

HALLELUJAH WHAT A SAVIOR

BY FABIENNE HARFORD

It's not a new word. Most of us have heard it our whole lives: it calls to mind Gospel Choirs or rows of angels. The word stems from a two-part Hebrews phrase: "Praise Yah". Yah is short for Yahweh: the personal name of God. The word 'Hallelujah' carries with it all the weight of what Christmas means to us: the nearness of God. God isn't just the omnipotent and unsearchable Elohim. He is Yahweh: the God who had invited His people to encounter Him personally. That truth is never clearer to us than at Christmas. Jesus' birth is the evidence that God doesn't just say He wants to be near and known, but He makes a way, at great cost to Himself, to come near.

At the heart of this song is the fullness of the word Hallelujah: praise the God who makes Himself known; praise the God who has come near. What a Savior, indeed.

The opening line of "Hallelujah What a Savior" references a story we all know inside out. We know about the star that rose in the sky that the Kings followed to find their way to the feet of a baby whose Kingdom would never end. The book of Matthew recounts the story:

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." (Matthew 2:1-2 ESV)

The wise men knew the King of Kings had been born because they 'saw his star when it rose'. They knew of the prophecy¹ of a Messiah - 'a star' - that would rise out of Jacob's descendants and crush Satan. Those who knew the Scriptures recognized that the special star rising in the sky indicated the

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□ Numbers 24:17

coming of a Messiah. But while they traveled, there were others who weren't hunting for the signs. There were simple shepherds, just doing their usual work of tending sheep.

Just as God has always done for His people, He pursues those who aren't looking for Him. It was to the shepherds, who were considered lowly and unclean, that God chose to reveal the good news first.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. (Luke 2:20 ESV)

The shepherds – the outcasts of society – were the very first people who got to see Jesus, the child whose birth had been anticipated for so many years. And as they looked at the screaming baby in the hay, they saw the promise of God fulfilled. Their faith was sight. No longer did they have to cling to hope; they had proof. What they saw was not just the grace or mercy of God, it was His justice. So often we separate God's love and His righteousness, but at Christmas, through Jesus, these aspects of God's character dance together: "God the just, His love displayed".

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe... This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26 ESV)

Lying in that manger was the evidence that God doesn't overlook sin. Jesus is the proof that God is righteous. He doesn't overlook evil. He doesn't make a way around justice – in love, He makes a way through it. That baby was the one who would take the righteous punishment for every sin previously left unpunished. He took the punishment for every sin of those whom God loved. God the just displays His love in Christ.

In the second verse of the song, we get to press into the glory of the incarnation:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 ESV)

Jesus – the Word – was present at the creation of the World. All things were created through Him. He is GOD, yet He chooses to wrap Himself in flesh. He is the physical evidence that the words of God are true: visible manifestation of the promise that people had waited for thousands of years. And on that first Christmas, neither Mary nor the wise men nor the shepherds had experienced the great gift that God was going to give to His people: the Church.

God wanted a people set apart. He wanted a people free from the rule and reign of sin, but He knew the ransom would be great. Through Jesus, He purchased for Himself a bride bought with nothing less than His own blood

Grasping these beautiful truths will lead us to the chorus: Praise Yahweh. Praise the only true God, the one who came and got us, bought us with His blood. Oh, what a Savior! What a redeemer, what a King, who would come and rescue us from sin and death because of His great love.

Hallelujah. What a Savior!