

The Church's Confessional Carol of Christ

1 Timothy 3:15-16

80-317

One of the remarkable realities in this season is how predominant the presence of Christmas carols becomes in our society. No matter how we want to remove Christianity from our culture, no matter how politically incorrect it is to speak the gospel, you can't go into a store or an office building, just about anywhere without hearing Christmas carols being played or sung in the background. They are ubiquitous. They are absolutely everywhere. And I always have sort of a general smile on my face when I get into those environments because many people in our culture, though they're listening to an instrumental version of a Christmas carol, know the words well enough to be reciting them in their own minds, even though they don't necessarily believe the gospel. This is one of the good gifts of God's grace to our society, many, many centuries of great Christmas theology captured in these songs and carols which are so common in our culture. The gospel is really proclaimed far and wide musically for those who are listening to it. Christmas carols are a great blessing and a great heritage, especially those who know and love the Lord Jesus Christ because we understand the meaning of those wonderful words which are a part of that music.

By the way, a carol, the dictionary says, the Old English Dictionary says, "a carol is a song or hymn of gladness." It doesn't have to be just about Christmas, it could be about any glad theme, any joyous theme. And, of course, there's nothing more joyous than the incarnation, the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ because of which all other truly joyous things have come to pass. When we look back on the wonderful hymns and carols that are a part of our heritage, we find in them the clear rich statements of gospel truth and they are a wonderful heritage for us.

I just was going through some of the more familiar ones and some of the older ones with which you might not be familiar, but just a little bit of reminder of the theology that we sing or that we hear played at this season. "Come, Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Your people free. From our sins and fears, release us. Christ in whom our rest shall be." That's Charles Wesley in the eighteenth century. Or, "He comes the prisoners to release in Satan's bondage held, the gates of brass before Him burst, the iron fetters yield. He comes to cleanse the human mind from thickest scales of sin, and by the entrance of His words give light and life within." Another eighteenth century Christmas carol by Philip Dotterage(?). "O come, true branch of Jesse, free Your own from Satan's tyranny. From depths of hell Your people saved, to rise victorious from the grave." That goes back many centuries, that is a Latin hymn translated into English. Or that wonderful hymn by James Montgomery from the nineteenth century, "Come and worship. Come and worship. Worship Christ the newborn King." With lines like, "Sinners brought to true repentance, doomed for guilt to endless pains, justice now revolts the sentence, mercy calls you, break your chains."

A newer hymn, "Child of the stable' secret birth, the Lord by right of lords of earth, let angels sing of the King newborn, the world is weaving a crown of thorn. A crown of thorn for that infant head, cradled soft in the manger bed. Eyes that shine in the lantern's ray, a face so small in its nest of hay.

Face of a child who is born to scan the world He made through the eyes of man. And from that face in the final day, earth and heaven shall flee away. Child of the stable's secret birth, the Father's gift to a wayward earth to drain the cup in a few short years of all our sorrows, our sin and tears. Ours the prize for the road He trod, risen with Christ at peace with God."

Familiar words from Wesley again, "Christ by highest heaven adored, Christ the everlasting Lord." Or, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity." Or, "Born that men no more may die, born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth." Or, "Adam's likeness now effaced, stamp Thy image in its place." That's Hark the Herald Angels Sing.

It was Isaac Watts who wrote Joy to the World. "No more let sin and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground. He comes to make His blessings flow wherever Eden's curse is found." Speaking of the coming Kingdom of our Lord.

Another, "This perfect man incarnate God, by selfless sacrifice destroyed our sinful history all fallen Adam's curse. In Him the curse of blessing turns, my barren spirit flowers as ore the shadow of sin the cross of Jesus towers."

And then one from the fourth century in Latin, translated in the eighteenth. "Praise Him all you hosts of heaven, praise Him angels in the height. Powers, dominions bow before Him and extol His glorious might. Let no tongue on earth be silent, let each heart and voice unite ever more and evermore." A lot of theology in those lines, profound gospel truth.

