



## Reflecting on the Hymns in Advent

### Hark, a Herald Voice is Sounding #108

1 Hark, a herald voice is sounding:  
"Christ is nigh," it seems to say.  
"Cast away the dreams of darkness,  
O ye children of the day!"

2 Wakened by the solemn warning,  
let the earth-bound soul arise;  
Christ, our sun, all sloth dispelling,  
shines upon the morning skies.

3 Lo, the Lamb, so long expected,  
comes with pardon down from heaven;  
let us all, with deep repentance,  
pray that we may be forgiven,

4 that when next he comes with glory,  
and the world is wrapped in fear,  
with his mercy he may shield us,  
and with words of love draw near.

5 Honour, glory, might, and blessing  
to the Father and the Son,  
with the everlasting Spirit,  
while eternal ages run.

Hark, a Herald Voice is Sounding is a hymn for Advent that has been used by the Church since the 5th or 6th century. Originally the Latin hymn "Vox clara ecce intonant" it was translated into English by Edward Caswall who was born in 1814, at Yatley, in Hampshire, England where his father was a clergyman. In 1838, he was ordained Deacon, and in 1839, Priest. (Hymnary.org) He published several works in prose and poetry. He translated several hymns that are in our hymn book including "Earth Has Many a Noble City" (158) and "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee" (617). It may be, however, that his most appreciated contribution to our hymnbook is the Christmas hymn that he authored himself, "See Amid the Winter Snow." (148) A most perfect hymn for this parish!

The tune "Merton" that is most often used for this hymn "Hark a Herald Voice is Sounding," was composed by William Henry Monk (England, 1823-1889) whose music is well represented in our hymnbook including the "All Things Bright" that we sing with "All Things Bright and Beautiful." There can be no doubt, however, that his most well-known

tune, is “Eventide” sung to the words of “Abide with Me.” One of the Church’s most beloved hymns.

The herald’s voice referred to in the hymn is the “voice of one crying out in the wilderness” from our Gospel reading this morning. It is the voice of John the Baptist. John’s ministry is clear from this passage: he is a forerunner and a witness to the “one true light.” As our hymn states it: “Christ, our sun, all sloth dispelling, shines upon the morning skies.”

In Mark’s gospel we are told that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, clothed in camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist and he ate locusts and wild honey. Even in those ancient times he would have been a highly unusual character. Born to a barren and aging mother; how could he possibly be the messenger of whom the book of Malachi speaks: “See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple”

In reflecting upon the life of John the Baptist William Barclay once wrote: “Many a [preacher] comes with a message which he or she has no intention of practicing. Many with a comfortable bank account preach about not laying up treasures upon earth. Many extol the blessings of poverty from a comfortable house. But, in the case of John, the man WAS the message, and because of this people listened.”

## Questions to Ponder

1. There are times in our lives when we need to make room for someone else: a new baby, a returning son or daughter, and elderly parent or overnight guests. The whole ministry of John the Baptist was to make room for the coming of Jesus as our hymn so richly speaks of. Advent is a time for us to make room for the coming of Christ. In what part of our life do we need to clear out some space, remove some clutter or repair something that is broken?
2. In our Gospel reading today, John the Baptist was asked the question: “Who are you?” How would you answer that question? When have you ever been a “voice crying out in the wilderness?” Who are the “voices crying out in the wilderness” in this generation? What is their message?
3. John the Baptist’s issued a call for repentance. Each Sunday in our liturgy we recite the Confession: *we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.* The word “repent” in the scriptures refers to a complete change of direction (180 degrees). Take time to reflect upon what this might mean for you and how might the coming of Christ inspire you to bring new meaning to these words.