

Lutheran Service Book 388

Go Tell It on the Mountain

Sunday, December 25 at 10:00

The Nativity of our Lord – 2013

On Sunday, 12/29 – We have one Service at 10 AM

Mondays at 7 PM – They return on January 6

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen! On this Christmas Day 2013 we focus on the hymn, “**Go Tell It on the Mountain.**” First we will consider its background; then, *the meaning of the words and their relation to God’s Word.*

Background: If you opened the Lutheran Service Book and looked at the bottom of the page, you would see that “**Go Tell It on the Mountain**” is an *African American spiritual*. Therefore, it is a hymn that followed this course:

- **From** African American slaves in the fields.
- **To** small slave churches.
- *Eventually to* white churches.
- *Even to* large concert halls in both the South and the North.
- And, finally, **to** the Lutheran Service Book.¹

Most African American spirituals “**centered on earthly pain and suffering, and the joy and happiness that only heaven seemed to offer.**”² For a moment, *try to imagine being a slave*: You are told: ☹️what you must and *must not* do,

¹ Ace Collins, *Stories Behind the Best-Loved Songs of Christmas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 43.

² *Ibid.*, 44.

☹️what you must and *must not* say, and ☹️where you must and *must not* go. You have no choice; *obey or else!* For those trapped in slavery they understood their earthly lot, but they longed for joy and happiness *beyond this life!* Their ticket to paradise was Jesus, *so they thought and sung about their Savior and their eternal home!* That reminds me of the questions asked of Rev. James May by those living in Burkina Faso, West Africa: Is there a God? Is there a heaven? How do we get there? *Then Pastor May pointed them to Jesus!*

Not long after the Civil War a man named John Wesley Work – ♦an African American, ♦a scholar, and ♦a musician – was used by the LORD to spread the hymn, “**Go Tell It on the Mountain**” throughout the world.

This is the hymn:

1. **Refrain:** **Go tell it on the mountain, Over the hills and ev’rywhere; Go tell it on the mountain, That Jesus Christ is born!** // So which people initially told others about Jesus? *The shepherds!* After the angels returned to heaven, the Bible says that the shepherds: “...hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child...” (Luke 2:16-17 NIV) But where, exactly, did they spread that word? *Possibly* ☺️on the mountain, ☺️over the hills, and ☺️everywhere!
2. **Stanza 1:** **While shepherds kept their watching, O’er silent flocks by night, Behold, throughout the heavens, There shone a holy light. Refrain.** // It seems that shepherds were unimportant people in the sight of the world, *similar to slaves*. Nevertheless, it was lowly

shepherds to whom the angel announced these words:

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born **to you**; he is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11 NIV) When *famous* or *wealthy* people are lost, *people search diligently to find them*; but who cares about shepherds, or slaves, or common sinners like you and me? Many in our world might not care, **BUT GOD DOES CARE!** 700 years before Jesus’ birth, the LORD moved Isaiah to write: “**For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...**” (Isaiah 9:6 NIV) That child, that son *is Jesus!* He is the Savior of all – *from the lowest to the highest! Everyone needs Him!*

3. **Stanza 2: The shepherds feared and trembled, When lo, above the earth, Rang out the angel chorus, That hailed our Savior’s birth. Refrain.** // Angels are awesome beings created by God; they are messengers – *bringing messages from God to people*. For example: Gabriel spoke ✚ to Zechariah about John (Luke 1:5-20) and ✚ to Mary about Jesus (Luke 1:26-38); also, ✚ an angel spoke to Joseph about Jesus (Matt. 1:18-25)! Then, *going ahead in time to Jesus’ birth*, we come to the shepherds; the Bible says: “An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.... [Then, after hearing the good news of Jesus’ birth:] Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” (Luke 2:9, 13-14 NIV) Try to imagine those shepherds: *shaking with fear YET filled with joy!*

4. **Stanza 3: Down in a lonely manger, The humble Christ was born; And God sent us salvation, That blessed Christmas morn. Refrain.** // Today’s epistle reading (Heb. 1:1-6) described our Savior:
- God “has spoken to us by his Son...”
 - God “appointed [Him] heir of all things...”
 - God “made the universe” through Him.”
 - He is “the radiance of God’s glory...”
 - He is “the exact representation of [God’s] being.”
 - He is “sustaining all things by his powerful word.”
 - He has “provided purification for sins...”
 - He “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”

Nevertheless, *God sent Him and He came* to be our Savior! St. Paul wrote: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.” (2Co 8:9 NIV) Since we were all super-poor in our sins (even dead, Eph. 2:1), the Christ came to make us spiritually rich through ✚ His sinless living and ✚ His sacrificial dying!

Conclusion: Since we *were* so low and, *now*, have been lifted so very high thru Jesus, let us go forth to ♦the mountains, ♦the hills, and ♦everywhere in between *to share the good news that Jesus Christ is born!* And all God’s people said: **Amen!**