

PITTSBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



An Scripture and Hymn Study

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# How to USE THIS STUDY



# How to USE THIS STUDY

You are welcome to use this study in any way that is helpful to you, but it was written with three specific uses in mind.

## **1. For a class or small group setting**

You may wish to use this study over the course of several sessions leading up to either Christmas or Epiphany. Each chapter works nicely as its own session. Alternatively, you may wish to group them as follows:

- Session 1: Introduction
- Session 2: Verses 1 and Appendix
- Session 3: Verses 2-3
- Session 4: Verse 4-5

Week one will begin with the history of the hymn as found in the introduction. Share the story, and discuss memories of singing the song. Then, see who can recite the most verses without help.

After the introduction in week one, and throughout the entirety of the other courses, guide the group through an in depth study of each verse, following the schedule above and the structure below.



# How to USE THIS STUDY

Study each verse individually. Each time you begin, read the various versions of the verses with the class and ask for reactions. What words did people notice? What did it remind them of? What differences or similarities did they find? For verses four and five, why might they be left out of modern versions of the song?

Finally, read the corresponding Bible passages. Ask if the passages are familiar, and if so, when participants remember reading or hearing them. Then, talk through the reflection page and discuss the questions.

If you have additional time in your sessions, use one of the prompts and activities included in the appendix.



# How to USE THIS STUDY

## 2. In corporate worship

If you would like to incorporate a portion of this study in corporate worship, there are many ways to do so.

You could use the hymn at the opening of worship, singing one verse each Sunday in Advent. You may wish to preface each verse with the corresponding Scripture reading.

You may choose to do a fifth verse on Christmas Eve.

On a Christmas Eve service or Christmas Day service, you could then put together each of the verses used throughout the season, singing a version of the hymn with either four or five verses.

Alternatively, you may choose to use one verse each Sunday as a sung response following the sermon and to preach on the corresponding Scripture each week.

You may also wish to use this song as you celebrate Epiphany. Though traditionally associated with the revelation of Christ to the world, the proclamation in the hymn could be easily paired with Epiphany celebrations.



# How to USE THIS STUDY

## 3. In personal devotion

*Hark! the Herald Angels Sing* has become an integral part of our Christmas celebrations. As such, you may find it helpful to use in personal devotional practices either right before or right after Christmas day.

You may choose to read the introduction on Dec. 19, and then one chapter each day until Christmas Eve. You may then choose to use the appendix on Christmas Day if you would like.

Alternatively, you may wish to use this study to prepare for Epiphany, reading a section each day of the week leading up to Epiphany Sunday.

