

Angels We Have Heard on High

And suddenly there was with the angels a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!

Luke 2:13, 14 (KKJV)

“*Les Anges dans nos Campagnes*” was French carol dating from the 1700s, which appeared in several different versions. It was published in English in 1862, the words saying:

*Angels we have heard on high / Sweetly singing o'er the plains,
And the mountains in reply / Echoing their joyous strains.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!*

An older version had the title, “Harken All! What Holy Singing!” The words, translated into English, said:

*Harken, all! What holy singing / Now is sounding from the sky!
'Tis a hymn with grandeur ringing, / Sung by voices clear and high.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!*

Still another primitive version speaks from the shepherds' vantage point, saying:

*Shepherds in the field abiding, / Tell us when the seraph bright
Greeted you with wondrous tiding, / What you saw and heard that night.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo!*

Hymns are usually authored by human beings like us, but in this case obscure verses by unknown French poets were coupled with a refrain that was literally composed by angels in heaven; *Gloria, in excelsis Deo*. That's the Latin wording for the angelic anthem, “Glory to God in the highest!” It comes from Luke 2:14 in the Vulgate, the Latin version of the Bible. The Latin word *Gloria* means *Glory*, and in excelsis is the phrase for *in the highest*. Our English words *excel* and *excellent* come from the same root, meaning *to rise or to ascend or to be high*. The Latin word *Deo* means God.

This was the song proclaimed by the angels over Shepherds' Field the night Christ was born. The musical score stretches out and emphasizes the words in a way that is uniquely fun to sing and deeply stirring, as we lift our voices to proclaim: Jesus has come! Hope has arrived on earth! A Savior is born! Glory to God on High! *Gloria, in excelsis Deo!*

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