Just a few lines in the almost endless array of Christmas music, songs that celebrate the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ. But there are songs even older than the fourth century. There are songs that go all the way back to the New Testament. Now you remember in Ephesians 5 or Colossians 3, the Apostle Paul commands us to speak to ourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and to sing and make melody in our heart to the Lord. Singing has always been a part of the worship of the people of God. In the Corinthian letter we were reminded that when the people came together they sang. That was part of worship, always has been a part of worship, even going back into the Old Testament. That's why the Old Testament saints had a complete hymnal, the book of Psalms. And if you study the New Testament carefully, you will find at numerous intervals in your study, hymns appearing or fragments of hymns appearing in the New Testament.

For example, some of the doxologies such as Romans 11:33 to 36 are really hymns. It's very likely that those doxologies, those paeans of praise and worship, were set to tunes and were actually song by the people of God. There are many who believe that the first chapter of Ephesians, that great long sentence from verse 3 to verse 14 which sweeps through the glories of God's redemptive purpose in Christ was really a hymn and that it was suitable to be sung in some fashion. Later in the book of Ephesians in chapter 5 verse 14, there's a little three-line fragment of a hymn. In fact in your Bible it's set apart from the normal prose format to demonstrate that it's poetic, very likely was a refrain or a piece of a hymn familiar to the early church and sung by them. There appear to be songs even in the book of Colossians, chapter 1 verse 15. In Philippians there are many who believe that Philippians 2:6 through 11, that great celebration of the incarnation and exaltation of Christ, really was sung. It has the components or the elements of a song. In 2 Timothy it appears that there are several refrains or components or fragments of hymns that were known to the early church to which the writer, Paul, alludes because they would be so familiar to the people. There are some who believe that Titus chapter 3 verses 4 to 7 has all the earmarks of a hymn, or a part of a hymn that could easily be sung.

And there are more.

This particular study would be for another occasion, not for this morning. But there are some criteria by which people come to the conclusion that these passages of Scripture were likely sung. I'll just give you a handful of them. One of them would be what we call contextual dislocation, that's kind of a technical term...contextual dislocation. That is to say given the context, this seems a little out of touch, a little dislocated, a little out of sync or out of join with what's going on, as if the writer in his normal writing in prose stops and takes a break and then comes back again. So that kind of dislocation is one criteria that's used to say, "Well maybe this is an added...added fragment of a hymn, a proverb, a creed, whatever that might be."

The second is change in style. Clearly you move from the prosaic style to the poetic style. And in that case you might also have a change in terminology as well.

Thirdly, some kind of introductory phrase whereas the normal flow is moving and all of a sudden there's this little introductory phrase. It could be as simple as a word, or it could be a brief phrase that indicates that there's a movement in another direction at this point.

Fourth, and maybe particularly important, is the use of parallel and antithesis. That is to say juxtaposing things against each other in parallel forms which lends itself to the kind of rhythm that is sung.

And then one final one, which is an interesting one, is rare vocabulary. Vocabulary that is unique. There seem to be in the content of these hymn fragments more of what we call *hapax legomena*, that's a Greek term meaning it appears only here. There are more hapax legomena words used in these fragments than would be normal in the others, so that they take on a little bit of a unique character of their own. For those particular kind of reasons, when all that criteria sort of comes together, you get a good idea that this may well be a hymn.

Now there are many that we could look at. But I want to draw you to one that I think is my favorite part of a hymn that is in the New Testament, take your Bible and open it to 1 Timothy chapter 3...1 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 16...1 Timothy 3 and verse 16. You will notice in whatever translation you may be using that the translators have set this apart in a poetic format because they recognize that this takes on a different character than the regular flow of the text. And so it is indented and put in poetic lines, one statement each line.

Now this hymn goes like this. "He who was revealed in the flesh was vindicated in the Spirit, beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory." There's a rhythm there, there are parallels there that are obvious..flesh, spirit, nations, angels, world, glory, human, divine, heavenly, earthly, above, below. That's the kind of antithesis, that's the kind of parallels that suit the rhythm of something that is being sung expressed poetically. Also there are six verbs here, one in each line. They are all singular aorist verbs and they are therefore parallel to one another. Those are the indicators here that this is very likely a hymn.

