

GLORY TO GOD  
 Luke 2:13, 14

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1-20.

Intro: 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude

of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 **Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men** (Luke 2:13-14).

On this Christmas morning when people all over the world are at least reminded of the birth of Jesus Christ almost two thousand years ago, I would like to direct your attention to some of the most familiar words we hear in connection with the birth of Christ. We have them in verse 14.

They are not the only familiar words. In fact, verses 8 through 14 together give us the best known account of what was actually taking place when the baby Jesus was born. The announcement of the birth was made, not to those who lived in castles, nor even to the religious leaders of the people of Israel at that time, but to shepherds. We don't even know what their names were, but we can be sure that they were believers who were awaiting the coming of the Messiah because the angels said to them, "For **unto you** is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

Nothing like this had ever happened before. A virgin gave birth to a child. Her Son was conceived in her by the Holy Spirit. Earlier Mary had been told by the angel Gabriel that:

The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

The angel of the Lord who spoke to the shepherds said that the One Who was born in the city of David would be "a Saviour," and that He would be, lit., Messiah, the Lord.

You probably remember that Joseph had been told even earlier than this that Mary's baby was to be

named JESUS because He would save His people from their sins. Cf. Matt. 1:21.

The Lord Jesus did not come to earth to overthrow Rome, that is, to save them from Rome, but He came to save the people from a far worse fate than being a subject of Rome. He came to save them from their sins. And this is what would cause great joy for, lit., all the people! Most Jews in that day thought that what would bring them the greatest joy would be to be free from Rome. But their bondage to sin was far greater than their bondage to Rome, and their deliverance from their bondage to sin was the one thing that would make them happier than they had ever been, far happier than being politically free from Roman tyranny.

We can see from the messages of the angels to Mary and to the shepherds, and even from what the angel of the Lord said to Zacharias when predicting the birth of John the Baptist, that great blessing would come to people on the earth through the coming of God's Son into the world. And there is certainly nothing wrong about thinking of what the birth of Christ, and His ministry afterwards, would mean to people on the earth. But today I want us to think about the birth of Christ and what it meant to God! Perhaps this will help us to appreciate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ even more. And so I want to consider with you the message of the angels as they sang,

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth  
peace, good will toward men.

First, let us make sure that we understand the meaning of their song.

### I. THE MEANING OF THE TEXT.

In verse 9 we have the word "glory" used. We read that when the angel of the Lord came upon them that "the glory of the Lord shown round about them: and they were sore afraid."

The word glory there speaks of the presence of the Lord. In fact, we can justifiably translate verse 9 by saying that the presence of the Lord was upon them, or simply that the Lord displayed His glory to them. And it frightened them, frightened them terribly.

We learn about the glory of the Lord early in the OT. When God told the children of Israel to build a tabernacle for Him, He said that His reason was this:

And let them make me a sanctuary: **that I may dwell among them** (Ex. 25:8).

After the Tabernacle was completed, and all of the pieces of furniture were in place, we read this:

34 Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and **the glory of the LORD** filled the tabernacle.

35 And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and **the glory of the LORD** filled the tabernacle (Ex.

40:34-35).

So, many times when the word glory is used in Scripture it actually means GOD! So, when the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds, God was there, too! As well as we know those verses, I imagine that most of us have missed that wonderful part of the angel coming to the shepherds. It is no wonder that the shepherds were "sore afraid," or, as the words could be translated, they were exceedingly terrified! Men in the past who were exposed in some way to some manifestation of God's presence, did not feel that they would live through it. That must have been the way the shepherds felt.

What a sight that must have been! The angel of the Lord was there, but GOD was there also. It is a precious thought, isn't it, that when the Lord Jesus came to earth as a baby, God the Father came with Him! If we can ever say that God honored men, He certainly honored those shepherds that night.

But "glory" in our text does not mean the presence of the Lord. "Glory to God" means praise to God, or honor God, or give worship to God. What had taken place that very day was to bring glory, praise, worship, to God, and to no one else.

What about the words, "in the highest"?

"The highest" here is in contrast with "the earth." (Read.) But instead of just saying, Glory to God in the heavens, the angel chorus sang, "Glory to God in the highest," i.e., in the highest heavens, in the very abode of God Himself. All of the

angels in heaven, as well as all of the saints who were in heaven, were called upon to make the highest heavens ring with the worship of God. The singing which shepherds heard that night surpassed any singing that had ever been done on earth, and it surpassed anything that any chorus has done up until now, and to the end of time! And I say this realizing that there have been some wonderful choirs throughout time which have sung to the glory of God. But this choir of angels surpassed them all.

So much for the heavens. What about the earth? The angels sang about the earth, too, and it was a prayer. So you have two forms of prayer in this one verse: praise, and then petition: "Peace on earth, good will toward men."

When Adam and Eve sinned, the peace which they had before then, left them. Sin also caused turmoil in their home. They had two sons, and one killed the other. Cain killed Abel. And we know that the world has not been a peaceful place ever since Adam and Eve sinned. A lot has been said about peace again this Christmas, but how rare it is. Surely there is no peace among the nations of the earth, and most nations are being torn apart from within. People long for peace, but they are looking for it in the wrong places.

What does our text say? It says, "Peace on earth, good will toward men." But it seems generally agreed by Greek scholars that we can improve upon the translation of this verse, not changing the original, but making the original clearer. The NASB translates this verse,

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth  
peace among men with whom He is pleased.

The NIV renders it this way:

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth  
peace to men on whom his favor rests.

The old ASV gives this translation:

Glory to God in the highest, And on earth  
peace among men in whom he is well  
pleased.

