

Glory to God in the Highest

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

The immense joy and hopefulness expressed in this angelic outpouring may seem quaint and outdated in our cynical, modern world. And yet it still strikes a chord in our hearts, and if there should ever come a time when these words lose their power to lift our spirits, that would be a sad day indeed.

If our own time seems dark, it was darker still on the night when the Lord was born. There was sadness, even in heaven, over how cold and dark the spiritual atmosphere of our world had grown. But then, when the great event which had been foretold for so long came to pass, the hearts of the angels were uplifted and overflowed with joy, and the good tidings from heaven spilled over onto earth.

Shepherds were watching over their flocks when suddenly a bright light from heaven lit up the night sky over the fields of Judea, and an angel announced the joyful news that the Savior had been born. “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

Do not imagine that because this story has such a sweet and childlike simplicity about it that it is less than true. Nothing truer was ever recorded in all history! Nor is the truth of it just historical. “The multitude of the heavenly host” that sang to the shepherds are the truths of the Lord’s Word (see *Arcana Coelestia* 344). So these good tidings are repeated for us whenever we take up the Lord’s Word and read it with a humble desire for the Lord to speak to us.

Our text expresses a beautiful sentiment, but, more than that, this brief chorus sums up everything the Lord taught while He was in the world: love to the Lord and love to the neighbor. The whole Word is contained in this heavenly greeting!

“Glory to God in the highest...” *This* comes first. This is the context and condition which is necessary if the angelic promise of peace on earth is to become a reality. The Lord is the Source of all peace, and, however much people may wish for peace and strive to bring it about, without Him we can do nothing. To “give glory to God in the highest” means to acknowledge Him and worship Him and love Him above all else, and to live in the light of His Word (see *Apocalypse Explained* 678).

The world wants peace, but is the world willing to turn to the Source of peace and give glory to God in the highest? The two things are inseparable, because the Lord is the Prince of Peace, and only where He rules can there be true peace. Wanting peace while ignoring the Lord is like wanting the warmth of the sun while rejecting its light; it is impossible.

There is some question about how to translate the last part of the angelic greeting, but the meaning is clear enough. The familiar King James version says “peace on earth, good will toward men.” An alternate reading is “toward men of good will.” Both ideas are correct; the Lord

and His angels will nothing but good to people on earth, but only those whose will is also good can receive heaven's blessing of peace.

Peace comes from within, or above. When the natural part of our being is opened to the Lord's life flowing in through the internal mind, then we can know peace. And only through the influence of people in whom this is the case, can the world know peace. A peaceful world cannot be realized by any device of human reason, but only from the sphere of peace going forth from people whose hearts and minds and lives are ruled by the Lord.

Everything that comes from the Lord brings peace with it (see *Apocalypse Revealed* 306). All things of heaven and the church create peace—the warmth of love, the soft light of truth, the sweetness of charity, the satisfaction of use, the delights of marriage and offspring, the trust in Divine Providence, the worship that exalts the soul and gives meaning to all of life. Peace flows from the two heavenly loves—love of the Lord and love of the neighbor—as a stream flows from a fountain.

Yet, one might say, “So peace is only wishful thinking after all, because apparently those loves are in short supply.” But they are not in short supply, any more than the warmth and light of the sun are in short supply in winter. The problem is just that the earth is turned away. All that is necessary for spring to come, is for the earth to turn back. All that is necessary for a spiritual spring to come to earth is for people to turn back to the Lord.

It is an old, old message, but as true today as when John the Baptist first cried “Repent!” And it is the only solution. Only when people turn from self and the world to the Lord and heaven can the angelic promise be fulfilled. And it will be fulfilled! But we must *look* for its fulfillment and *work* for its fulfillment *in ourselves*. Rather than lament the lack of peace in the world around us, we should concentrate on preparing ourselves to contribute to the sphere of peace from heaven that the world so sorely needs.

“Shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night”—what a strange audience to choose for the greatest announcement ever made. But they represent innocence, the essence of which is willingness to follow the Lord. And although nighttime represents an obscure state, one of lacking knowledge, it is also a reflective time, when the world is still and we are not distracted by the many busy sights of day. If we will reflect on the Lord's Word from a simple, humble willingness to live by it, we too can become more certain of our faith and return to our lives glorifying and praising God for the marvelous things He has revealed to us.

Perhaps one of the things that will be revealed is that we are not alone, but that the Lord's love is working through the lives of many more people than we ever realized, that His kingdom is growing, and that there is reason to rejoice.

It is not by *human* will and effort that this comes to pass. The Lord was born on earth to make this possible. He united the Divine and the Human in Himself so that we might *see* God and, in following Him, have the internal and external parts of our lives joined together. Then the “heaven” within us will draw near to the “earth” with its blessed news. This means that the good and true principles—the shining ideals we have gained from the Word—will inspire our

everyday thoughts and decisions, affections and actions, and set us on a new path, one leading to the Lord Himself.

So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."

Amen.

Lessons: Isaiah 60:1-6; Luke 2:1-20; *Apocalypse Explained* 678:2-4