Also, verse 16 begins by common confession which indicates that everybody says this. And the fact that everybody says this must mean that it's familiar. That again leads us to the conclusion that this is a hymn. That kind of introduction sets this apart as something that is commonly known.

Now before we look at the hymn itself, let me back you up a little bit into the fifteenth verse. It doesn't take long in this text to get the setting for the hymn. You will notice in verse 15 that just about the middle of the verse, we'll just pick it up with the household of God...the household of God, the family of God. We're talking about believers here, which is the church of the living God. And then He defines the church of the living God this way, the pillar and support of the truth...the pillar and support of the truth.

The church of the living God, that is just an interesting phrase. The way it appears in the English, THE church of the living God, sounds a bit institutional because the definite article in the English is really in the wrong place. The Greek doesn't say THE church of the living God, it really would in the Greek be translated this way, "The living God's church...the living God's church. And the article before church is really absent. It is the living God's church. If you say THE church of the living God, the church takes the priority and it...it's a kind of institutional feeling. But if you translate it the way the Greek does, "The living God's church," it's not emphasizing the institution of the church, it's emphasizing the nature of the church as belonging to God. The emphasis then becomes laid squarely on the living God. It is the living God's church, the One according to Acts 20:28 which He purchased with His own blood.

And so we are here introduced to the church, the living God's church. That is the true church, right? The church that really belongs to the living God, the church that is alive in Christ, that possesses the life of God. We're talking about the true church, not the false church, not the professing church, but the true church, the living God's church, the real household of God, those who truly belong to Him. And it says of the church this, that it is the pillar and support of the truth. Pillar, *stulos*, simply those great pillars that held up the massive roof. The support is the word *edrama*(???)which means foundation. He then goes on to articulate what that truth is, and it is substantial and it is centered in one person, verse 16, here is the common confession of the truth that identifies the true church. "By common confession, great is the mystery of Godliness." When people went to the Temple of Diana in the city of Ephesus, they would say this, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians. Great is Diana of the Ephesians." According to Acts chapter 19, that's what they said, "Great is Diana, Great is Diana. But when we who are the church of the living God, the living God's church, when we come together, our common confession is great is the mystery of godliness. Great is the mystery of godliness."

Now notice that opening statement, "By common confession..." You may have a translation that says, "Without controversy," I think that's the King James and maybe the New King James, "Without controversy," that's really meaning the same thing, just saying it a little differently. It means it is not subject to debate, it is not up for grabs, there's no argument on this issue, it is beyond dispute. It is the unanimous conviction of the living God's church, the true family of God. The Greek verb here translated "By common confession" is *homologoumenos*, *homomeaning* the same, *legoto* say. We all say the same thing. That's what it means. All of us affirm the same truth that holds up the church, that identifies the church, that is the support and the strength and the form and the shape of the church. And what is that great truth? Great is the mystery of godliness....great is the mystery of godliness.

What does that mean? What is the mystery of godliness? Is that a doctrine? Is that a theological point? Is that a philosophical reality? What is that?

The mystery of godliness can be easily understood. Mystery means something hidden, now

revealed. Always in the New Testament *mysterion* has that idea. Something hidden, now revealed. So what we have is godliness revealed...godliness revealed. What is godliness? God-likeness revealed, deity revealed. That's another way to say it. So we're not talking about a doctrine here, we're talking about a person. We're not talking about a theological principle here, we're talking about a person. While they were saying, "Great is Diana," the Christians are saying, "Great is God revealed....Great is the mystery of godliness."

That's a tremendously important statement, tremendously important. Notice please that revealed is from *phaneroo*(??), it means to make visible, it's not to create or to bring into existence. God was already in existence. God the Son in existence eternally, as eternally the second member of the Trinity as all the Trinity is eternal, from eternity to eternity. He does not become created but rather He which has been forever in existence but invisible is made visible. And it goes further. His visibility was in the flesh, in *sarx*, human form...human form, as we note in the first statement of the hymn.