Do you get the prayer of the angel chorus? They were not praying that men of good will would have peace, but that the men, the people, with whom God was well pleased would experience the peace of God.

So we find ourselves thinking about God, don't we? He is to be praised from the highest heaven. And if He is to be praised up there, then surely He must be praised also upon the earth. But the peace that the coming of Christ came to establish will never be experienced except in the hearts of the people who are well pleasing to Him. Or we could also say that the angels were speaking of those who were acceptable to God.

How can sinners possibly be acceptable, well pleasing to God? There is only one way, and that is through faith in Christ. Cf. Rom. 5:1:

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).

Paul, in the epistle to the Ephesians, said in Eph. 2:14, that Christ "is our peace." In his letter to the church at Colosse Paul Christ has made peace with God for us "through the blood of His Cross" (Col. 1:20).

When people look for peace in their hearts, or peace in the world, without making peace with God, they are looking for something which cannot be. We must have peace with God first concerning our sins, and there is no other way to get that kind of peace except through faith in Jesus Christ and His death on the Cross. You see, He was born to die. He came to take away our sins, the sins of His people. And Christ by His death did everything necessary to reconcile us to God, and to give us peace with God. Then, when once we have peace with God, it follows that we can enjoy the peace of God in our hearts-- and it is a peace which passeth understanding. See Phil. 4:6, 7.

The angels are still praising God, and some day the whole universe will ring with His praises, and the subject will be the salvation that was made possible through the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ as a Man, Who came to offer Himself as a perfect Sacrifice for completely undeserving sinners.

But before I close, let me be a little more specific about the praises of the angels. We don't know what language angels speak, but I have no doubt but that the shepherds, untrained as they were, got every word that the angels sang. But what must have prompted their singing?

II. THE SONG OF THE ANGELS.

We can't reproduce all of their words because all we have are the words found in Luke 2:14. But from those words we can see why the angels sang, and why they sang in praise to God alone.

Let me suggest first that they sang to God because:

A. The promises of the Word concerning the coming of  
     the Redeemer had just been fulfilled.

There is an interesting passage in the first epistle of Peter which applies to our text. Do you remember how Peter mentioned concerning the coming of Christ that not even the prophets who wrote the prophecies understood what they meant. And so they searched their own writings and the writings of the other prophets. And then Peter concluded with a very interesting statement. It had to do with angels. We actually know very little about angels, but Peter mentioned one thing that we can and do know. Listen to Peter's words:

10 Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you:

11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; **which things the angels desire to look into** (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

Don't miss this! The angels rejoiced at the trustworthiness of God in His Word. His Word cannot fail, and that is worth singing about from the highest heavens. Angels always have been very concerned about the Word of God. Even the Law was given to Moses by the ministry of angels. Cf. Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2.

B. They were rejoicing that the Savior had come.

They knew that salvation was not something that men had asked for. They knew that there were no men who on their own initiative would seek after God. They knew that the people on the earth could not do enough to save themselves even if they had the desire. And so they were praising God that even though no one had asked to be saved, yet God in His grace, and because of His great love for His own, had planned before creation that there would be salvation, and that this salvation would be in Christ, and Christ alone.

One interesting thing that Paul said in 1 Timothy about angels and their relationship to Christ is that he was "seen of angels." I am referring to 1 Timothy 3:16:

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, **seen of angels**, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

If anyone ever had guardian angels, the Lord Jesus did. They ministered to Him after His temptation. At the conclusion of Matthew's account of the temptation, he wrote this in Matt. 4:11:

Then the devil leaveth him, **and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.**

When Judas came with the soldiers to arrest the Lord, Peter took out his sword and started to defend the Lord. But the Lord rebuked him with these words:

52 Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

53 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?  
(Matt. 26:52-53).

So angels were rejoicing that the Lord Jesus had finally come, and they ministered to Him throughout His life on earth.

Finally, we can say this:

C. They sang because they knew that God had appointed the Lord Jesus to do all that was necessary for the complete salvation of everyone who would trust in Him.

Lately the Lord has impressed upon me the thought that the Lord chose us, and pledged Himself to keep us, when He knew when He chose us how often we would fail Him even after He saved us. And I know I have mentioned this to you several times. But I want you to be amazed with this thought, too.

Who was it who said when asked if he did not do something about his own salvation, responded by saying, "Yes, I did"? And then he went on to say that the Lord did everything to save him, and that he did everything to keep the Lord from saving him. But just think back with me this morning over our lives as Christians, and remember the many times the Lord would have been justified in calling off our salvation because of our sins. And yet He hasn't! And He won't! He never will! Why? Because when He undertook our salvation He promised to stay with us until the work was finished. See Phil. 1:6.

Angels know this. And angels know how frail we even as believers are. And they sing the eternal praises of God that not one of His chosen people will fail to get to heaven. Salvation is of the Lord, not partly of the Lord and of partly of His people. Not even mostly of the Lord, and a little of His people. But all of the Lord! And that is worthy singing about, and that is one reason the angels sang. The angel of the Lord said before joining the chorus, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." The Lord delights in our obedience, but when our faith fails, He refuses to let us go.

We all ought to say, "Hallelujah, what a Saviour!"

Concl: (Quote Luke 2:13, 14.)

Not only on this Christmas Day, but every day we live, let us join the angels in praising God on earth for a Savior Who by His death has reconciled us to God, making peace, and Who stays with us day by day, giving us His peace, working in us to



perfect us, and is slowly conforming us to His blessed image.

For any who do not know the Savior, on the authority of the Word of God we place before you the offer of salvation. Come to the Lord, put your trust in Him, leave your own works behind and rest in His finished work on the Cross where He forever put away the sins of all who will ever believe in Him. The command is still being given, followed by the promise, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."