

# “Angels from the Realms of Glory”

by

James Montgomery

Hymn Study – Pastor Michael Lynn / West Hampden Baptist Church

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## I. The messenger of the song > James Montgomery

### A. His birth & early years

1. Born November 4, 1771; in Irvine, Scotland.
2. Parents died as Moravian missionaries while serving in the West Indies.
3. James became a ward of the Brethren School in Fulneck, England – there taught to “regard the Lord as his Friend & Brother.” [began seminary training at age 7 in Yorkshire, England??]
4. At the age of 10 he began to write serious poetry.
5. When 16, he left Fulneck & worked in retail shops (Mirfield, Wath).

### B. His career & middle years

1. First assistant editor, then editor of Sheffield Register, in London, England (editor for 31 years).
2. Twice imprisoned for speaking out against the Tory government – many hymns written in prison.
3. In 1797, published a volume of poems entitled “Prison Amusements.”
4. Always an active supporter of foreign missions, Bible societies, & the abolition of the slave trade.
5. Not until 43 years of age was he completely assured of his salvation. He wrote to his brother: “On my birthday, after many delays & misgivings & repentings, I wrote to Fulneck for readmission into the Brethren congregation; & on Sunday last I was publicly invested with my title to that goodly heritage. Rejoice with me for this unspeakable privilege bestowed on so unworthy & ungrateful a prodigal as I have been.”

### C. His later years & death

1. In 1825 he gave up his paper to devote himself solely to literary, humanitarian, & missionary efforts.
2. In 1833 he was recognized for his integrity & worth to England; awarded an annual pension of \$1,000 pounds by the government for his many contributions to English society.
3. He died on April 29, 1854 at the age of 82 (found unconscious on the floor that morning – awoke in the presence of His Lord).
4. He wrote nearly 400 hymns during his lifetime.

## II. The motivation of the song??

A. We have no recorded setting for this particular poem/hymn (first appeared as a poem in newspaper).

B. This hymn was written in 1816, just 2 years after he was assured of his salvation & rejoined the church.

C. Testimonials of James Montgomery:

1. Personal – Each of his hymns were written “...embodying some experience in my life & which I trust will be helpful to others.”
2. “Montgomery’s devotional spirit was of the noblest type. With the faith of a strong man he united the beauty & simplicity of a child. Richly poetic without exuberance, dogmatic without uncharitableness, tender without sentimentality, elaborate without diffusiveness, richly musical without apparent effort, he has bequeathed to the church wealth which could only come from true genius & a sanctified heart” (John Julian, a foremost authority in hymnology).
3. Next to Isaac Watts (the “father of English hymnody”) & Charles Wesley (wrote 6,500 hymns), no other hymn writer has made a greater contribution to English hymnody.

### III. The music of the song > Henry Thomas Smart

#### A. His background

1. Born October 26, 1813 in London, England.
2. A self-taught musician – became one of the finest organists & composers in the British Isles.
3. His advice on new organ installations was frequently sought for in England & Scotland; he also designed & built some of England's finest organs.
4. Was totally blind the last 15 years of his life, yet in which time he continues to play the organ & write some of his finest music (including this tune).

#### B. His contribution to this hymn

1. This tune was originally written for a hymnal being compiled by Dr. Hamilton – pastor of London's Regent Square Presbyterian Church – Smart dedicated this new tune to the church.
2. The tune was composed in 1867 (13 years after Montgomery's death). (Smart died in 1874.)

### IV. The meaning of the song

[It has been said, "Considering the factors of comprehensiveness, appropriateness of expression, force & elevation of sentiment, it challenges comparison with any hymn ever written."]

#### A. Stanza 1 > The seraphim's proclamations

1. The angels of Luke 2:13-14 are called upon to not remain in Bethlehem, but to go to all the world with the good news of Messiah's birth.
2. The angels who sang creation's story (Job 38:7) can now proclaim Christ's birth.

#### B. Stanza 2 > The shepherds' participation

1. The shepherds have been told the good news of Christ's birth.
2. "God with man is now residing" – calls to mind Isaiah 7:14 & Matthew 1:23, "*Immanuel*" & John 1:14, "*And the Word was made flesh, & dwelt among us...*"

#### C. Stanza 3 > The sages' presentation

1. The sages are the "*wise men*" (magi) who have contemplated the promise of a coming Messiah.
2. The sages are encouraged to seek the "*Desire of nations*" spoken of in Haggai 2:7, "*And I will shake all nations, & the desire of all nations shall come: & I will fill this house (new Temple) with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.*" (cf. verse 9, "greater glory" – Christ's presence)

#### D. Stanza 4 > The saints' preparation (anticipation or prospect)

1. Saints bending before the altar praying for the Lord's return (cf. Revelation 22:20).
2. Saints seeing the Lord descending suggests Malachi 3:1, "*...and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His Temple, even the messenger of the covenant...*" (compare & contrast with the rapture of the church - I Thess. 4:16; I Cor. 15:51-52).

#### E. Stanza 5 > The sinner's purification (pardon) – not in most hymnals:

"Sinners, wrung with true repentance, / Doomed for guilt to endless pains, /  
Justice now revokes the sentence, / Mercy calls you, break your chains.

1. Sinners who have come to repentance – II Corinthians 7:9-10; formerly doomed to hell – II Thessalonians 1:8-9.
2. Sentence of death now revoked – John 3:18; 5:24; Mercy calls – "Break your chains" – John 8:34-36

Summary: "Come and worship, come and worship, Worship Christ, the newborn King." As we sing this tremendous hymn, let us consider again the *proclamation* of the **seraphim**, the *participation* of the **shepherds**, the *presentations* of the **sages**, the *preparation* of the **saints**, & the *purification* of the **sinner**. Are you still under condemnation for your sins? Come to Christ today & receive His pardon. "Mercy calls you, break your chains!"