

Angels

We are about to sing Hark the Herald Angels – so, a few words about angels.

It's a long time since I harkened to Angels. 13 years in fact – since I was last actually able to listen to Angels. You may find this hard to believe, but it is absolutely true.

I was sat on the train from Ely to London, opened my white macbook, put my headphones on, called up Itunes, and found a playlist that began with Robbie Williams's beloved sentimental sad song. The headphones weren't working too well, so I had to turn them up very loud. Then I sat back, closed my eyes, and ... somebody tapped me on the knee! When I opened my eyes, all the other passengers on the rush hour train were staring at me, and the gentleman sat opposite smiled at me, and said, 'you forgot to plug your headphones in.'

That's why I have been unable to hearken unto angels for 13 years.

I am not sure what people might think of angels. Robbie Williams certainly does not seem to share the same view as Saint Luke, who reports the incident when Angels visited shepherds on the hillside.

As usual, the first thing an angel says in the Bible is 'Do not be afraid.'! In fact, the only time when that didn't happen was when the angel visited a woman. When the archangel appeared to Mary, he just said hello and started talking. Then Mary got afraid... then he seemed to close his eyes, and say, 'Do not be afraid.'

But the shepherds were afraid – and they were not afraid of much. But they had good reason to be afraid – because while they were out in the field in the middle of the night, it was an entire army of angels who appeared. They are called, the heavenly host, and on your Christmas card, you may picture them floating up there in the sky, with their

wings, their harps, the white night gowns, and voices like Taylor Swift. The kind of vision you might see in a shampoo commercial.

But in reality, this was an army, a brigade with an operational strength sufficient to overcome the hostile superpower's legion that was stationed in the promised land. And this is an army not singing, but chanting about the mighty deliverer, laid in a feeding trough in a nearby village.

But it's an army talking about peace – and a deliverer who would grow up to have no resource capital, no oligarchic bank account, and no army at his beck and call. Not the kind of deliverer anyone might have expected.

And that is all an angel really is – a messenger. And in the gospels, the news about this peasant baby, and the news issued by this peasant when he grew up, was not what anyone expected.

If we hark, and hear what the herald angels sing, especially as the story unfolds – it may put us off listening to Angels.