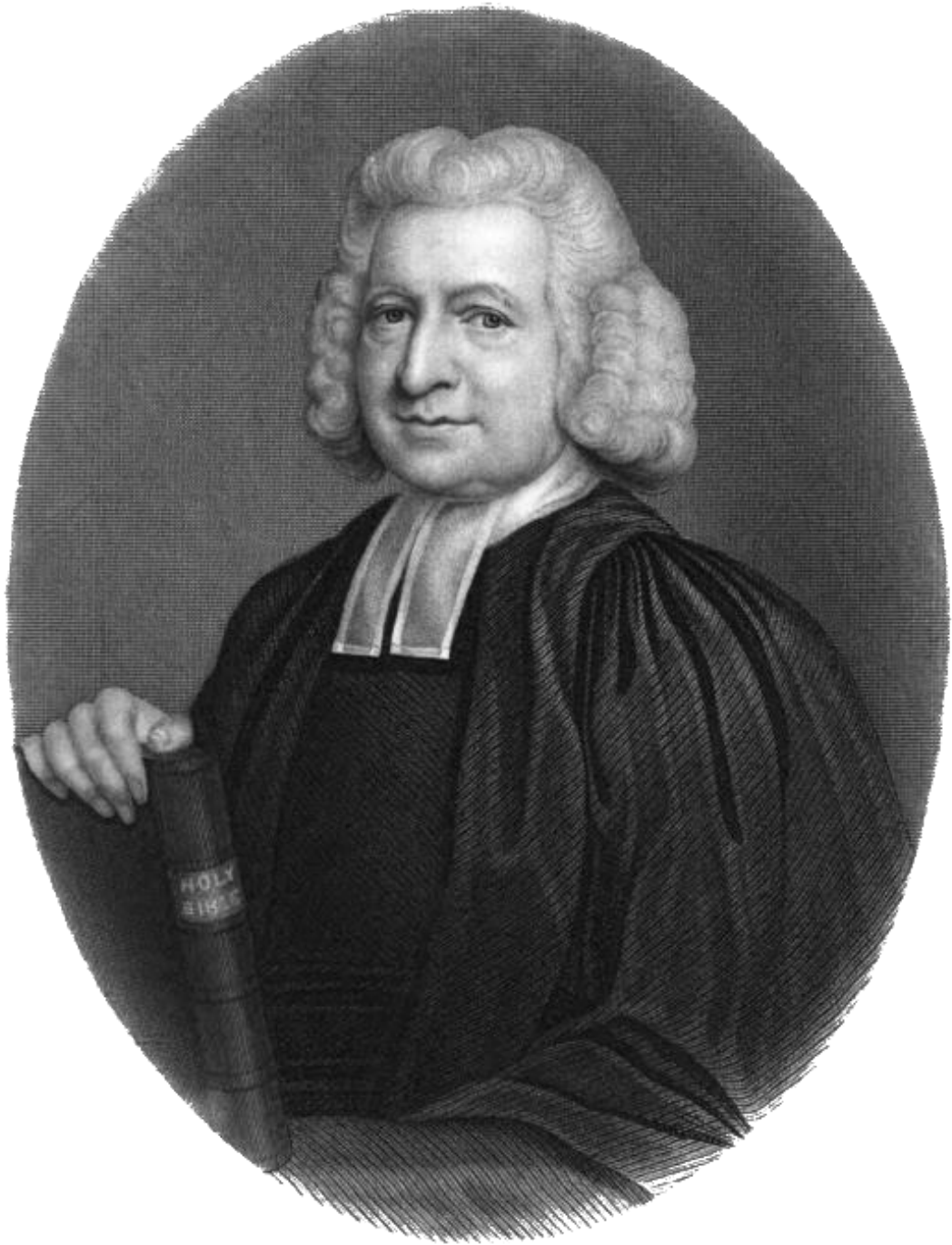
Whether you choose to use this study for a small group, during worship, as part of your personal devotional practices, or just as reading material as you celebrate Christmas or Epiphany, we hope it is draws you into Scripture and provides you with a new appreciation for a familiar song!



# INTRODUCTION







## Charles Wesley

From Wesley, John, Charles Wesley and G. Osborn. 1868. *The poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley: repr. from the originals Vol. 1*. London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office.

# INTRODUCTION

John and Charles Wesley are most famously associated with Methodism. Charles, however, was also a prolific poet. He reportedly wrote the words for more than 6,500 hymns, several of which have endured the test of time.

Among the thousands of hymns attributed to Charles Wesley are:

*O For A Thousand Tongues to Sing  
Christ Whose Glory Fills the Skies  
Rejoice the Lord is King  
Come Thou Long-expected Jesus  
Love Divine All Loves Excelling*

But the hymn of most interest to this study is, of course, the original version of *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*.

Wesley included his version in *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, first published in 1739. The original title was simply “Hymn for Christmas Day.”

Wesley’s words were popular enough to find a place in future hymnals, but not without some changes...

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## HYMN *for* CHRISTMAS-DAY.

- 1 **H**ARK how all the Welkin rings  
“ Glory to the King of Kings,  
“ Peace on Earth, and Mercy mild,  
“ GOD and Sinners reconcil'd!
- 2 Joyful all ye Nations rise,  
Join the Triumph of the Skies,  
Univerfal Nature fay  
“ CHRIST the LORD is born to Day!
- 3 CHRIST, by highest Heav'n ador'd,  
CHRIST, the Everlasting Lord,

Late

## HYMNS *and* SACRED POEMS. 143

- Late in Time behold him come,  
Offspring of a Virgin's Womb.
- 4 Veil'd in Flesh, the Godhead see,  
Hail th' Incarnate Deity!  
Pleas'd as Man with Men t' appear  
JESUS our *Immanuel* here!
  - 5 Hail the Heav'nly Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!  
Light and Life to All he brings,  
Ris'n with Healing in his Wings.

## Hymn for Christmas Day

From Wesley, John, and Charles Wesley. 1743. *Hymns and Sacred Poems: The Fourth Edition*. Bristol: Printed by Felix Farley.





- 6 Mild he lays his Glory by ;  
Born ; that Man no more may die,  
Born ; to raise the Sons of Earth,  
Born ; to give them Second Birth.
- 7 Come, Desire of Nations, come,  
Fix in Us thy humble Home,  
Rise, the Woman's Conqu'ring Seed,  
Bruise in Us the Serpent's Head.
- 8 Now display thy saving Pow'r,  
Ruin'd Nature now restore,  
Now in Mythic Union join  
Thine to Ours, and Ours to Thine.
- 9 *Adam's* Likeness, LORD, efface,  
Stamp thy Image in its Place,  
Second *Adam* from above,  
Reinstate us in thy Love.
- 10 Let us Thee, tho' lost, regain,  
Thee, the Life, the Heav'nly Man :  
O! to All Thyself impart,  
Form'd in each Believing Heart.

