

hark the herald angels sing?

luke 2:8-14

1. the significant & confusing business of carol singing

Carol singing is a really important part of Christmas for many people. There are carols playing in supermarkets while we shop. There are massive carol events on television. All over the place there are carols by candlelight gatherings. I've even been hearing people walk around humming Christmas carols. Carols are a big part of many people's Christmas.

Perhaps one of the reasons carols are so popular is that they're so familiar to us.

Every year we sing the same carols. Singing them is part of the tradition of Christmas.

But if you're like me, the carols are so familiar that I often find myself singing them without even thinking about what I sing. The words just flow off my tongue, & my brain is in neutral. And sometimes, the words are pretty strange. The word, Nowell, is not one I use all that much apart from Christmas!

So given all of that, I thought it'd be helpful to take a few moments to think through the words of one particular carol...
Hark the herald angels sing.
But before we look at the carol, let's take a quick look at the part of the Bible that the carol comes from.

2. a surprising & important message

**** Luke 2:8-9 ****

I don't know why it is that on all the Christmas cards I've seen, angels look so peaceful & serene & nice. Because in the Bible, whenever they appear to people they bring terror!

The shepherds wouldn't have forgotten this night in a hurry that's for sure. But listen to what the angel spoke to these terrified shepherds...

**** Luke 2:10-12 ****

It's a very important message that the angel declared to those shepherds that night. It's a message that unlocks the truth about Christmas.

And it was a most surprising message.

For a little distance from the shepherds, in a small town called Bethlehem, unnoticed by anyone of importance, a young girl away from home in a dirty stable had given birth to her first child.

There was no room in the inn for them & so this child, wrapped in cloths was placed in a feed box.

Its a picture of poverty & pity & shame...

and yet the angel declared to the shepherds that the birth of this baby who lay in the manger, was the most important birth in the entire history of our planet.

"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 Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord."

The angel awards to this new born baby Jesus 3 titles of immense significance....

can you see them?

This Jesus is born as Saviour, Christ & Lord.

We'll consider each title in turn

3. 3 titles

• 3.1 Saviour

Firstly "saviour".

Jesus was born as a saviour or a rescuer.

That's an important title to notice because it means someone's in trouble.

A saviour is only needed when someone needs saving.

And that someone is us.

In the Bible, God warns us that every single one of us is in serious trouble with him.

All of us choose to go it alone in life without God.

We do things our way...

we please ourselves...

We leave God out of the picture...

sure, we think about God sometimes... we might even obey him sometimes....

But God's GOD!

This is his world, we are his creatures....

Life just doesn't work unless we're connected to him.

His rightful place is at the centre of everything we do.

We don't treat God as God, & that's what the bible calls sin.

Our sin disconnects us from God.

In fact God promises to judge sin with justice....

& we are all guilty.

We're in this terrible danger & we are helpless to get out of it... we can't change it...

we need to be rescued.

We need to be saved.

That's very different to the way we normally think about ourselves isn't it? Its much more comfortable to assume that we're all basically good people & that we'll be in heaven when we die.

But that's not what the bible teaches.

I need to let you know that.

Because the bible spells it out plainly that none of us are good enough for God.

We're in trouble... we need saving.

That's the bad news.

But the angel brought good news for the shepherds.

Good news of great joy that would be for all the people.

Jesus was born as the Saviour.

• **3.2 Christ**

But he is no ordinary saviour.

That's signalled in the other 2 titles the angel declared about Jesus.

He wanted the shepherds to understand that this saviour who was born was none other than the Christ.

Its easy to miss the significance of that second title.

We tend to think of Christ as Jesus' surname.

But it is much bigger than that.

The word "Christ" means King.

And not just any king, God's chosen King.

Before the birth of Jesus, God had been promising for some time the arrival of His specially chosen King.

He promised that this King would reign forever.

He promised that this King's kingdom would be boundless.

This would be the King of all kings...

he would enjoy ultimate authority & power forever.

He would be the Christ, the Messiah, God's chosen King.

And so the angels declare that Jesus, the baby in the manger in Bethlehem is that Christ.

He is the promised one.

This one who was born as the Saviour is the King of kings.

That would have been breath taking for these shepherds...

knowing the promises that God had given concerning his King...

to hear the angel declare that finally he has come.
It must have been wonderfully exciting.
The waiting was over, the King had come.

But there was one final title that the angel declared concerning this new born babe.

And nothing could have prepared those shepherds for it.
Their terror & excitement must have been eclipsed by this last title...

For this Saviour who was born was not only God's chosen King, he was the Lord himself.

• **3.3 Lord**

"Today, in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord."

To understand the importance of this final title we need to realise that in Luke's gospel, the title Lord is used 17 times in Chp 1 & every time it refers to the living God himself.

And the angels declare that this baby born in Bethlehem, Jesus, is the Lord.
That is mind blowing in its enormity isn't it?

You could have held this baby, in all of his frailty & human dependence,
& you would have holding the Son of God himself.

In the person of Jesus, God entered our world, stepped onto our planet.

At a particular moment in time & in a particular place, God himself became a man.... he became one of us.

The creator of everything entered into his creation.

The immortal one became mortal.

Its a staggering truth.