So what is the mystery of godliness? The mystery of godliness is not a what. The mystery of godliness is a who, it is...look at verse 16 again...He who was revealed. Now some of you may have a Bible that says "God was revealed," there are some manuscripts that have the name God, *theos* in there. But all manuscripts older than the seventh century have *hos* which is He who. So somewhere along the line somebody thought they'd help us interpret *hos* by adding God, and it showed up in certain manuscripts. But the original manuscripts have *hos* and the NAS recognizes that in discovering those manuscripts and entrusting those older manuscripts and translates it "He who." Of course "He who" refers to Christ and "He who" is God, but to be accurate with the text, it is He who. Here is our great confession then, beloved, here is what all true Christians affirm. We all affirm that God came into the world and revealed His holy person in human flesh. We all believe that Jesus is the incarnate God. If you do not believe that, you are not in the household of God and you are not a part of the living God's church. This is by common confession. This is without dispute and without argument and without debate the true and unanimous conviction of the church. While all the pagans may be hailing whatever god they're hailing, we are all saying, "Great is God incarnate in the flesh." And of whom are we speaking? "He who was revealed in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."

The bottom line in belonging to the living God's church is that your Christology is correct. That you believe in the incarnate Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. John the Apostle in writing affirms the deity of Jesus Christ in his opening chapter of his gospel, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." John affirms the deity of Christ all the way through his gospel. Again and again and again he is testifying to the fact that Jesus is God. "If you've seen Me...Jesus said...you've seen the Father. I and the Father are one," and so forth. And in his epistle, John lays down the standard Christology for anyone who is in the living God's church. First John 2:23, "Whoever denies the Son doesn't have the Father. The one who confesses the Son has the Father also." In chapter 4 of his gospel, verse 2, "By this you know the Spirit of God, every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. Every spirit that does not confess Jesus, is not from God." It is your view of Jesus Christ that either puts you in the church or prevents you from being a part of the church. Verse 12 of chapter 4, "No one has beheld God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us. By this we know we abide in Him and He in us because He's given us His Spirit and we beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him and he in God."

In the fifth chapter he says it again, verse 9, "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. The witness of God is this, that He's born witness concerning His Son." In verse 20, "We know the Son of God is come and given us understanding in order that we might know Him who is true. We are in Him who is true and in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God."

A common Christology is possessed by the true church. We all affirm the deity of Jesus Christ, that He is the eternal God manifest in human flesh. And therefore the following hymn is to be sung to His honor and to His glory. Six verbs and around them six great statements of His deity.

Number one, "He who was revealed in the flesh," not created, not made but rather manifest, made visible, *phaneroo*. Jesus Christ is God made visible. The invisible God, transcendent Spirit becomes visible. In human form in Jesus Christ, God the Holy One appears in human flesh. Godliness takes on human flesh.

In Romans 1 the Apostle Paul begins his great epistle with these words, "Paul, a bondservant of Christ Jesus, called as an Apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which He promised before hand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures concerning His Son who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, but was declared the Son of God with power," and we'll come back to that later. He is the Son, God the Son, but He is also a man born of the seed of David.