N 3

HYMN

## Hymn for Christmas Day

From Wesley, John, and Charles Wesley. 1743. *Hymns and Sacred Poems: The Fourth Edition*. Bristol: Printed by Felix Farley.





## George Whitefield

Wakeley, J. B. 1871. *The prince of pulpit orators: a portraiture of Rev. George Whitefield, M.A. : illustrated by anecdotes and incidents.* New York: Carlton & Lanahan.

# INTRODUCTION

In the 1750s, George Whitefield published Wesley's hymn in a new collection of music but not without some major changes.

Whitefield (pronounced wit-field) was an interesting character. One biographer referred to George Whitefield with the title "the Prince of Pulpit Orators."

He was famous for dramatic and engaging preaching, often outdoors. Legend has it that on occasion Whitefield's voice could be heard up to two miles away.

Frequently complemented on his oratory, one tale holds that Whitefield struggled with pride in his abilities. According to legend, an acquaintance approached the preacher after a sermon and told him "Brother Whitefield, you have preached a most eloquent discourse. I was highly delighted."

Whitefield responded "Ah, brother, there is one in advance of you, for the devil told me so before I left the pulpit."

## H Y M N XXXI.

The fame.

**H**ARK! the Herald Angels sing  
Glory to the new-born King!  
Peace on Earth, and Mercy mild,  
God and Sinners reconcil'd.

Joyful all ye Nations rise,  
Join the Triumphs of the Skies;  
Nature rise and worship him,  
Who is born at Bethlehem.

Christ by highest Heav'n ador'd,  
Christ the everlasting Lord;  
Late in Time behold him come,  
Offspring of the Virgin's Womb.

Veil'd in Flesh the Godhead see,  
Hail th' incarnate Deity!  
Pleas'd as Man with Men t'appear,  
Jesus our Emmanuel here.

Hail the Heav'n-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Son of Righteousness!  
Light and Life around he brings,  
Ris'n with Healing in his Wings.

Mild

### Hark the Herald Angels Sing

From Whitefield, George. 1758. *A collection of hymns for social worship*. London.  
Printed by William Strahan.





[ 25 ]

Mild he lays his Glory by,  
Born that Men no more may die ;  
Born to raise the Sons of Earth,  
Born to give them second Birth.

Come, Desire of Nations, come,  
Fix in us thy heav'nly Home ;  
Rise the Woman's conqu'ring Seed,  
Bruise in us the Serpent's Head.

Adam's Likeness now efface,  
Stamp thy Image in its Place ;  
Second Adam from above,  
Work it in us by thy Love.

## Hark the Herald Angels Sing

From Whitefield, George. 1758. *A collection of hymns for social worship*. London.

Printed by William Strahan.





# INTRODUCTION

Whitefield's version of the hymn made significant changes, including a radical rewriting of the first line. Wesley opened the hymn with the words:

Hark how all the Welkin rings  
Glory to the King of Kings.

Whitefield changed the opening to the more familiar words:

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!  
Glory to the new-born King!

Some have argued that Whitefield's edited version represented a significant theological shift (for more on Whitefield's changes, see the Appendix). In addition to his lyrical edits, Whitefield also altered the length of the text. Wesley's version spanned 10 verses at four lines apiece. Whitefield trimmed the words to eight verses of four lines each.

Though Whitefield had given the hymn the opening line that would eventually serve as its title, the song had not yet taken the form that we know. It lacked music.



## Felix Mendelssohn

From Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, Felix. And W.F. Alexander. 1894. *Selected letters of Mendelssohn*. London: S. Sonnenschein.

# INTRODUCTION

In 1840, a century after Charles Wesley wrote his poem, the city of Leipzig in Germany was preparing for a major festival to commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the printing press. As part of the celebration, the city was unveiling a statue of Gutenberg.

To commemorate the occasion, Felix Mendelssohn was to write an original piece of music. Using a German poem for lyrics, he composed a piece of music that took various names over the years. It is sometimes called by the opening words of the poem "*Vaterland in dem Gauen*," sometimes the "*Gutenberg Cantata*," and sometimes "*Festgesang*." The latter name has caused some confusion, as Mendelssohn wrote several *Festgesangs*.

