

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Luke 2:8-14 ⁸And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. ¹⁰And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ¹⁴Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

- Many **LEGENDS** have sprung up around our celebration of Christmas. Here are some of the most popular, along with their true/false status:

1. **Poinsettia plants are poisonous to humans. False.**
2. **Candy canes were created to symbolize Jesus, their shape representing the letter "j" and their colors standing for the purity and blood of Christ. False.**
3. **The song "The Twelve Days of Christmas" was created as a coded reference to important articles of the Christian faith. False.**
4. **The suicide rate increases significantly during the winter holiday season. False.**
5. **The character 'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer' was created for Montgomery Ward department stores. True.**

Rudolph came to life in 1939 when the Chicago-based company asked one of their copywriters, 34-year-old Robert L. May, to come up with a Christmas story they could give away to shoppers as a promotional gimmick. May, who had a talent for creating children's stories, rejected the names "Rollo" and "Reginald" before settling on "Rudolph." His story, originally written in verse, received a warm reception from his 4-year-old daughter Barbara, but a chilly one from his boss, who worried that the reindeer's red nose might be associated with drunkenness. May's illustrations finally overcame his reluctance, and the tale became an overnight success. Rudolph's story really became a phenomenon, however, when May's brother-in-law Johnny Marks set it to music and Gene Autry recorded it in 1949. It became one of the best-selling Christmas songs of all time, second only to "White Christmas," and an animated Christmas special narrated by Burl Ives in 1964 remains a perennial favorite.

6. **Xmas is a modern, disrespectful abbreviation of Christmas. False.**

The abbreviation of 'Xmas' for 'Christmas' is neither modern nor disrespectful. The notion that it is a new and vulgar representation of the word 'Christmas' seems to stem from the erroneous belief that the letter 'X' is used to stand for the word 'Christ' because of its resemblance to a cross, or that the abbreviation was deliberately concocted "to take 'Christ' out of Christmas." Actually, this usage is nearly as old as Christianity itself, and its origins lie in the fact that the first letter in the Greek word for 'Christ' is 'chi,' and the Greek letter 'chi' is represented by a symbol similar to the letter 'X' in the modern Roman alphabet. Hence 'Xmas' is indeed perfectly legitimate abbreviation for the word 'Christmas.' None of this means that Christians (and others) aren't justified in feeling slighted when people write 'Xmas' rather than 'Christmas,' but the point is that the abbreviation was not created specifically for the purpose of demeaning Christ, Christians, Christianity, or Christmas. It's simply a very old artifact of a very different language.

7. **Three wise men traveled from afar on camels to visit the infant Jesus as he lay in the manger. False.**

The truth is, the Bible contains virtually none of these details. Matthew 2:1 tells us: **Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem.** That's it. Matthew doesn't say how many wise men came from the east, doesn't mention their names, and doesn't provide any details about how they made their journey. (It has generally been assumed that the wise men were three in number because Matthew's gospel makes mention of three gifts.) Nothing in the Bible says the wise men rode camels (or any other animal); they may have made their journey from the east on foot for all we know. And despite the familiar lyrics of the Christmas carol "We Three Kings," no biblical source depicts the three wise men as kings. They were most likely learned men, perhaps astrologers. However many wise men there were, and however they got to Bethlehem, the Bible tells us they arrived just after the birth and found the baby Jesus in a manger, right? Not quite. Matthew 2:11 states: **And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.** Note that the wise men came "into the house," not the stable, and they saw a "young child," not an infant. This indicates that the wise men didn't arrive until quite some time after Jesus' birth. It was shepherds, not wise men, who visited the infant Jesus in the manger.

8. Jesus was born on December 25. False.

The biblical narrative of Jesus' birth gives no date for the event, though it more likely occurred in spring than in winter. Luke 2:8 tells us: **And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.** Shepherds guarded their flocks day and night only at lambing time, in the spring; in winter, the animals were kept in corrals, unwatched. The idea of celebrating the Nativity on December 25 was first suggested early in the fourth century, a clever move on the part of Church fathers, who wished to eclipse the December 25 festivities of a rival pagan religion, Mithraism, that threatened the existence of Christianity. On December 25, pagan Romans, still in the majority, celebrated Natalis Solis Invincti, "Birthday of the Invincible Sun God," Mithras. Mithraism was so popular with the masses that Emperor Aurelian proclaimed it the official state religion. In the early 300's, the cult seriously threatened Christianity, and for a time, it was unclear which faith would emerge victorious. Thus, to offer converts an occasion to properly celebrate, the Church officially recognized Christ's birth. And to offer head-on competition to the sun worshipers' popular feast, the Church located the Nativity on December 25. The mode of observance would be prayerful, a "mass," in fact, Christ's Mass. As one theologian of the day wrote: "We hold this day holy, not like the pagans because of the birth of the sun, but because of him who made it."

