**The Story & Theology of Particular Hymns**

Lesson 8 – Charles Wesley – “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” (#203) & “Christ the Lord is Risen Today” (#277)

**Biography**

* 1707-1788
* Born in Epworth, England
* Next to youngest of 19 children born to Samuel and Susanna Wesley
* Their heritage includes great-grandfathers and grandfathers who graduated from Oxford and were clergy in the Church of England
* With his brother, John, they formed a “Holy Club” while students at Oxford.
* Their methodical habits of living and studying earned them the name “Methodists”
* Upon graduating Oxford, the Wesley brothers were sent by the Anglican Church to help stabilize the religious climate of the Georgia colony and to evangelize Indians.
* Converted on May 21, 1738 at Aldersgate, London,
* After Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley is considered one of the most influential writers of English hymnody.
* Wrote 6500 hymns
* His aim was to “arouse sinners, encourage saints, and to educate all in the mysteries of the Christian faith.”
* He published a comprehensive hymnal in 1780 titled *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*

**Occasion for “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”**

* Written in 1739, one year after his conversion
* Considered to be one of Charles Wesley’s finest hymns.
* Hymnologists claim that this is one of the four most popular hymns in the English language
* Originally consisted of 10 verses!
* Christmas carols as we know them now were abolished by the English Puritan parliament in 1627 because they were a part of a “worldly festival,” which they considered the celebration of Christmas to be. As a result, there was a scarcity of Christmas hymns and carols in the 17th and early 18th centuries.

**Theology of “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”**

* This hymn is a condensed course in the doctrine of Christ (Christology) in poetic form.
* Verse 1 – Retells the story of the angels visiting the shepherds (Luke 2:8-20)
* Verse 2 – Teaches biblical truths about Christ’s nature: Divine, born of a virgin, Divine & human in 1 person, “God with us”
* Verse 3 – Teaches biblical truths about the purpose of Christ’s coming: brings life and light to the world, to put an end to death, the firstborn of the resurrection, comes to give regeneration

**Occasion for “Christ the Lord is Risen Today”**

* The first Wesleyan Chapel in London was a deserted iron forge and was called the “Foundry Meeting House”
* Charles Wesley wrote this hymn for the first service in this chapel in 1739.
* This was 1 year after Charles’ dramatic conversion experience.
* This hymn was originally called “Hymn for Easter Day” and contained 11 verses!
* The “alleluias” at the end of each line are not original but were added to make the text fit the hymn tune.

**Theology of “Christ the Lord is Risen Today”**

* Verse 1 – Simple praise and call for others to praise and rejoice in the fact that Christ has risen
* Verse 2 – Christ has won the victory over death. The stone, death, and hell could not contain Him.
* Verse 3 – Originally said, “Dying once he all doth save” which in the Trinity hymnal now says “Once he died, our souls to save”
* Verse 4 – We will be raised one day just like our Lord and be made like Him and reign with Him
* Verse 5 – Heaven and earth welcome their King and this is a picture of the King returning and His people and creation welcoming Him.