Regardless of its name, Mendelssohn's piece made an impact. During rehearsal, a music critic listened to Mendelssohn's composition and a nearby reporter recorded his reaction: "The old man's face lighted up with pleasure, and, as the joyous strains pealed out, he seemed to hail the dawn of a new era in art."

Despite the impact of his composition, Mendelssohn felt like his music needed new lyrics. He wrote, "I think there ought to be other words . . . If the right ones are hit at, I am sure that piece will be liked very much by the singers and the hearers, but it will never do to sacred words." The first half of his sentiment was exactly right. The second half was exactly wrong.



## William H. Cummings

From "William H. Cummings." *The Musical times and Singing-Class Circular* 39, no. 660 (February 1, 1898).

# INTRODUCTION

In the 1848, Waltham Abbey Church in England hired a teenaged organist named William Hayman Cummings. A devoted fan of Mendelssohn's music, the organist sought out copies of everything Mendelssohn wrote as soon as it was published.

In the mid 1850s, Cummings played a portion of Mendelssohn's composition for the Leipzig celebration. As he played, he noticed how easily the tune could be adapted to Wesley's now-familiar Christmas hymn.

In a flash of complicated brilliance, Cummings arranged Mendelssohn's music, written in honor of Gutenberg, to pair with Whitefield's version of Wesley's words.

The congregation at Waltham Abbey was the first to sing the newly crafted hymn. Cummings quickly began to receive requests for his arrangement, which then began to find its way into hymnals.

Cummings went on to have a successful career in music, though he was rarely credited for his arrangement of *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing* for many years.

# INTRODUCTION

The hymn would undergo subsequent alterations and changes, some to the ire of Cummings, but with the organist's arrangements, the song was approaching its final form.

Today, there are minor variations in a few of the verses, but the most significant change from Whitefield's version is that today's hymnbooks typically include just three verses, each made up of two stanzas from the earlier lyrics.

Wesley's version had 10 stanzas. Whitefield used eight. Today's versions contain just six, with the first two lines of the poem serving as a refrain.

*Hark! the Herald Angels Sing* has a complex and fascinating history. It took four artists more than 100 years to compile the song as we know it. Alongside the many lessons the words of this hymn have to offer, perhaps its history can encourage us to have patience with ourselves and our various crafts as we remember that it took more than a century for this song to reach the form that we know and love.

# INTRODUCTION

For further reading see:

"The Abbey Church of Waltham Holy Cross" *The Musical times and Singing-Class Circular* 47, no. 763 (September 1, 1906).

Collins, Ace. 2004. *Stories behind the best-loved songs of Christmas*. Philadelphia: Running Press.

Giles, Gordon. 2005. *O come, Emmanuel: reflections on music and readings for Advent and Christmas*. Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship.

"Hark the Herald Angels Sing." *The Musical times and Singing-Class Circular* 38, no. 658 (December 1, 1897).

McKim, LindaJo K. 1993. *The Presbyterian hymnal companion*. Louisville, Kent: Westminster/John Knox.

"Mendelssohn." *The Musical World* 32, no. 14 (April 8, 1854): 1-3.

Miller, Cait. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing": An Illustrated History. 2016. The Muse Performing Arts Blog of the Library of Congress.

Wakeley, J. B. 1871. *The prince of pulpit orators: a portraiture of Rev. George Whitefield, M.A. : illustrated by anecdotes and incidents*. New York: Carlton & Lanahan.

"William H. Cummings." *The Musical times and Singing-Class Circular* 39, no. 660 (February 1, 1898).



# INTRODUCTION

In this study, the Wesley version of the hymn comes from:

Wesley, John, and Charles Wesley. 1743. *Hymns and Sacred Poems: The Fourth Edition*. Bristol: Printed by Felix Farley.

Whitefield's version comes from:

Whitefield, George. 1758. *A collection of hymns for social worship*. London. Printed by William Strahan.

