

## Go Tell It

By Rev. Todd Farnsworth

Luke 2: 8-20



There's been a lot of coming and going from the stable since last we met. A child was born. An important child. Our child. And as Luke testifies, a flock of angels filled up the sky and

prompted a bunch of shepherds to make their way to where the child was trying to rest. Given the restlessness of newborns, it's not very likely that anyone got much sleep, especially when the shepherds started singing their songs of celebration for what they had seen! This morning we have an opportunity to join those shepherds in song, with a few that didn't get sung much (or at all!) during the season of Advent. We begin with:

- 150, Hark the Herald Angels Sing
- Hark the Herald Angels Sing was originally written by Charles Wesley as: Hark, How All the Welkin Rings, in 1739. The song we have in our hymnals is a composite of Wesley's songs and at least 4 other editors who tweaked Wesley's words to make them more "contemporary." Although Charles never commented on this process, he was aware of it. His brother, John, wrote this about editing of hymns: *"Many Gentlemen have done my Brother and me (though not without*

*naming us) the honour to reprint many of our hymns. Now they are perfectly welcome to do so, provided they print them just as they are. But I desire they would not attempt to mend them--for they really are not able."* "For those who are not able to resist the temptation to amend and alter, they should at least print the original texts in the margin that we may no longer be held responsible either for the nonsense or the doggerel of other men." Despite this warning, Wesley was known for changing other writer's work including Isaac Watt's *Our God and Help in Ages Past*.

- 154, *While Shepherds Watched*
- Nahum Tate was named poet laureate of Ireland in 1692 and died in a debtor's prison in 1715. His much loved (and much parodied) paraphrase of Luke's account of the Annunciation to the shepherds is believed to be the FIRST Christmas hymn to gain official approval of the Church of England when it was included in the *1700 Supplement to the New Version of the Psalms* and bound into the *Book of Common Prayer*. It was the only Christmas hymn allowed to be sung in the context of worship in Anglican churches
- 147, *Away In A Manger*
- How many of you like this hymn? It is by far one of the most popular of the Christmas hymns and a standard of the season. Beloved in Christmas pageants and Christmas Eve services alike. Besides being lovely to sing, I enjoy the fact that it is also known as the least scriptural carol of the season. Really. The Bible makes no mention of cattle, or sharks in the stable. There is no suggestion in the scripture

that Jesus didn't cry as a baby. In fact, that particular assertion belongs to a popular heresy called, "Gnosticism" which denied that Jesus was fully human. We believe differently, but let's sing it anyways.

- 162, What Child is This? (see below)
- Finally, we have a hymn written around 1865 by William Chatterton Dix. In 1865 Dix was struck with a terrible illness that left him bedridden for several months. While convalescing, he read his Bible and was taken with the story of Jesus' birth and the Adoration of the Shepherds found in the gospel of Luke. To wit, he wrote this poem in response to how he imagined the shepherds approaching the Christ Child for the very first time. *What Child is This?* is found in most major American denominational hymnals, although the language has been edited, much like our first hymn! The original words carry a message of Christ's resurrection. A theme that is most associated with Easter, but present, nonetheless in the birth story of our Savior. On the back of your bulletins, you will find the original words. Let's sing with the shepherds as we approach Jesus anew today...



What child is this who laid to rest,  
On Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet  
While shepherds watch are keeping?  
This, this is Christ the King,  
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:  
Haste, haste to bring him laud,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary!

2 Why lies he in such mean estate  
Where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christians fear: for sinners here  
The silent Word is pleading.  
Nail, spear shall pierce him through,  
The Cross be borne for me, for you;  
Hail! hail the Word Made Flesh,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary!

3 So bring him incense, gold and myrrh;  
Come, peasant, king, to own him!  
The King of Kings salvation brings:  
Let loving hearts enthrone him!  
Raise, raise the song on high!  
The Virgin sings her lullaby.  
Joy! joy! for Christ is born,  
The Babe, the Son of Mary!