

Date Preached	26-Dec-2021	Date Initiated	21-Dec-2021
Where Preached	SAK	Appointed Readings	Xmas L&C (BOS 2018)

" Sing, choirs of angels; sing in exultation "



There is just *something* about Christmas and carols, isn't there? There are, to be sure, hymns that we sing frequently during other seasons ... in Advent, in Lent and during Easter ... that are of equally venerable lineage and tradition. But I don't think we'd feel any of those seasons were incomplete or short-changed if we omitted *them* ↓ the way Christmas would feel if we didn't sing "O come, all ye faithful" or "Hark! the herald angels sing" or "Silent night." Those carols—and many others (including my own personal favorite, "Angels we have heard on high")—are as woven into the fabric of Christmas as decorating a tree or exchanging gifts.

Now, I'm not naïve ... or, at least, not *entirely* (!): I know the secular culture probably has something to do with this. By now, we're used to hearing a bouncy "I saw three ships come sailing in" at the grocery store or a soulful "It came upon a midnight clear" in the airport. There are stations that begin playing Christmas music full-time in November or even October; indeed, it wouldn't surprise me to learn there are one or two somewhere that play it all year-round. Both pop singers and symphony orchestras, alike, know that recording a Christmas album—usually with at least a few 'chestnuts' from the Church's repertoire—is a sure path to commercial success.

But I don't think it's just the familiarity of these tunes or the catchy way we may hear Nat King Cole or Annie Lennox perform them that makes these carols so dear to us. No, there is something about hearing—and singing—them *here* ... in this particular place; in this particular season; with these particular people ... that simply makes Christmas ↓ *Christmas*.

- For one thing, re-opening the treasury of beloved carols each year helps us explore and express the full range of responses we, the faithful, have to the Birth of Our Savior: ¶the overflowing joy of [*sing*] "Glo-ri-a" ... ¶the tender gift that [*sing*] "while mortals sleep, ↓ the angels keep their watch of wond'ring love" ... ¶the triumphant proclamation [*sing*] "Joy to the world! the Lord is come; let earth receive her King" ... ¶and the perfect stillness of a [*sing*] "silent night, holy night."
- It is also true that the long and cherished memories we have of singing these carols, year-upon-year ... in churches we were baptized and grew up in ... were married in ... raised children in ... met dearest friends in ... buried loved ones in ... furnish these hymns a timelessness and transcendence that are so perfectly befitting: for Christ did not come once in time, but for all time ... and *every* time. He did not bring us a mere *taste* of Heaven, but its full and glorious banquet-feast. The God who came to be With-Us in the Manger in Bethlehem is *still* With-Us ... *and* with everyone with whom we've ever sung these beautiful carols, wherever they may be: on the near shore or the far.

- But for me, more than anything else, the transforming power of these carols lies with the angels. They appear in the account of Jesus' Birth like nowhere else in the Bible,* in great, swarming multitudes, praising God and singing, "Glory to God in the highest" (Lk 2:13-14). *One* angel would have sufficed to tell the shepherds about the miracle of the Manger, but *countless* of God's messengers throng the sky, bursting with joy and adoration. A *spoken* command to "go to Bethlehem and see" surely would have been invitation enough, but these heralds cannot help but *sing* the Good News they have been charged to announce: "mild, he lays his Glory by, born that we no more may die; born to raise **the all** of earth, born to give them second birth."

It is the angels who show us how to greet the Christ Child ... how to receive His Coming ... how to trumpet His Presence with us and in us. And so, how can we keep from singing, just as they do? How can we uncork the full joy of Christmas ... how can we pour forth the full glory of Christ's Birth ... how can we drink in the resplendent dawn of His New Age ... without singing? without lifting our voices, not just in *imitation* of, but—indeed—**with** the very angel choirs ... to tell out the great, glad tidings of comfort and joy?

"Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning," we sing in exultation, with all the citizens of heaven above: So *do* ↓ come, let us adore Him, ↓ Christ the Lord!



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* I am, I admit, intentionally glossing over the Book of Revelation, where St John encounters and witnesses angels seemingly at every turn. His account, however, takes place largely in heaven, and the angels I limn just now are those who appear among us on earth.