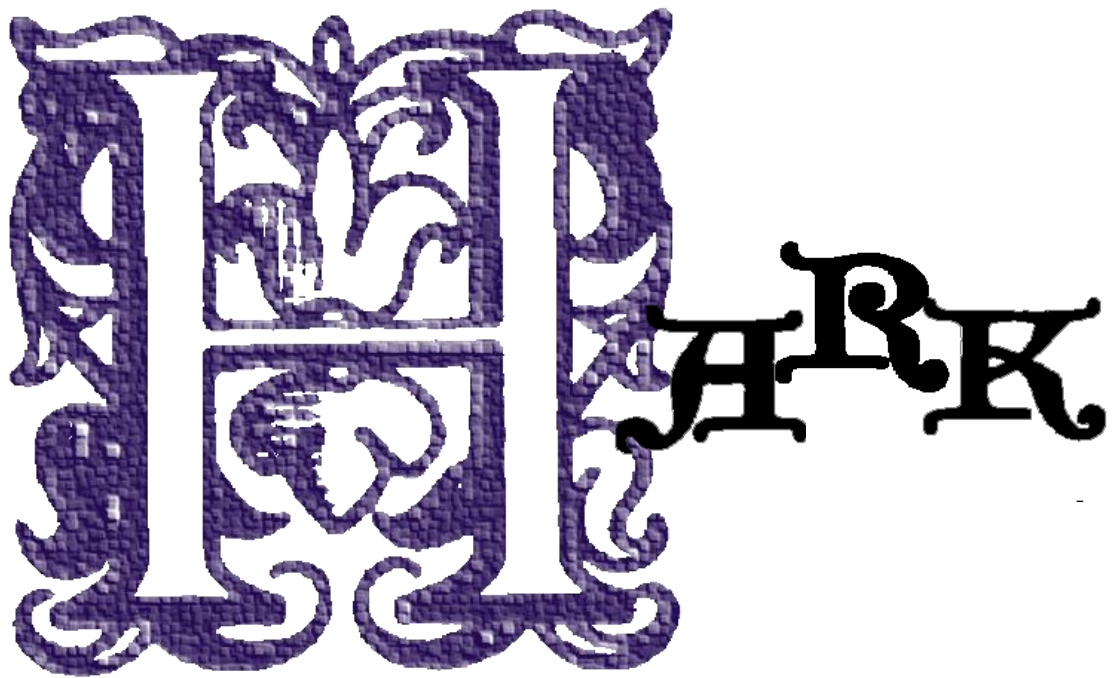
The modern version comes from:

Dodd, Ira Seymour, and Lindsay Bartholomew Longacre. 1912. *The Riverdale hymn book*. New York: Revell.

Scripture comes from:

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CHAPTER 1 –  
HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING

# CHAPTER 1 – HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Wesley:	Whitefield:	Modern:
<p>Hark how all the Welkin rings "Glory to the King of Kings. "Peace on Earth, and Mercy mild, "God and Sinners, reconcil'd!</p>	<p>Hark! The Herald Angels sing Glory to the new-born King! Peace on Earth, and Mercy mild, God and Sinners reconcil'd.</p>	<p>Hark! The Herald Angels sing "Glory to the new-born King! Peace on Earth, and Mercy mild, God and Sinners reconciled!"</p>
<p>Joyful all ye Nations rise, Join the Triumph of the Skies, Universal Nature say "Christ the Lord is born to Day!</p>	<p>Joyful all ye Nations rise, Join the Triumphs of the Skies; Nature rise and worship him, Who is born at Bethlehem.</p>	<p>Joyful all ye nations rise, Join the triumphs of the skies; With th'angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"</p>
		<p>Refrain (Verse 1 Line 1)</p>



# HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING

What did you notice about the different versions of this verse? Why do you think the changes were made? Is there anything you would change?

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# CHAPTER 1 - SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:8-15 (NRSV)

<sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.'

# CHAPTER 1 – REFLECTION AND QUESTIONS

Luke 2 is a well-known part of the Christmas story. With the descriptions of the angels and shepherds, it is a passage that we love to depict with pageants, skits, paintings, and even figurines.

Think about depictions of this passage that you have seen or of which you have been a part. How do our depictions compare with the words of this hymn?

How do our images of this event compare with the actual passage?

What are the differences between popular portrayals of this passage and the Scripture itself?

Are any of those differences significant? If so, how?



CHAPTER 2 –  
CHRIST BY HIGHEST HEAVEN ADORED

# CHAPTER 2 – CHRIST BY HIGHEST HEAVEN ADORED

Wesley:	Whitefield:	Modern:
<p>Christ, by highest Heav'n ador'd Christ, the Everlasting Lord, Late in Time behold him come, Offspring of a Virgin's Womb.</p> <p>Veil'd in Flesh, the Godhead see, Hail th'Incarnate Deity! Pleas'd as Man with Men t'appear Jesus our Immanuel here!</p>	<p>Christ by highest Heav'n ador'd, Christ the everlasting Lord; Late in Time behold him come, Offspring of the Virgin's Womb.</p> <p>Veil'd in Flesh the Godhead see, Hail th'incarnate Deity! Pleas'd as Man with Men t'appear, Jesus our Emmanuel here</p>	<p>Christ, by highest heaven adored; Christ the everlasting Lord! Late in time behold him come, Offspring of the Virgin's womb.</p> <p>Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail th'Inarnate Deity, Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.</p> <p>Refrain (Verse 1 Line 1)</p>

# CHRIST BY HIGHEST HEAVEN ADORED

What did you notice about the different versions of this verse? Why do you think the changes were made? Is there anything you would change?

