

Angels We Have Heard on High



The science of acoustics is fascinating. When a piano key is pressed, a group of notes sound in harmony. While most can only hear the main, louder note struck, a keen ear might make out another higher tone or two that soars faintly above. The overtone series of sounds that emerge are mostly inaudible to us and create a chord of pitches as other keys had been lightly struck as well. This series of tones, which builds higher upon the loudest sounding note, is also referred to as the harmonic series.

So too our songs in worship rise far above that which we can hear. Our singing touches the eternal. Earthly voices can set in motion a heavenly symphony of pleasing praise to God. From a small rural church to an urban mega setting, all of God's children can reach the heart of the God in worship. One writer suggests that when we sing, we are for that moment pulling back the door of heaven and peering inside. Two worlds are drawn together – heaven and earth, God and humanity. Therefore, this echoes the reality of the incarnation. Christ brought heaven to earth so that all mankind is given the possibility of being with Christ in heaven. And, toward our ultimate homeland, our songs rise heavenward, always calling us in that direction.

The announcement of Jesus' birth to the shepherds was accompanied by singing angels. In this startling moment, the angelic host did not simply proclaim the good news, they set it to music. Their song is one of the earliest hymns of praise. "Glory to God in the Highest!" was the repeated refrain. And still, this anthem echoes today as Christians everywhere make it their expression of praise. While most of our hymns are of human composure, this one of angelic origins reminds us that we engage in a heavenly activity when we sing. The song itself is echoed from generation to generation, from heaven to earth and back. The Christian joins a choir that far surpasses our own earthly choirs.

Aren't you glad that God doesn't require our singing to be perfected first? He never asks us to fine-tune our song for it to be acceptable – only that it be joyful. In worship, we are to set in motion that one "string" of praise, however out-of-tune or meager it may be. The Holy Spirit takes what we lack in our earthly voices and "interprets" it. Somewhere between earth and heaven it is tuned and made perfect. At the sound, even the mountains "echo it back." Praise calls unto praise and all of creation takes its part in harmony.

If a series of inaudible notes emerge from one piano string being struck, imagine the festival of tones, the symphony of praise that rises far past our sanctuary rafters when the church is in worship. Most of this is unheard by the human ear, but now and then a keen ear may hear its reverberations. Heaven is brought to earth and we, for that moment, get to peer inside. So lean in. Sing out. And touch heaven with your praise.