first stanza tells us simply this:

1. The Angels Sang Good News for Israel

*It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, goodwill to men from heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.*

- i. Perhaps Edmund Sears was drawn to the angel's proclamation of peace because he recognized **similarities between his world and the world into which Jesus was born.**
 1. Jews under oppressive Roman rule
 2. Before that Babylon, Assyria and others
 - The Jews had long since been waiting for the promised Messiah to deliver them from their enemies and bring the peace that had been promised through their prophets.
 - **Isaiah 9:7.** Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.
- ii. **The angel's song announced the good news that this reign of peace had begun with the birth of Jesus.** He was the solution to the wars and conflicts surrounding Israel.

1. **Verses 10-11 call him the Savior, who is Christ the Lord.** Three titles for Jesus that show up together only here in all the NT. Each title reinforces the fact that Jesus is the one who could bring peace to a war-torn people.
 - Savior—**deliverer** from physical and spiritual enemies. Sin is our spiritual enemy.
 - Christ—NT form of OT Messiah. A reference to Jesus as the promised heir of David, a **King** who would deliver God’s people, Israel from national enemies. This world is described as ruled by Satan, the evil one.
 - Lord—Christ’s absolute sovereignty as the Son of God. Lit. **“master.”** Our natural position in this world is to be mastered by sin & Satan. Putting our faith in Jesus is to serve a new master.
- iii. **Jesus Christ was born to bring peace to God’s people, Israel.** This is the good news the angels sang. But the good news isn’t just for Israel. The second stanza of our carol tells us—

2. The Angels Sing Good News for Everyone

*Still through the cloven skies they come with peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats o’er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains they bend on hovering wing,
And ever o’er its babel sounds the blessed angels sing.*

- i. **Acts 10:34-36.** “God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.”
- ii. **There we have the theology of this carol in two simple statements:**
 1. **The angels sang good news for Israel.**
 2. **The angels sing good news for everyone.** Specifically, everyone who fears God and does what is right.
 - **What is right? Acts 10:42-43.** “All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”
 - **Peace is available to all who believe in Jesus and receive forgiveness of their sins.** Is that you? Do you believe? Have you received Jesus as your Savior, Christ & Lord? You can do that today by communicating three simple things in a prayer to God: I’m sorry, Thank You, Please.
- iii. The following three stanzas of our carol apply the theology of the angel’s message to a war-torn, weary world and offer this simple message: hear the angels sing.

3. Stanza Three (often omitted)

*Yet with the woes of sin and strife the world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not the love-song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife, and hear the angels sing.*

- i. **This stanza could have been written in 2017 just as easily as 1849** because the wars and conflicts of 19th Century America are still raging in our world today, as they were 1st Century Israel.

1. Conflicts in Syria & Iraq, Turkey, Middle East & Northern Africa
2. Tensions around North Korea
3. Mexico made top ten list in a recent article
4. Local and global terrorism and acts of violence

- The need is great for our world to hear the good news of peace the angels sing.

- ii. **What I find interesting is the solution the poet offers to the “sin and strife” of the world.** He says, “O hush the noise, ye men of strife, and hear the angels sing.”

1. My paraphrase—

- **Troublemakers, Be Quiet and Hear the Angels Sing**

- Who are the troublemakers?

- i. **Others.** We tend to point fingers at others, especially public figures. Sometimes our judgments are accurate. We should pray for those we consider public troublemakers.

1. **1 Timothy 2:2** says we should pray “for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”

- ii. **Us.** As they say, “all politics is local.” I think it’s a much-needed exercise to stop and consider our own attitudes, words and actions. Are you bringing peace to your little corner of the world, or are you a troublemaker? What kind of noise are you making? Most of us would do well to be quiet and hear the angels sing: “peace on earth, good will to men, from heaven’s all gracious king.”

- iii. Stanza four speaks to a different group. It says—

4. Weary People, Rest and Hear the Angels Sing

*And ye, beneath life's crushing load whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing!*

- i. **Edmund Sears had experienced challenges in his own personal life.** Not too long before writing this carol, he left a seven-year pastorate that didn't go well. He had also had his share of significant illness.
 - 1. Some people have a hard road. Most of us at least have seasons of hardship where we grow weary. We're invited to rest.

- ii. **More than his own weariness, I have to think this passionate abolitionist identified with the cause of the three million plus in America who were living in slavery in the 1840s.** The phrases "forms are bending low" and "painful steps and slow" would aptly describe the oppressive conditions of American slavery as it neared its highpoint in history.
 - 1. Sears and others were doing what they could to offer a rest beside the weary road for those who carried the "crushing load" of slavery. Ultimately they succeeded, though the cost was high. 12 years later the Civil War began, and 16 years later congress passed the 13th amendment abolishing slavery in the United States.
 - 2. Stirring hearts with compassion for the oppressed, It Came Upon the Midnight clear might truthfully be seen as a freedom carol inspired by the Angels' song of peace at the birth of Jesus, the ultimate abolitionist.
 - According to IJM, today there are more than 40 million people in slavery worldwide today. I wonder if this carol might inspire you and me to take up the cause of freedom in the way Sears hope it would in his day.
 - i. We can certainly pray for freedom. We can also partner with organizations like IJM.

- iii. Finally, the carol closes with the message of hope that one day there will be an end of wars and conflict and ultimate rest for the weary. The final stanza tells us ...

5. Hear the Angels because the Prince of Peace is Coming

*For lo!, the days are hastening on, by prophet seen of old,
 When with the ever-circling years shall come the time foretold,
 When the new Heaven and Earth shall own the Prince of Peace their King,
 And the whole world give back the song which now the angels sing.*

- i. **1 Thessalonians 4:16** says, "the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God."

- ii. **In its final stanza, our carol makes another theological statement** from Isaiah 9:6-7. There is coming a day when the Prince of Peace will return and establish forever the peace you and I and our world long for.
 - 1. For now, let's be quiet. Let's rest. And let's hear the good news the angels sing.