In Galatians the Apostle Paul also tells us in chapter 4 verse 4 that in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son born of a woman...born of a woman. This is repeated all through the New Testament particularly the epistles of Paul, emphasized in the book of Hebrews as well. This line of the hymn then focuses on the incarnation...the incarnation. It takes us from the birth to the death, His human life from being born to dying, being human is to be born and it is to die. And He was born though conceived supernaturally, He was born the way all people are born, from the womb of His mother. And He died the way all people die. From birth to death is summed up in that first line. He lived as a human being, a life from birth to death. But throughout that entire life, it was holiness manifest, it was godliness revealed, it was the mystery of godliness, the unveiling of divine holiness revealed in His life. The Bible tells us clearly He was without sin. He knew no sin. There was no iniquity found in Him. He committed no sin. So say the writers of the New Testament. Divine revelation frankly offers nothing as astonishing as this, that the eternal God would become a man and go from birth from a mother's womb to death as a man. This is holiness revealed, holiness disclosed, made visible, supreme sovereign, supernatural, divine holiness. That's the first great statement about Jesus Christ, and the first proof of His deity was that no one could accuse Him of any sin at all. And even God said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Secondly, says this hymn, He was vindicated by the Spirit...vindicated by the Spirit. We won't take a lot of time to deal with the text here, just to say that the way to understand it is that He was vindicated by the Spirit. Vindicated...what does that mean? Justified, declared righteous. He was affirmed as godliness manifest, as holiness personified. His utter perfection was vindicated. How was it vindicated? Was it at His baptism when the Spirit of God came upon Him and settled as a dove and the Father said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased?" Was that His great vindication? Was that the great confirmation of His righteousness? No, that was at the very outset of His ministry, there was still a whole ministry to endure, all the way through the garden to the cross.

The final vindication has to come at the final end of His life. His revelation in the flesh at the end point once He has died, then it's time to render the vindication. And so the true vindication, the true

declaration of His perfection and holiness comes by the Spirit at the end of His life. And what event is that? That is His resurrection. That takes us back again to Romans chapter 1 and verse 4, "He was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead according to the Spirit of holiness." The Holy Spirit affirms the holy perfection of Christ by empowering Him to rise from the dead. It is the Spirit who gives life, says Romans 8:11, and God raised Jesus from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. And in the raising of Him from the dead, vindicated Him as absolutely righteous. Death had no legitimate claim on Him. The soul that sins, it shall die. The wages of sin are death. But there was no sin in Him, He is holy, harmless, undefiled. Death cannot hold Him. It has no grip on Him. He is raised from the dead by the power of the Spirit of holiness because He Himself is the holy Son of God incarnate.

Now remember, this is an important vindication. This is an important declaration because He died under condemnation. He died under the sentence of sin. He died as a criminal. The verdict on Him by the Jewish people and acquiescence by the Romans was that He was worthy of death, that He should be put to death. From the Jews' viewpoint He was a heretic who threatened the Kingdom of God. From the Romans' viewpoint, He was a would-be king who threatened the power of Rome. In any case, He died under a cloud of guilt. The resurrection was God's vindication that the Jews were wrong and the Romans were equally wrong. And so the great vindication of Christ comes in His resurrection.

In that passage I read to you in Romans 1:4 where it uses the verb "declared," He was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, the word "declared" is *horizo* from which we get the word horizon. And it's an interesting word because it can be vividly illustrated as to its meaning. The horizon is the clear boundary between earth and sky when you look out say over the ocean and you see where the water ends and the sky begins, that is the horizon. And the horizon, *horizo*, is a clear boundary. It is a line of demarcation between one thing and another. And God through the power of the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead to declare that He was completely different from anyone else who ever lived in this world or would live in this world as a human being. A boundary is set clearly between Christ and all other humans. The Spirit's raising Jesus from the dead gives us irrefutable evidence to clearly mark out and distinguish the human life of Christ as in fact the divine Spirit who was hidden, now made visible.

The third line in the hymn, "Beheld by angels." And there's a chronology here we're moving through the life of Christ. "Beheld by angels," to what does this refer? Are we referring to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ when the angels were out there in the field declaring to the shepherds that He had been born? Are we referring to the time in His temptation in Matthew chapter 4:11 when angels came and ministered to Him? Are we referring to His time in the agony of the Garden, Luke 22:43, when the angels cared for Him? By the way, those are the only two times that angels ever appear in His entire life from birth to death, they only show up at His temptation and at His agony in the Garden.

