

Lutheran Service Book 367

# Angels from the Realms of Glory

Service: Sunday, December 25 at 10 AM

Church Year: The Nativity of Our Lord – 2016

Please Join Us

Saturday, New Year's Eve at 7 PM OR Sunday, New Year's Day at 10 AM

**Introduction**: Dear friends: *Merry Christmas!* Christ, our Savior, has † lived, † died, † rose, and † ascended; *His saving work is finished*; He is now reigning; and He will come again! Today, *as we celebrate His birth*, we focus on the popular hymn, **Angels from the Realms of Glory**, which is “possibly the best-written, sacred Christmas carol of all time.”<sup>1</sup>

Before we get to the hymn itself, let's learn about its composer, *James Montgomery*<sup>2</sup> of Scotland. He was born in 1771; his father was a missionary. When James was young his parents were called to do mission work in the West Indies, so he was sent to live in Ireland.

Five years later his parents died on the mission field. “By the age of twenty, [James] was little more than a vagrant, moving from job to job, often unemployed, and homeless for weeks at a time” (11).

James did enjoy writing though, and eventually took over a local newspaper. Through his editorial articles he waged a written war for Ireland's freedom. “His fiery editorial stance twice landed him in prison. [When he wasn't busy writing,] he was reading his Bible in an attempt to understand the

<sup>1</sup> Ace Collins, Stories Behind the Best-Loved Songs of Christmas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 11.

<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery also wrote the words to LSB 398, 435, and 436, “Go to Dark Gethsemane.”

power that motivated his parents' lives and ultimately led to their deaths" (12).

Even though his writing typically *stirred people up*, his readers immediately noticed the topic of *unity* in his editorial article on Christmas Eve in 1816 – when he shared the words of **Angels from the Realms of Glory**. The hymn, *initially called Nativity*, “told the story of angels proclaiming the birth of a Savior for all people, English and Irish, rich and poor, Anglican and Moravian” (14).

James Montgomery wrote the words, but the tune came from Henry Smart.<sup>3</sup> “By the age of eighteen, Smart was going blind,” (15); then, *some twenty years later*, he heard the words written by Montgomery and wrote the tune we have today. **Angels from the Realms of Glory** “...would soon become one of the songs that opened the door for a new, joyful, and uplifting musical style in hundreds of English churches” (15).

1. **Stanza 1:** **Angels from the realms of glory, Wing your flight o'er all the earth; Ye who sang creation's story, Now proclaim Messiah's birth.** // Angels are messengers, so, *as recorded in Luke 2*, God sent an angel – *from the realms of glory* – to announce to the shepherds outside of Bethlehem that a Savior had been born to them, *who is Christ the Lord!* Those shepherds needed a Savior; so do we! We have all been disobedient to God; at times we have all chosen *our own way over God's way*. Since our action could never make it right, *God took action through Jesus!*

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Smart also wrote the tunes for LSB 478, 494, 583, and 924, “Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing.”

**Refrain: Come and worship, come and worship; Worship Christ, the newborn King.** // Today we have come, *we are here to worship!* As recorded in Matthew 2, *wise men came to worship the baby Jesus; then “they fell down and worshiped him” (v. 11 ESV).* Even though He was only an infant, *they bowed down before Him and gave Him precious gifts!* Now, in 2016, *we know so much more about Jesus: He is God in flesh, He gave up everything for us, and He is the only way to heaven, so let us trust Him and bow before Him!*

2. **Stanza 2: Shepherds in the field abiding, Watching o’er your flocks by night, God with us is now residing, Yonder shines the Infant Light. Refrain** // From Luke 2 we know there were *“shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night” (v. 8 NAS).* It was *at that time* that God’s messenger announced the amazing news that *the Messiah, the Christ, the Word made flesh, the light of the world had been born in Bethlehem!*

We now sing stanzas 1-2

3. **Stanza 3: Sages, leave your contemplations, Brighter visions beam afar; Seek the great Desire of nations, Ye have seen His natal star. Refrain** // *Sages, thus wise men,* they are being called to **STOP** their deep thinking in order to **SEEK** *“the great Desire of nations,”* *the One whom we need the most, the One whose birth was accompanied by a star, and the One given by God to save all people from their sins!* In today’s world there are many learned people, *but the true wise men are the ones who* ✓ admit their sins, ✓ are sorry, and

✓ seek “the great Desire of nations”! *Let us always be counted among such people!*

4. **Stanza 4:** **Saints before the altar bending, Watching long in hope and fear, Suddenly the Lord, descending, In His temple shall appear. Refrain** // The fall brought condemnation, *so the LORD promised salvation*; then the long wait began – waiting – waiting – waiting for 4,000 years! Think of Simeon and Anna as recorded in Luke 2: The Holy Spirit had made it known to Simeon that he would *see the Messiah* before he died; then there was Anna who had been living in the temple and waiting *for about sixty years!* Then, *suddenly*, both Simeon and Anna were blessed to see their Savior!

We now sing stanzas 3-4

5. **Stanza 5:** **All creation, join in praising, God the Father, Spirit, Son, Evermore your voices raising, To the\_ eternal Three in One. Refrain** // *The people and all creation were pulled down with the fall, so now the creation itself, as recorded Romans 8, and all people should join in praising the Triune God – who took amazing action to reverse the curse and redeem the world!*

**Conclusion:** Let us pray: Dear LORD, even though we have sinned so much, *You love us and have saved us through Jesus!* Enable us now and always to receive Your gift of Jesus and share Him with others! In Jesus’ name we pray...

↑ We now sing stanza 5