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## CHAPTER 2 - SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 7:14 (NRSV)

<sup>14</sup>Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

Matthew 1:20-23 (NRSV)

<sup>20</sup>But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' <sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

<sup>23</sup> 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.'

## CHAPTER 2 - REFLECTION AND QUESTIONS

In Matthew 1, we find Joseph deciding to divorce Mary. Before he can do so, however, he has a dream in which an angel convinces him to stay with her.

Matthew then quotes Isaiah 7, applying the passage to Jesus.

The word "Immanuel" or "Emmanuel" comes from Hebrew, and literally means God with us.

As Wesley and Whitefield sought to retell the Christmas story in this song, they both decided that this name was significant enough to warrant inclusion in their hymn. Why do you think it was so important to them?

If you were to rewrite this song, what other titles for Jesus you would want to include? Why?

A number of other songs use this title for Jesus. How many can you name?



CHAPTER 3 —

HAIL THE HEAVEN BORN PRINCE OF PEACE

# CHAPTER 3 – HAIL THE HEAVEN BORN PRINCE OF PEACE

Wesley:	Whitefield:	Modern:
<p>Hail the Heav'nly Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness! Light and Life to All he brings, Ris'n with Healing in his Wings.</p> <p>Mild he lays his Glory by; Born; that Man no more may die, Born; to raise the Sons of Earth, Born; to give them Second Birth</p>	<p>Hail the Heav'n- born Prince of Peace! Hail the Son of Righteousness! Light and Life around he brings, Ris'n with Healing in his Wings.</p> <p>Mild he lays his Glory by, Born that Men no more may die; Born to raise the Sons of Earth Born to give them second Birth.</p>	<p>Hail, the heaven- born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness! Light and life to all he brings, Risen with healing in his wings. Mild he lays his glory by, Born that man no more may die, Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth. Refrain (Verse 1 Line 1)</p>





## CHAPTER 3 - SCRIPTURE

John 3:1-6 (NRSV)

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews.<sup>2</sup> He came to Jesus by night and said to him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.' <sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.' <sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him, 'How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?' <sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, 'Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. <sup>6</sup> What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.



## CHAPTER 3 - REFLECTION AND QUESTIONS

John 3 tells the story of Jesus conversation with Nicodemus. As they talk, Jesus tells Nicodemus that people must be “born from above” to see the kingdom of God. The Greek term can be difficult to translate, and is sometimes rendered “born again.”

Throughout the years, the phrase “born again” has taken a variety of meanings. What do you think Jesus means by the term in this passage?

How have you heard the term “born again” used in other contexts?

What does it mean in this hymn?

Why do you think Wesley chose to use this phrase in a Christmas song?





CHAPTER 4 —  
COME DESIRE OF NATIONS



# CHAPTER 4 – COME DESIRE OF NATIONS

Wesley:  
Come, Desire of Nations,  
come,  
Fix in Us thy humble Home,  
Rise, the Woman's  
Conqu'ring Seed,  
Bruise in Us the Serpent's  
Head.

Now display thy saving  
Pow'r  
Ruin'd Nature now restore,  
Now in Mystic Union join  
Thine to Ours, and Ours to  
Thine.

Whitefield:  
Come Desire of Nations,  
come,  
Fix in us thy heav'nly Home;  
Rise the Woman's  
conqu'ring Seed,  
Bruise in us the Serpent's  
Head.



## CHAPTER 4 - SCRIPTURE

### Genesis 3:14-15 (NRSV)

<sup>14</sup>The LORD God said to the serpent,  
'Because you have done this,  
cursed are you among all animals  
and among all wild creatures;  
upon your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.

<sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers;  
he will strike your head,  
and you will strike his heel.'

### Haggai 2:6-7 (NRSV)

<sup>6</sup>For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; <sup>7</sup>and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendour, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>8</sup>The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>9</sup>The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the LORD of hosts.



## CHAPTER 4 – REFLECTION AND QUESTIONS

The phrase “come desire of nations come” is famously associated with *O Come O Come Emmanuel*. In Haggai 2, the phrase “treasure of all nations” is sometimes translated “Desire of nations.”

