

SESSION 1: ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Luke 2:8-20

QUESTIONS

1. ICEBREAKER: What is your favorite Christmas carol, and why?
2. The perspective/speaker changes from verse to verse in *Angels We Have Heard on High*. Why do you think the writer of these lyrics chose to do that?
3. In the third and fourth verses, the shepherds refer to Jesus as King, Savior, and twice as Lord. Given the humble circumstances of Jesus' birth, why do you think the shepherds were able to see Jesus so clearly for who He was?
4. Read Luke 2:8-11. Why were the shepherds initially afraid when the angel appeared? How does the angel's news eliminate their fear?
5. Continue reading the story from Luke 2:8-20:
 - a. What was the role of the shepherds? In other words, why did the angel tell them the good news of the birth of Jesus? (Reference verses 17-18)
 - b. Is it significant that God chose these lowly men to be the first to hear the message of the Messiah's birth? Why?
 - c. How do you think you would've reacted if you experienced what the shepherds did?
 - d. What were the two responses of the shepherds after seeing Jesus and being in His presence? What can we learn from their response?
6. What do you think is meant by "goodwill toward men?" Reference multiple translations of this verse (Luke 2:14) for additional insight (NIV, NLT, ESV, etc.).

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH

For our session today, we'll be learning more about the song, *Angels We Have Heard on High*.

In Luke 2, we read the account of shepherds in the fields watching their flocks overnight. On the night Jesus was born, an angel appeared to these shepherds to tell them of the birth of the Savior. *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"* (Luke 2:13-14)

French shepherds in the 18th century traditionally called out to each other on Christmas Eve, "Gloria in excelsis Deo," the Latin translation of "Glory to God in the highest." This was their way of sharing their holiday joy with one another throughout the hills and valleys as they did their work. The melody that they most likely sang these words to also included the lyrics, "Angels we have heard on high." Eventually, the melody and lyrics of this Christmas carol came together and was published in 1855. Originally a French carol, this hymn was translated some years later into English, and updated in the early 1900s to become the song we sing today during the Christmas season.

In reading the lyrics of the four verses, we see the story in Luke 2 begin to unfold. The first verse is from the perspective of the shepherds: *Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains and the mountains in reply, echo back their joyous strains.* The shepherds have heard the good news of the angels that Jesus Christ, the Savior, was born.

In the second verse, the perspective shifts to an unknown narrator. This person, a witness to the joy of the shepherds as they receive the angels' news, asks, *Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong? Say what may the tidings be which inspire your heav'nly song?*

The third and fourth verses are the shepherds' response to these questions: *Come to Bethlehem, and see Him whose birth the angels sing; come, adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn King. See within a manger laid Jesus, Lord of heav'n and earth! Mary, Joseph, lend your aid, with us sing our Savior's birth.*

To understand the news that the angels shared, the shepherds had to go to Bethlehem to see what was happening. *When they found Mary and Joseph with Jesus lying in the manger, they glorified and praised God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them* (Luke 2:20). And in the

Christmas carol, the shepherds tell this unknown narrator the same thing, "To understand our joy, you must come and see. Come and see the Lord of heaven and earth! Come and adore Him!"

During this Christmas season, we, too, are encouraged to come and see. We can only understand the joy and light of Christ when we open ourselves to His presence and experience Him. And when we do see Jesus Christ in our lives, we can echo the same refrain of the angels and shepherds: "Gloria in excelsis deo." *Glory to God in the highest!* This hymn stirs us to be convinced of the wonder of God. For all He has done, and for the sending of His Son to the world, He is deserving of our unending praise.