What does that tell us? Oh they were accessible to Him in Matthew chapter 26 verses 53 and 54. He said that if He wanted to He could call any time on a legion of angels and they would come to His rescue. But in His humiliation and in His incarnation, He was willing to live and die without angelic intervention. So we're not talking about Him being ministered to by angels, that's not what it says. We're not talking about His being annunciated by angels to Mary and to Joseph or even before them to Elizabeth or Zacharias or afterward to the shepherds. We're not talking about any announcement by angels. We're talking about angels looking at Him, *horaois* the word, it means to watch...to watch. Watched by angels. Watched by angels.

Could it be that He's talking about fallen angels? Could it be that He's talking about those angels that Peter refers to in 1 Peter 3 who were bound in hell because of their sin in Genesis 6 to whom Jesus appeared after His death and before His resurrection? And as Colossians 2 says, declared openly His triumph over them. While hell was having a party thinking He was dead, He showed up to declare His triumph. Is that what we're talking about? Is that angels beholding Him? That's not likely. It's not likely that the word angel would be used here in this hymn if they're not holy angels.

So what are we talking about? Well we're at the resurrection, aren't we? And here we do see the angels. The angels were there at the tomb, weren't they? Matthew, Mark and Luke tell us about an angel who had a conversation with those who came to the tomb. John tells us that when they went inside the tomb, there were two angels, one sitting at His place where His feet had been, one sitting at the place where His head had been. Some very specific angels were firsthand participants in the scene of the resurrection. And all of the angels in heaven must have been having a great celebration, worshipping the Son of God.

But there's something more here...something more here. Angels had witnessed the creation. The morning star sang together when God made the universe. Angels had witnessed the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. Angels had announced the birth of Jesus Christ. Angels will be very involved in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. And angels were there at the resurrection. They are holy beings devoted to God. They are there as witnesses to the resurrection.

People may have been confused about the resurrection. They may have wondered exactly what went on to some degree or another. The disciples were confused. It says in Mark 16:11 they even refused to believe it. But while the disciples were struggling to believe, the angels had no problem. The angels were fascinated by the events of the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They were completely absorbed in those things.

In 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse 12, wonderful testimony of Scripture. It says this, "It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preach the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven," then this, "things, the gospel things, into which angels long to look." You see, angels have no personal knowledge of redemption. Fallen angels were confirmed in their fallen condition and destined for eternal hell and a lake of fire and there is no redemption of any angels. Demons are demons forever. Holy angels were confirmed in holiness forever. They know nothing of grace. They know nothing of mercy. They know nothing of redemption. They know nothing of substitution. They know nothing of the sacrifice for sin. They know nothing of sin. And so they look at this whole thing as outsiders, stunned and amazed and longing to understand and comprehend it. And that gives you an insight into the whole issue of theodicy, or why God allowed evil. God allowed evil because if there was no sin, there would be no grace, there would be no mercy, there would be no redemption, there would be no sacrifice and God would not be able to put Himself on display in those categories to the everlastingly worshipful angels. They long to look at these things.

They were there clearly in the Garden of His agony. They were looking at the cross of His suffering and at His glorious resurrection. Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 6 says, "When He brings the firstborn into the world," He says, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." And if you go heaven in Revelation 4 and 5 and you listen to the worship of heaven, you're going to hear this, "Worthy art Thou to take the book and break its seals for Thou was slain and purchased for God with Thy blood men from

every tribe and tongue and people and nation." That, you say, is 24 elders, don't they represent men? Yes. But the next verse says, "And I looked and heard the voice of many angels." And what did the angels say, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." The angels watched the death and the resurrection of Christ so that it might forever inform their worship.

The fourth statement about the incarnate God is proclaimed among the nations. After His resurrection what happened? After His resurrection He revealed Himself to those who believed on Him. First He revealed Himself to the disciples on a couple of weekends. Then He revealed Himself to some in Galilee, namely 500 at one time. And by the revelation of the risen Christ, those who were sorrowful and sad and lonely and doubtful and fearful and wondering whether they had wasted the years of their life in following the Lord Jesus because He was now dead, they were totally transformed. From those few who met Him on the road to Emmaus to the 500 who saw Him risen from the dead in Galilee, they were transformed and they were transformed into powerful preachers of the gospel and they went everywhere proclaiming the risen Christ. Read the book of Acts, everywhere they went they preached that Christ had risen from the dead. The Messiah had to suffer and die and be raised from the dead. This is the great, great unanswerable question that those who deny the resurrection cannot really solve. How can such fearful doubtful scattered frightened apostles become martyrs proclaiming the gospel fearlessly to death if Jesus hadn't risen from the dead? They became passionate evangelists. They went out and gave their lives and so did the ones who followed after them. And they do even today. And the gospel is still being preached and will continue to be preached until the end of time.

