

**“Hark the Herald Angels Sing”**  
**Advent 2021**  
**Downtown**  
**December 12, 2021**

Hey, how are we doing this morning? If I haven't met you, my name is Jake, and it's good to be with you this morning. If you have a Bible, turn to **Luke 8:43-48**. We're gonna get there in a bit, so hold your place there, I've got a long set-up.

And while you're turning there, we are already in the home stretch of our Advent season where each week, we've been looking at a popular Christmas carol and unpacking the theology behind it and why it's good news. This morning we're looking at Hark the Herald Angels Sing - which, fun fact, growing up I thought for the longest time it was Hark the Harold Angel Sings, like, the angel's name was Harold. Fun, right?

So I'm not gonna read the whole song, but if you will, let me drop some bars on you

Hark! The herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the newborn King!  
Peace on earth and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled.”

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Son of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings,  
Ris'n with healing in His wings.

Joyful, all ye nations rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies,  
With th'angelic host proclaim:  
“Christ is born in Bethlehem.”

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

**Some quick song background**, this was written sometime around 1739 by Charles Wesley, a minister whose name you might recognize as being one of the founders of the Methodist movement. What you may not know is that he wrote, along with this hymn, as far as we know, over 6,500 hymns. So if you do the math, if each hymn was 3 minutes a piece, you could listen to nearly 20,000 minutes of Charles Wesley hymns without skipping a track. If you were doing a Spotify Wrapped post, saying that you listened to 20,000 minutes of Charles Wesley in a year would be a pretty baller.

Another fun fact. Around the late 1800s, an annual Christmas Eve service was started in England called the Nine Lessons and Carols - which we've done here from time to time - this hymn is

always the last song to be played. This carol was the closer. I'd like to think this is when people singing along would put their lighters in the air.

Looking specifically at this carol, Wesley wrote the hymn based on the story in **Luke 2**, if you've been around church you may be familiar with it. Shepherds are out in the field, "keeping watch over their flocks by night," Angels come, announcing the birth of king Jesus, singing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

But rather than walking through this portion of the advent story, I wanted to zoom in on one verse of the hymn that I read earlier:

Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!  
Hail the Son of Righteousness!  
Light and life to all He brings,  
Ris'n with healing in His wings.

Now as a church family, we like to sing hymns around here. And there's a couple reasons why. For one, hymns connect us to the deep tradition of people who came before us. I think it's really easy in the American evangelical church to sort of think of tradition as out-of-date and uncool, but hymns are one way we recognize and honor our past brothers and sisters in the faith. At the same time, hymns are stock-full of such rich theology that when we sing them out loud it actually sticks into our minds in a unique way. I came across an article last month where neurologists did some brain studies and noticed that churchgoers remember a song lyric that was sung waaaaay more than they remember a line from what was preached. Which, as someone who regularly preaches, was a bit humbling to read...but there's something to when we sing theology, there's something on a neurological and spiritual level that sticks with you.

All that to say, we want to be a people who sing good, rich truths found in Scripture, and from time to time we need to explain exactly what we're singing.

So, for example, what do we actually mean when we sing that line "ris'n with healing in His wings"...are we saying that Jesus has wings? Are we saying Jesus is a cute angel fairy?

Like, I'm not gonna say who shared this clipart with me. But he's a pastor at Midtown Lexington and his name rhymes with Andrew Flowers. →

The short answer is no, but let's unpack that.



This line comes from **Malachi 4:2**. To give you some background, in our English Bibles, Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. God's people had returned from exile, out of Babylon and into Jerusalem again. They had rebuilt the temple, but things were still bleak. They were in their homeland but they were under **foreign occupation**. It's like, imagine if you were to drive home today, and you find there's someone living in your house who you don't know at all, and they say they're in charge now, and you have to serve them. Can you imagine how disorienting that would be? How powerless and weak you would feel? This is what the Israelites were feeling but it had been going on for years and years and years.

And in the midst of all of this, the prophet **Malachi says in 4:2** says,

“But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.”

So the hope-filled promise here for the people of Israel is that one day, the things that are wrong will be righted - the broken, fixed - the hurt healed - like the sun rises to drive away darkness with its warm glowing light. No more enemy occupation, one day you will finally, truly be home. One day the king of Israel will come and heal this broken land and these broken people.

Fast forward now 400 years. And the Israelites go from Persian occupation to Greek occupation. From Greek occupation to Roman occupation. And in the midst of all of this, in the town of Bethlehem, the king of Israel is born in the person of Jesus. The rising sun promised in **Malachi 4:2**, is personified in the risen Son, Jesus Christ.

Now, Jake, you may be saying, that's cool stuff, but again...what's this about Jesus having wings tho? I'm so glad you asked. The answer is a bit Bible-nerdy so bear with me. The word “wings” that we see in **Malachi 4:2** is the Hebrew word - **kanaph**. Can you say that with me? Kanaph. Now that word kanaph, can sometimes be translated as wings, but it can also be translated at times in the Old Testament as robe or garment or cloak. So there's healing in his cloak, in his garment. That this future king, whoever He will be, is so powerful that even the ends of his garment will have the power to heal.

So if you grew up in ancient Israel, living in the time of Malachi and onward, you were clinging to this hope as a people for 400 years. The sun of righteousness will one day rise. One day the king of Israel will come. One day he will restore what is broken. One day there He will be so powerful that He will bring healing to the land - and in fact, his **kanaph**, his garment, would even bring healing - but God's people had to wait and hope, even when things seemed bleak.

In fact, this is what you see happening in the **Gospel account of Luke**. (See? Told you it was a long set-up.) In **chapter 8**, Jesus has been preaching the kingdom of God, going town to town, performing miracles and healing people, and the word is getting out about Jesus. People begin to whisper: is this the guy? Is this the one we've been waiting for? Is this the promised king we've been hoping for so long?