The passage speaks of a restoration of the glory of Jerusalem and an upheaval of the political and economic realities of society.

Why might the authors of hymns associated with Christmas be drawn to a phrase used in Haggai?

As the verse continues, Wesley draws from the language of Genesis 3 about a “son of Eve” wounding the head of the serpent. This verse, along with verse five, connects the birth of Jesus with the story of the fall. “Woman’s conquering seed” can be interpreted as a symbol for Jesus. The song asks him to bruise the head of the serpent, who can be interpreted as a symbol of sin or evil.

Why might Wesley have used this reference to Genesis? How would you interpret Wesley’s use of the Genesis passage?



CHAPTER 5 –  
ADAM'S LIKENESS LORD EFFACE

# CHAPTER 5 – ADAM'S LIKENESS, LORD, EFFACE

Wesley:  
Adam's Likeness, Lord,  
efface  
Stamp thy Image in its Place,  
Second Adam from above,  
Reinstate us in thy Love.

Let us Thee tho' lost, regain,  
Thee, the Life, the Heav'nly  
Man:  
O! to All Thyself impart,  
Form'd in each Believing  
Heart.

Whitefield:  
Adam's Likeness now efface,  
Stamp thy Image in it's  
Place;  
Second Adam from above,  
Work it in us by thy Love.



## CHAPTER 5 - SCRIPTURE

### I Corinthians 15:21-26 (NRSV)

<sup>21</sup>For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; <sup>22</sup>for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup>Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup>For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup>The last enemy to be destroyed is death.



## CHAPTER 5 - REFLECTION AND QUESTIONS

I Corinthians 15 compares Jesus to Adam and makes the case that Jesus is like a second Adam, a new creation, bringing faithfulness and life instead of sin and death.

The images of the enemy being beneath Jesus' foot also brings to mind passages like Genesis 3, and the Wesley's fourth verse of this hymn.

Paired with verse four, Wesley incorporates both the story of Genesis as well as the New Testament Epistles with the story of Christmas. Wesley spreads the allusions out over two verses, while Whitefield combines them as one.

Which version do you prefer?

Why do you think that Wesley and Whitefield thought the references to Adam and Eve were important enough to include in this song?

# APPENDIX A: WHAT'S A WELKIN?



# APPENDIX A: WHAT'S A WELKIN?

Charles Wesley wrote the earliest version of the Hymn we know as *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing* and included it in *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, first published in 1739. The original title was simply "Hymn for Christmas Day."

In the 1750s, George Whitefield made revisions to Wesley's text and included the new version in his own collection of music.

One of the most significant changes was the opening line.

Wesley opened his poem with the following lines:

Hark how all the Welkin rings  
"Glory to the King of Kings

Which Whitefield changed to read:

Hark! The Herald Angels sing  
Glory to the new-born King!

Looking at these two opening lines, the first question that likely arises is "What's a Welkin?"

# APPENDIX A: WHAT'S A WELKIN?

“Welkin” is a term that enjoyed its peak popularity in the late 1500s, in part, perhaps, to use by poets like Shakespeare and Chaucer. A quick look at Shakespeare’s use of the word may help identify the word (if you’re not a Shakespeare fan, fear not. This part will be short!).

In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* the Fairy King Oberon issues the following command to his servant:

The starry welkin cover thou anon  
With drooping fog as black as Acheron

The word also appears in *King John*, when Lewis proclaims:

The sun of heaven, methought, was loth to set  
But stay’d, and made the western welkin blush

These two examples offer some context, indicating that the word “welkin” is a poetic term for what we currently mean by the word sky. It’s poetic and often cosmic connotations may make it more like the word “firmament” or even “heavens.”

When Wesley chose to open his hymn with “Welkin,” he was referring not to angels but to the skies or heavens in their cosmic entirety.



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But not everyone reads Shakespeare or Chaucer, and by the mid-1700s, when Wesley wrote his poem, the modest popularity of the term had fallen.

The chart below, taken from Google's NGram viewer, compares the rate that the words "welkin" and "angel" appear in books within the Google Books database between 1700 and 1750. Though an imperfect tool (see the 2017 PTS Epiphany Resource Kit), the NGram viewer can give some indication as to a word's popularity at a given time.



In this graph, the rate that the word "angel" appears in books is represented by the red line. The rate that the word "welkin" appears is represented by the blue line—the one that is so close to the bottom you can't really see it!