9. A choir of angels sang at the birth of Jesus. False.

Charles Wesley is credited with authoring over 3000 hymns. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" is one of them. Actually, what he wrote is "Hark how all the welkin rings, Glory to the King of Kings." ("Welkin" means heaven.) Because the verse was altered, today most people believe the Bible talks of singing angels. Actually, the scripture does not say that! The "host of angels" were "saying" not "singing" at the birth of Christ. **AND THAT MAY INDEED BE QUITE SIGNIFICANT!**

- The angels were very active in the time surrounding Christ's birth:
 - An angel appeared to Zacharias in the temple, to tell him that he would have a son and that his name would be John. (Luke 1:13)
 - An angel appeared to Mary to tell her that she would give birth to the son of God, and that his name would be Jesus. (Luke 1:30-31)
 - An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, to put his fears to rest about taking Mary as his wife. (Matthew 1:20)
 - An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream to warn him to flee with his family to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod. (Matthew 2:13)

- An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream to tell him that King Herod was dead and that it was safe to return to Israel. (Matthew 2:19-20)
- And of course, it was an angel that appeared to the shepherds in Luke 2 to announce the birth of Christ, along with a "a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and SAYING ..."
- But at no time during Christ's earthly ministry do the angels SING. In fact, the Bible gives us no indication that angels sing today, or at any other time during human history!
- There are only **TWO TIMES** in Scripture that we see the angels singing, once at creation and once in Heaven with the redeemed:
 - **Job 38:4-7** ⁴Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. ⁵Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? ⁶Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; ⁷When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
 - **Revelation 5:8-9** ⁸And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. ⁹And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;
- The first time the angels sang was before the creation of man, before Adam's sin, and even before Lucifer's fall from Heaven. In fact, Lucifer was probably leading them in worship! The Bible names three archangels, and gives us a hint as to their original role in Heaven:
 - Michael – the archangel in charge of the nation of Israel
 - Gabriel – the archangel in charge of bringing God's messages
 - Lucifer – the archangel in charge of leading worship to God
- It was when the "worshipper" desired to become the "worshipped" that all the trouble started in Heaven! Angels are not omniscient ("all-knowing") like God, and Lucifer could not have imagined the terrible fate that would befall him due to his rebellion.
- **THERE WAS CHAOS IN HEAVEN'S CHOIR!** Their leader was gone! Since that time, the angels have continued to praise God, but never is there a record of them SINGING their praises! They don't have a "choir director" any more!

- It was also Lucifer that led Adam and Eve into sin, in hopes of stopping every SONG of praise to God throughout all creation, permanently! But he didn't know that God had a plan of redemption for humanity!
- **1 Corinthians 2:6-10** ⁶Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: ⁷But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: ⁸**Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.** ⁹But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. ¹⁰But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.
- **Since the fall, in every place that Scripture records worship through SINGING, it is invariably tied to REDEMPTION.** When a man experiences salvation, it puts a SONG in his heart, whether his vocal cords can carry a tune or not!
 - **Psalm 100:1-2** ¹ Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. ² Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing.
 - **Psalm 27:6** And now shall mine head be lifted up above mine enemies round about me: therefore will I offer in his tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the LORD.
 - **Psalm 47:6-7** ⁶ Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises. ⁷ For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding.
 - **Psalm 104:33** I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.
 - **Psalm 40:2-3** ² He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. ³ And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.
 - **Ephesians 5:18-19** ¹⁸ And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; ¹⁹ Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;
- Have you ever wondered why the devil so viciously opposes you in your living for God, and even in your worship? It is because YOU ARE TAKING HIS PLACE, usurping his original role in leading praise to God! And he is JEALOUS of the immeasurable blessing you have!
- In fact, since John's encounter with the Lord on the Isle of Patmos, the devil has known something that makes him INSANE WITH JEALOUSY. For John saw in his vision the redeemed of all ages, represented by the four and twenty elders, LEADING WORSHIP IN HEAVEN.
- **Revelation 5:8-9** ⁸ And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints. ⁹ And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;
- The four beasts are the angels that surround God's throne, and as such they represent all the angelic hosts. THE ANGELIC CHOIR WILL ONCE AGAIN GET A "CHOIR DIRECTOR" TO LEAD THEM IN WORSHIP ... AND IT WILL BE THE REDEEMED ... IT WILL BE YOU!
- We will sing together in praise to God through all the ages of eternity! THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS IS THE STORY OF REDEMPTION! **But until we get to Heaven, the angels cannot begin to sing it!**
- **1 Peter 1:12** Unto [the prophets] it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; **which things the angels desire to look into.**
- The angels did not sing at the FIRST COMING of Christ, but they will sing with the church at His SECOND COMING! "It's a song holy angels cannot sing, Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, it's a song holy angels cannot sing, I once was lost, but now I'm found!"

HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

Hark! the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!
Joyful, all ye nations, rise, Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angelic host proclaim Christ is born in Bethlehem!
Hark! the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King!

Christ, by highest heaven adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord;
Late in time behold him come, Offspring of a Virgin's womb,
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; Hail the incarnate Deity.
Pleased as man with man to dwell; Jesus, our Emmanuel!
Hark! the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King!

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 we no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth, Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King!