And in Luke 8, Jesus is on His way to heal someone and there are *so* many people around Him, verse 42 says people were pressed around Him. Another translation says the crowds almost crushed Him. It's this giant mosh pit of people wanting to see exactly who this Jesus was all about. That's where we'll pick up in verse 43.

### **Luke 8:43-48**

And there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone.

So to paint the picture for us of this woman. This woman had been menstruating non-stop for 12 years, and according to Old Testament law, you were considered "unclean" during that time. You were not allowed during that time to worship God in the temple because in the temple courts you were supposed to be ritually pure and ceremonially clean. If anyone was unclean and they walked into the temple, it would be an act of defiling the temple itself. The logic went, if an unclean thing came into contact with a clean thing, the clean thing would then be unclean.

So all that to say, anyone with any ailment, any sickness, or condition, were not allowed inside the temple to worship with God and His people in risk of making the entire temple unclean. And this had been going on for the woman for 12 years. Which to help us get into her shoes, if we did the math, 12 years ago was 2009. So, she's tried everything to be clean. She's gone to the doctors. Nothing. She's gone to the physicians. Nothing. She's spent every last dollar, trying to find a cure to fix her condition so that she can be with God and with others. But it's all hopeless. Nothing seems to work!

But then she hears about this man named Jesus. And he's healing people. And the people Jesus touches are now healed. People who couldn't walk, Jesus touches, and they walk again.

And in the mind of this Jewish woman, she's probably wondering. Is this Him? Is this the King? Is this the one who will bring healing?

So she hears that Jesus is coming through the town. And the crowds are rushing in on him. And she knows, she knows, if this man is who I think this man is, Jesus probably can't touch her - or he would be unclean. But if this man is who I think he is, then there's healing even in his garment. So this woman, who has tried everything, musters up the courage, and in her

desperation fights her way through the crowd. And finally, she's in arms reach, if she could just reach out.

**Luke 8:44**

She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased.

Like that. In an instant. She's healed. It worked! It actually worked! After all these years of trying for a miracle, this man named Jesus actually healed her by simply touching his garment!

But the story goes on:

**Luke 8:45**

And Jesus said, "Who was it that touched me?" When all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!"

Classic Peter. He's a bit of a teacher's pet.

**Luke 8:46**

But Jesus said, "Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me."

And then it's almost like she gets singled out in the crowd. The people move away from her and the spotlight is on her.

**Luke 8:47**

And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed.

Why is she afraid? Because she knows the logic of what happens when something unclean touches something clean. She's lived with it for most of her adult life. She falls on her knees shaking because she thinks she's now made Jesus unclean. But notice what Jesus says:

**Luke 8:48**

And he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace."

Notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say, how dare you come to me as you are. He doesn't say, why did you do that? He doesn't shun her or mock her or dehumanize her. He doesn't call her unclean.

But what He does say is “Daughter.” “Daughter, your faith has made you well.” Jesus sees her, and looks her in the eyes, and gives her a word of healing. He gives her a word of hope and joy as he restores her because there is healing in his wings. All she had to do was reach out.

We don’t know what happened to the woman after this, but can you imagine what it would have been like for her to go to the temple after Jesus healed her?

Now, I can’t imagine what you might be going through right now during this holiday season. The pain you may be feeling. The loss you may be experiencing. Maybe you’re like the woman, you feel unclean and unworthy. You feel shut off from God and from others. Maybe you’ve been captive to a secret sin that you’ve been enslaved to for years and years. Or maybe you feel in bondage by guilt and shame, and it’s just been weighing you down for who knows how long. Maybe you’re a husband or wife, a mom or a dad, and you’ve felt like you’ve blown it with your family one time too many.

And perhaps like this woman, you’ve felt like you’ve exhausted all your options. You’ve tried good and helpful things. You’ve tried counseling. You’ve tried a family counselor. You’ve tried a 12-step program. You’ve tried to do all the things to find healing - but nothing seems to work, and it only leaves you feeling hopeless and in despair.

But here’s what we do know: is that there is healing in His wings. There is healing in His wings. **The same promise offered in Malachi 4:2, is offered to you.** The same promise that the woman reached out to in Luke 8, is offered to you.

And that just as in Malach 4 says that the sun of righteousness will rise, so too did the Son of God, the son of righteousness rise when He conquered death. When he rose from the grave He showed us that there is no sin too big. No problem too great. No sickness is too far gone, that He cannot and will not overcome one day. The son of righteousness, the son of God, offers healing in His wings. And one day, He will heal you!

That is the promise for us this morning. One day, maybe if not in this lifetime but guaranteed in the life to come, He will heal you. Because there is healing in the wings of our risen savior. So the question then for you and for me is, will you reach out? Will you reach out in faith, that the risen savior, has the power to heal whatever you’re going through? Will you trust Him and follow Him, no matter what, because He is King, and one day, one day He promises to each and every one of us that we will be restored. Enjoying His presence forever and ever.

And I can’t begin to imagine what it will be like when the time comes when we finally are one day standing before the throne of God in heaven. I imagine it will be something like when the woman went back to the temple but better.

And this is the beauty of Advent. The Son of Righteousness has risen into the world, and Jesus' birth is the proof that healing has come for each and every one of us. The opportunity is here for you this morning to reach out, knowing that you can't fix what's wrong with you, but we know the One who does. And Jesus, the Prince of Peace, is in the business of healing the broken.

And one day, the risen Son will dawn on this world again, and he will heal His people fully, finally, and for all eternity. All sickness, all pain, all loneliness, all hopelessness if we just reach out.