The mystery of godliness, the incarnate one, His glorious gospel is being preached today. Some are suffering to death in the process as they always have. But with unflinching faithfulness they continue to do it because He is alive. People don't die for a lie. They don't give their lives as martyrs for a hoax.

And then the next statement, number five. These transformed disciples who went out preaching, these persecuted imprisoned martyred preachers who preached the glorious mystery of godliness did have a response because verse 16 says, the fifth line, "Believed on in the world....believed on in the world." The evidence for the resurrection was so overwhelming that people did believe. When the gospel was preached, people believed. People responded. In the sixteenth chapter of Mark and verse 15 He said to them, "Go into all the world, preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and been baptized shall be saved. He who disbelieved will be condemned." Verse 20, the end of the chapter, "They went out and preached everywhere." The Lord worked with them and continued the Word by the signs that followed.

Go to Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. Peter gets up and preaches that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Three thousand people believed and are baptized and the church is born. Go in to chapter 4 and the church expands on the gospel of the resurrection. Go in to chapter 5 and move all the way through the book of Acts as the resurrection is being preached, affirming the sacrifice of Christ being accepted by God on behalf of sinners. The gospel is heard and believed. Still going on today, being proclaimed among the nations, being believed on in the world.

Finally, the hymn ends, "Taken up into glory...taken up into glory." This is the climax to incarnation, substitution, resurrection, evangelization, salvation. This is glorification. This is Christ going back to the glory that He had with the Father before the world began. This is Christ ascending into heaven and taking His seat at the right hand of God. This is Christ being coronated and given a name which

is above every name, the name Lord, a name at which every knee must bow. He took His seat at the right hand of God. Hebrews chapter 1 makes it abundantly clear that when He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high and He was given a name, a more excellent name than even angels have. That name, of course, is Lord. He is there reigning over His spiritual Kingdom. But the glory is not yet consummated, it is not yet complete. He is coming again in Second Coming glory. He will establish His Kingdom in the world and then He will reign over an earthly Kingdom for a thousand years, and then over the new heaven and the new earth He will be revealed in majesty and glory in His fullness forever and forever.

You have a hymn, six lines that sweeps from incarnation to glorification, all the way from the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to His eternal glory. He is God in human flesh. His incarnate life confirms it, the sinless perfection of His life. His resurrection by the Spirit of God confirms it. God was affirming His holiness when He lifted Him out of death. The experience of angels confirms it for the angels worship Him and call Him worthy to be worshiped. The preaching of the apostles confirms it for they preach because He is risen. The faith of believers confirms it because we put our trust by the power of God in a living Christ. And His final coronation and exaltation confirms it as He takes His place at the right hand of God and awaits the moment when He will come in glory to establish His earthly Kingdom and then to reign forever and ever.

This is our common confession. Put the denominations aside, the church names and titles aside, put all the other issues aside and all those who are a part of the living God's church, all of those who are truly in the household of God make this unequivocal common confession concerning Jesus Christ. We all have the same great Christology that sweeps us from incarnation right through the cross and resurrection to the glorious coronation of Christ. It is to this song that we have added countless songs of praise.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for this great confession that all in the living God's church make, this great affirmation concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. We reward...we rejoice and we worship in this hour having again been exposed to the wonders of the gospel and the honor of our Savior. May You cause every heart here to embrace and believe these things and to receive salvation by grace through faith that this might become personal reality, spiritual transformation and the promise of eternal joy. These things we ask in the name of Christ. Amen.

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