# APPENDIX A: WHAT'S A WELKIN?

Whitefield, with his knack for communicating to the masses, may have assumed that a hymn with the word "Welkin" in its opening would have trouble gaining popularity. Angels was a much more familiar term.

Charles Wesley, however, was reportedly furious at the change. The problem with Whitefield's edit was that "Welkin" and "Herald Angels" don't mean the same thing.

The passage portrayed in this opening, Luke chapter 2, does not use the word "angels" to describe who sings. The passage instead displays "a multitude of the heavenly host," sometimes translated "heavenly army." To capture this breadth, Wesley's used the word, "Welkin," representing the entirety of the skies or heavens, not simply "herald angels."

The change from welkin to angels was not the only controversy, however. Whitefield's angels also sang a different song than Wesley's welkin. Wesley portrayed the welkin ringing out "Glory to the King of Kings." Whitefield's herald angels, however, sang "Glory to the new-born King!"



# APPENDIX A: WHAT'S A WELKIN?

Without getting lost in Trinitarian theology, the passage shows the heavenly host singing “Glory to God in the highest.” Some consider Wesley’s “King of Kings” to be more accurate than Whitefield’s “new-born king” language.

Despite the controversy, Wesley’s words faded into obscurity while Whitefield’s gained popularity.



# APPENDIX A: WHAT'S A WELKIN?

Read Luke 2, and compare it with the Wesley and Whitefield versions of the first verse.

## Luke 2:8-18

<sup>8</sup> In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> 'Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.





# APPENDIX A: WHAT'S A WELKIN?

Questions for reflection:

In your comparison, is one version of the song more faithful to the text than the other? If so, is it Wesley's or Whitefield's?

Do you think Wesley would be justified in being angry with Whitefield over the changes to his poem?

If you had to rewrite the opening to his song in today's language, how would you do it?

Which version is closer to the way you envision the event in your imagination?



# APPENDIX B: DISCUSSION PROMPTS AND ACTIVITIES



# DISCUSSION PROMPTS AND ACTIVITIES

## 1. The Great Debate

If you could arrange an debate between Whitefield and Wesley, in which each had to argue for his own version of each verse, how do you think they would make their respective cases?

Who would you agree with and why?

## 2. Last Verse Standing

Imagine that you are publishing a hymnal and can only include three verses of this song. Which two would you include and why?

Once you've selected three, your editor tells you that you need to cut one more. Which of the remaining three verses would you cut? Why?

If you could only sing one verse, which would it be and why?

Be prepared to defend your answer—others may choose different verses!



# DISCUSSION PROMPTS AND ACTIVITIES

## 3. The Mystery of the Missing Verses

You have been tasked with explaining the disappearance of several stanzas of *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing* to a confused group of hymnologists from the 1700s. They don't understand how the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of the song came to omit so many stanzas found in the 18<sup>th</sup> century versions.

Explain why the verses are no longer used from your point of view and the impact their absence has on the meaning of the song.

## 4. Reference

Imagine that you have been approached by Charles Wesley with a request to add an additional verse to this song. Specifically, Wesley would like to add a reference to a book of the Bible not yet directly represented.

Write a verse that quotes an additional book of the Bible. Identify the passage your new verse draws from, and explain why Wesley would be happy to incorporate your new stanza.



# DISCUSSION PROMPTS AND ACTIVITIES

## 5. Pallets and Poets

Imagine that you received a message from George Whitefield, asking you to help him print his version of *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*. He has finished his edits but would like to print each verse in a different color of ink.

He wants each color to express the meaning of its verse. What colors would you use for which verses and why?

## 6. Elevator Speech

Imagine that you step onto an elevator with a stranger when this song begins to play.

The stranger comments that it seems different than most Christmas music and then asks if you know anything about it. In 30 seconds, explain *Hark! the Herald* to the stranger, who may have little or no knowledge of Christianity or Scripture.

# DISCUSSION PROMPTS AND ACTIVITIES

## 7. Firing Mendelssohn

Imagine that you find yourself somehow traveling through time, sitting with William Cummings as he considers setting this hymn to Mendelssohn's music. The organist is uncertain that he likes the pairing and would like to try a few other tunes to go along with the words.

Choose two new tunes to go along with the words of *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*. You can use a tune that you know—from another hymn, a favorite song, jingle, or theme song, or you can create a new tune.

For your first tune, you may not edit any words.

Once you have selected a tune that works with the words as they are, you may select a second tune that goes with an edited version of the verses. For this second tune, you may add or subtract refrains, choruses, lines, words, or syllables as needed as long as you do not change the meaning of the text.

You may use any resources necessary to complete this activity.



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