Don't let your familiarity with it rob you of that.

It is a staggering truth!

The word that that is sometimes used to describe this truth is "incarnation".

God took on human flesh, God became incarnate.

Wow!

The message of the angel to those shepherds was only short...

but it was of immense importance.

Those 3 words, those titles that the angel awarded to Jesus unlock the majestic truth of Christmas.

Saviour... Christ.... Lord.

I said earlier that the surprise of the message comes when we realise that these titles were applied to the baby in the feed box in Bethlehem.

4. the greatest & most important surprise of all

But perhaps the greatest surprise of the angel's message comes when we realise that the baby grew up into a man.
And that when Jesus was about my age he was nailed to a wooden cross & executed as a criminal.

Saviour, Christ, Lord.... crucified.

Its very important to realise that it is impossible to understand the truth about Christmas apart from the events of Easter.
Its impossible to understand the significance of the birth of Jesus apart from his death.

For the Son of God came among us in order to save us.
The Lord was born to die.

For the only way that we could be saved from our sin is to have someone else cop the punishment that we deserve.
We are guilty before God...
We need someone with no guilt of their own to bear our guilt for us.
And that's just what Jesus did.

In his death, Jesus, Saviour, Christ, Lord...
stepped into our guilty shoes...
he took our place...
so that we could be saved.
In his death, Jesus was punished so that we could escape...
so that we could be forgiven.

He came to rescue us from the problem of our sin.
And he died to do it.

And 3 days after his death, he rose victorious.
Jesus never died again.
In resurrection demonstrates that he truly is both Lord & Christ.
He holds the keys to heaven & hell.
Jesus is the one who decides who enters heaven & who doesn't.
He's the judge of those things.
There is no other name, no other belief system, no other way, by which a person can be saved.
For Jesus is the Saviour, he is the Christ, he is the Lord.

Its no wonder that back in that field on that first Christmas night, the one angel was joined by a great company of heavenly host praising God & saying,
"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to all on whom his favour rests."

The angels were overjoyed with the birth of Jesus.
Overjoyed that the one had come who was the Saviour, the Christ & the Lord.
For that is the truth of Christmas... & it is fantastic truth.
Its a truth that ought to be celebrated... its a truth that ought to be sung joyfully.

And that's why I reckon Hark the herald angels sing is a great carol to sing together.

5. a great carol to sing

The words of this carol come from this part of the Bible in Luke 2.
We can tell that from the opening lines that get repeated throughout the carol...

[words on ohp]

Hark the herald angels sing
glory to the new born King;

I can remember when I was younger wondering about the herald angel bit, I'd heard of the hell's angels but not the herald angels & I thought Hark was a bit of a strange name for a biker.

But I get it now.

The angels came to the shepherds heralding or announcing an important message, one that ought to be listened to,

& I guess in the days when this carol was written if you wanted to get someone's attention you cried out "Hark!"

What I enjoy about this carol is the way it helps us understand that Jesus is Saviour, Christ & Lord.

The fact that he is the Christ, the King is declared throughout in the carol in the chorus.

glory to the new born King;

The fact that Jesus is the Lord is described wonderfully well in the second verse...

Christ by highest heaven adored,

Christ, the everlasting Lord,

The origin of Jesus is heaven itself.... he is the eternal God.

late in time behold him come,

offspring of a virgin's womb.

How awesome... that God would enter our world through human birth.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;

hail, the incarnate deity,

Even though Jesus was fully human... he was just like us in all of our humanness...
yet he was fully God too.
God in the flesh... God incarnate.
How astounding!
Or in the words of the carol...
Hail the incarnate deity!

pleased as Man with man to dwell,
Jesus our Emmanuel!

The commitment & love of God toward us is displayed in Jesus coming among us.
Long before he was born God he was promised in the scriptures... his promised name was Emmanuel... God with us.
Put it all together, & that second verse is a wonderful testimony to the fact that Jesus is the Lord.

And this Christ, the Lord came as our Saviour.
In the words of verse 1, he came to reconcile sinners to God.
And check out verse 3 for a great description of Jesus the Saviour!

Hail, the heaven born Prince of Peace!
Hail, the Sun of Righteousness!
Light of 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.

What a saviour!
What blessings he won for his people in his death & resurrection...
life... healing from the disease of sin..... new birth... a fresh start as the children of God...

It can all be ours through Jesus, the Saviour, the Christ, the Lord.
Hark! The herald angels sing
glory to the new born King.

6. a great King to love & serve

Its a great carol to sing because its words are so helpful to us understanding the fantastic truth about Christmas.
But I'm absolutely sure that the writer of this carol, Charles Wesley, would be bitterly disappointed if that's all we came away with this morning.

It is a great carol to sing,
but it speaks of a greater King to love & serve.

And so to sing the words of this carol without serving & loving the King empties
it of meaning.

So may I end by calling on each one of us this morning, to consider carefully
our response to Jesus today.

The angel's message is clear... Jesus is the Saviour, he is the Christ, he is the
Lord.

He deserves & demands nothing less than our whole hearted devotion.

When we come to understand that....

well it does more than just give meaning to Christmas...

it gives meaning to every moment of every day of the rest of your life.