

Angels from the realms of glory, wing your flight o'er all the earth; ye who sang creation's story now proclaim Messiah's birth: (Refrain)

Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the new-born king.

2. Shepherds, in the field abiding, watching o'er your flocks by night, God with us is now residing; yonder shines the infant light: (Refrain)

3. Sages, leave your contemplations, brighter visions beam afar;
seek the great Desire of nations;
ye have seen his natal star:

(Refrain)

4. Saints, before the altar bending, watching long in hope and fear; suddenly the Lord, descending, in his temple shall appear: (Refrain)

There was an original final stanza which is generally omitted in hymn books.

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

Throughout the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles you will find people called: *faithful, holy, Godly and saints*. The Greek word for these people is *hagios* meaning a most holy thing. The Bible considers saints to be very much alive!

So how do we, who if asked, would probably consider ourselves sinners become saints? St Paul who called himself the worst of sinners is very clear that it is through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus that *we are made holy*. Paul explores this in his letter to the fledgling Christian community at Ephesus when he says: *I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. One word stand out here, worthy, the new life we have in Christ must be genuinely new, not a continuation of what went before. These qualities of humility, gentleness, patience and most of all striving for unity are not ones which the world recognises or places much value on these days. Quite the contrary in our world today, pride, aggressiveness, impatience and disunity are much more the order of the day. We value self, our needs, our opinions, our right to be right all the time far above any compromise, reconciliation or respect for a communal unity which respects the view of everyone.

In letters to some of his other Christian communities Paul adds to these qualities of humility, gentleness, patience and working for unity the need for hospitality and generosity found in sharing with those in need. He sees the result of this focus on humility, gentleness, patience, working towards unity, sharing hospitality and generosity with those in need, the result is that others will see God's love expressed through the lives of saints, our lives, and be drawn to God.

Paul lovingly sums up the life of a saint in that letter to the Ephesians when he says: *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

How do we move from verse 5 of our carol to verse 4? God calls us, just as God called angels, shepherds and sages with mercy and forgiveness to witness to the mystery of the incarnation. The amazing truth that in the birth of Jesus God became one of us, fully human to share our joys, to share our sorrows. In Jesus God became one of us, fully human to share our hopes, our dreams, to share our disappointments and our hopelessness. It is God through the amazing gift of love, the gift of his son Jesus, in this gift we find the strength to move from verse 5 to verse 4. In this amazing gift of love, the gift of the Messiah born in humanity, in this gift we move from sinners to saints.

Saints are no more or no less than all the faithful believers who have responded to God's call in their lives. Saints, alongside angels, shepherd and sages are witnesses to this amazing gift from God which are called to witness to in our lives.

Saints are us!

As we conclude our Advent journey and approach our Christmas celebrations we are called alongside angels, shepherds and sages to: *Come and worship, come and worship, worship Christ, the new born King.*