

**Shepherd of the Springs Lutheran Church
Second Wednesday in Advent - Vespers**

Text: Luke 2: 8-14

Theme: *The Gloria in Excelsis - The Song of the Angels that anticipates*

***Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.* (vs. 14)**

Tonight you are again invited to reflect and prepare for the coming of the Christ child by means of a very famous song taken from the Christmas Story in the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel - a song that the Church has developed from an opening line provided by angels and then sung in the worship of our God down through the ages. Listen to the lyrics and let them renew and sharpen your awareness and appreciation of the marvel of God becoming man for us and for our salvation. It is our prayer that reflection on the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the Song of the Angels to the shepherds will give you this evening will strengthen your joyful anticipation of the coming of Christ - for a song.

There are some interesting comparisons and contrasts between the *Magnificat* that we examined last week and what it can bring to us also for a song, and then, the Song of the Angels this week - the equally famous *Gloria in Excelsis*. Both songs come in response to an announcement about the coming of the Son of God into human flesh by an angel. I guess you could describe the way it was for Mary this way: She received a fairly ordinary or straight forward visitation and announcement by the Angel Gabriel, as far as angelic visitations go, but then she received a quite extraordinary sign. One, she became pregnant; but two, she was yet still a virgin. These realities I am sure helped to reinforce that indeed the Spirit of God had looked upon her humble estate and had done mighty things for her as she exclaimed in her song (Luke 1: 48-49).

For the shepherds in their fields by night, however, the things that occurred for them were somewhat the opposite. The visitation and announcement of the Angel was attended with the splendor of the glory of the Lord shining in their midst together with a choir of angels singing *Glory to God in the highest!* The announcement was majestic and extraordinary, but the sign to confirm was pretty mundane. They would find a recently born baby boy wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in an animal feed trough. There is poverty and majesty here, humility and glory. The poverty and humility is there in the nobody shepherds who receive the announcement and the helpless looking infant lying in a feed trough. Juxtaposed to this is the glory and majesty of the glory of the Lord shining about the annunciation and the choir of angels.

And these things are just what we in the Church have had through the ages as we prepare each year for the birth of our Lord. There is the poverty of our mean sinful state and the humility of baby in the barn in Bethlehem baby as the arrival of the eternal, now incarnate, Son of God . . . and there is the majesty of how the Church

through the ages has taken the opening words of the Angels and turned it into a timeless peal of praise to the triune God centered on the finished saving work of the Son now seated in majesty at the right hand of God the Father. It is hard to focus on both; the poverty of our sinful state and our need for a Savior from sin on the one hand, and the glory and majesty of the risen and ascended Lord who has already accomplished our salvation on the other. Sooo, in this penitential season as in Lent, we mute our singing of the song of the Angels, *the Gloria in Excelsis*, and focus our attention on our own spiritual needs and how they are to be met in the coming and saving work of the Christ. The song of the angels is therefore for us now, a song of anticipation. We anticipate singing it again on the Eve of Christmas. But then again, the song anticipates what we shall be singing in glory - what we shall sing as we take the fullness of our inheritance that he bequeaths to us in his humble saving work here on earth - the saving work of the perfect Lamb of God who has taken away the sins of the world, as the song goes, and who therefore graciously has had mercy on us.

For now, our taste of glory in the song of the angels is not beholding it in the highest heavens, but rather seeing it with the eyes of faith in the peace and favor of God that we receive and live with here on earth. The joy of the Gloria in Excelsis is reflecting on the words of the angels and rejoicing and we are among the men here on earth of which he is well pleased. We live in his pleasure as we place our faith and hope in the coming of the Lamb of God who takes away all our sins and that of the whole world.

For now in the life of the Church through the ages we receive a glimpse of the glory of the Lord as we visit the shepherds in the Christmas story and as we have sung the Gloria in Excelsis down through the ages - the glory of the Lord in a song, for a song. It is a song of confession of our sin - *have mercy upon us!* It is a song that confesses our faith in the *Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*; and it is a song of anticipation of the Glory of the risen Christ that we shall partake of in the fullness of time to come - *a glory of the Lord seated at the right hand of God the Father*. For a song we receive these blessings in a world that presents for us fallen creatures just hints of glory amid the fallenness of life. Yes the economy is in the tank, Europe is on the verge of economic collapse, terrorism is rampant . . . and our culture is sinking into a post-Christian dissolution. And then, there are the disappointments, the setbacks, the trouble and crises that hit in your life without warning. Business as usual amid also the blessings of the Lord that we daily receive.

Our prayer is that this advent season these songs may give you such hints of what it means to receive the Christ child at Christmas. It is the gift of God to you that extends beyond the New Year, beyond this present age, beyond this world coming to a close. It is God's gift of a glory that lasts forever. Glory to God in the highest . . . and peace to you here on earth. For with you in Christ, He is so very well pleased. Its what you get . . . for a song.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, A-men.