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Mormonbasics.com is humbled to bring you a commentary on the hymns published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This commentary is presented in a two-column format. The original text, as presented in the hymnbook published by the LDS Church, is in the left column. The comments on the right are provided by mormonbasics.com. We have even changed the color of the text so there won't be any question as to who wrote what.

Personal note from the commentator:
The hymns of the Church are sacred text. The Lord has made it very clear to us through his prophets that the singing of hymns is a form of prayer, and as such is sacred communication. Much of the sacred Spirit and reverence we experience in our meetings, especially Sacrament Meeting, comes from the Spirit that accompanies the singing of the hymns.

The hymns are written in poetic form, and as such are able to take certain licenses and liberties with the English language that cannot normally be expressed in any other way. It is certainly not the aim of this commentary to improve on the beauty of the poetic expressions found in our sacred hymns. As a teacher of English to those who speak other languages, I have found that many of the hymns have expressions that are difficult for some people to understand.

Because hymns are written to fit a set rhythmic pattern or meter, often the expression has to be condensed to fit in a small space, but still convey its intended meaning. It is the combination of the rhythm, text, and music that create such a powerful Spiritual experience when singing the hymns. My attempts to explain some of the meaning behind the text should not detract from the original meaning, nor should it replace the original meaning. Hymns, like parables, take on different meanings as the circumstances of our lives change. My commentary is only a starting point for (hopefully) a better understanding of the overall meaning of the hymn in this work. Anyone else writing this same commentary would have different perspectives and points to make. That is the nature of a commentary. I pray that what I say will, in some way, help in your understanding of this hymn. Since this is a personal study of the hymns, I will sometimes use the first person when writing the commentary.

Kelly P. Merrill

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I Saw a Mighty Angel Fly

1. I saw a mighty angel fly;
To earth he bent his way,
A message bearing from on high
To cheer the sons of day.
Truth is the message which he bears,
The gospel's joyful sound,
To calm our doubts, to chase our fears,
And make our joys abound.

I saw a mighty (great) angel flying toward earth carrying a message from God that would make the children of the last days happy. Truth is the message he carries, the joyful news of Christ's gospel. It will help us get rid of our doubts and will chase away our fears, and bring us great happiness. If our "joys abound" we have a great quantity of joy or many joys.

2. He cries, and with a mighty voice;
Ye nations lend an ear,
And isles and continents rejoice:
The great Redeemer's near!
He cries; let ev'ry ear attend,
And thrones and empires all!
Fear God, and make the Lord your friend,
The King, the Lord of all!

The message that is being shouted (a mighty voice) to the earth is that all nations need to listen, both the isles of the sea and all the continents (i.e. everyone) can rejoice or be glad because Christ is near. His message is that all thrones and governments need to listen and fear God. Make Him your friend by obeying him.

3. Fear God, who made the water pure,
The heavens, sea, and land.
His judgment will be swift and sure;
The day is nigh at hand.
Then, all ye people, worship God;
Give glory to his name!
To spread these tidings far abroad
The holy angel came.

We all need to fear the God who created the earth. His judgement will be fast and final. That day is close (nigh at hand), so worship God and give him glory. The angel came for the purpose of giving this message to the whole earth.

MUSIC
English melody, arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958.

TEXT
Anon., ca. 1840

SCRIPTURES
Revelation 14:6-7, Doctrine and Covenants 133:36-39, 52-53