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Empty Patch of Sky

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Empty Patch of Sky

Abstract

"It is not only the angels, but the very heavens themselves are bringing glory to God, just as they do every night."

Posting about our amazing creation from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/an-empty-patch-of-sky/>

Keywords

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Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

An Empty Patch of Sky

 [inallthings.org/an-empty-patch-of-sky/](http://allthings.org/an-empty-patch-of-sky/)

December 16,
2016

Tom Clark

I've always been drawn to the beauty of creation. The intricate patterns that lie in wait for someone to come along and take joy in. In as much as this draws my attention upward to give glory to God I would call this general revelation. Among the most well-known scriptures on the topic of general revelation are Psalm 8:3:

When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place.

and Psalm 19:1-2:

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.

These Psalms are echoed in the great hymn "This Is My Father's World" which begins

This is my Father's world,
and to my listening ears
all nature sings, and round me rings
the music of the spheres.

"The music of the spheres" is a beautiful way of capturing the harmony of the stars in their orbits wheeling around a supermassive black hole at the center of their galaxy, each star one of a hundred billion in its galaxy, each galaxy one of trillions.¹ The night sky has always captured my attention both for the bright shining points of beauty as well as the vast immeasurable empty darkness. In 1995 the astronomer Bob Williams had the terrible idea of pointing the Hubble Space Telescope at absolutely nothing, an empty patch of sky. A waste of time and a valuable resource² many said, but he nonetheless did it. When the Hubble telescope stared at the empty patch³ for 100 hours this is what it saw... thousands of galaxies of all shapes, sizes, and ages. Where most had seen nothing, one man saw the Hubble Deep Field⁴, and it was transcendent.

Indeed, looking up to see the heavens on a moonless night sky and seeing the Milky Way drape itself across the firmament is something I should do more often. Perhaps the shepherds were doing just that very thing one night in the fields near Bethlehem. Perhaps they were reminded of Psalm 19, and God's general revelation. Many biblical texts have both a near and a far interpretation. Prophecy especially has a way of being true in more than one sense. I think Psalm 19 was fulfilled on one particular evening in a very new way, when a group of shepherds looked up into the night sky expecting to see only stars and instead were greeted with the Glory of God.

You may be familiar with a certain Christmas carol that starts with *Hark! The Herald Angels sing, Glory to the newborn King!* What has always felt odd to me about this hymn was how it differs from the account in Luke 2:14 where the angels say:

Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests. (Luke 2:14)

Because of this, I have always admired, (and even sing to my wife's chagrin), not the 1758 version by George Whitefield, but rather the original 1739 text by Charles Wesley. In Wesley's original "Hymn for Christmas Day" you can see Psalm 19 on full display:

Hark! How all the Welkin rings
"Glory to the King of Kings"

The angels give "glory to God in the highest" not to the Christ child who laid his glory by to put on flesh. The Merriam-Webster dictionary reminds us that the word "welkin" means the sky, the firmament, the heavens, the celestial sphere, coming through Middle English from an Old English word for cloud. A great cloud of witnessed indeed! Wesley captures beautifully how it is not only the angels, but the very heavens themselves are bringing glory to God, just as they do every night. Except that on this one night, the veil was lifted for a few chosen men to see it more clearly, just as the Hubble telescope did when it stared patiently at what we all thought was an empty patch of sky and revealed just how vast, deep, and beautiful our world really is. Our God is full of surprises! And so Psalm 19 was fulfilled majestically as a new and special King was born to bring Peace to a world in so much need of it. The angels put words to what the moon and stars had been saying all along for anyone patient enough to listen:

Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world. (Psalm 19: 2-4)

May we all find the time this morning to listen to the Word of God as it was written by Luke and the Psalmists many years ago, and this evening as it is written in the welkin by the stars.

Footnotes

1. This is a rough estimate from various experiments see e.g., ["Hubble Reveals Observable Universe Contains 10 Times More Galaxies Than Previously Thought"](#) ↩
2. Nadia Drake, ["When Hubble Stared at Nothing for 100 Hours,"](#) *National Geographic* ↩
3. ["Hubble's Deep View of the Universe Unveils Earliest Galaxies,"](#) nasa.gov ↩
4. ["Hubble Deep Field Image Unveils Myriad Galaxies Back to the Beginning of Time,"](#) nasa.gov ↩