

What Is The “Glory Be to God on High”?

There are many ways we can thank and praise God. We can go to church and sing hymns and other songs. We can give our offerings in church. We can tell people about Jesus. We can even do nice things for other people. Everything we do as Christians can and should be done to thank and praise God for providing for all of our physical needs, but more importantly for providing for all of our spiritual needs so we can go to heaven. One way we thank and praise God in a liturgical worship service is by singing the liturgical song Glory Be to God on High? In this column entitled, “Questions About Christianity”, we are looking at the different parts of a basic liturgical worship service. This month we will learn about the song Glory Be to God on High by answering this question, “What is the “Glory Be to God on High”?

The liturgical song Glory Be to God on High is usually called *Gloria in excelsis Deo* (*excelsis* is pronounced egg-shell-cees). This is Latin for Glory to God in the highest. It is often abbreviated to *Gloria in Excelsis* or simply *Gloria*. It is also referred to as the Greater Doxology, which means a great song of praise. Glory Be to God on High was first sung in the Eastern Christian Church around the 2nd and 3rd centuries. A short time later, it made its way into the Western Christian Church where it was usually sung in Latin. This Latin translation is traditionally credited to have been written by Hilary of Poitiers (c. 300–368).

“Glory Be To God on High” received its name from the first words of the song. They are “Glory to God in the highest”. These words come from Luke 2:1 when the angels said to the shepherds on the night of Jesus’ birth, “Glory to God in the highest”. After this initial phrase, the song describes how we praise God for his glory, then how we praise the almighty Father, then how we praise Jesus Christ for taking away the sin of the world, and finally the Holy Spirit.

Christian churches use different words and different tunes for Glory Be to God on High. However, most use words similar to these:

Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will toward men. We praise you, we bless you, we worship you, we glorify you, we give thanks to you, for your great glory, O Lord God, heav’nly King, God the Father almighty. O Lord, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ; O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us. You take away the sin of the world; receive our prayer. You sit at the right hand of God the Father; have mercy on us. For you only are holy: you only are the Lord. You only, O Christ, with the Holy Spirit, are most high in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Christian churches sing Glory Be to God on High at different times in their worship service. Some sing it early in the service. Some sing it in the middle of the service, and some sing it towards the end. In my church, we sing it after the Lord, Have Mercy towards the beginning of the service. This is a very fitting place to sing it because after we have been assured by the minister God had mercy on us and forgave our sins through faith in Jesus, we now thank and praise God for this forgiveness. Regardless of where it is sung, what is important is this song beautifully teaches us about the Triune God and how Jesus Christ is our Savior from sin and through it the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith. In addition, this is another song we can sing to thank and praise God for saving us from our sins so we can one day live with him in heaven.