

## **GOD'S HEAVENLY WARRIORS PROCLAIM PEACE**

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

Hear again the Word of the Lord:

*Then suddenly (there) became with the angel (a) multitude of soldiers of heaven continually praising the God continually and saying:*

*“Glory in (the) highest to God;*

*and upon earth: peace among men of His good pleasure.”<sup>1</sup>*

From that song, we remember that this is a night to remember the power of God displayed in His taking on human flesh. He did so in the manner of all humans, though without any taint of Adam's sin. God became one with humans that He might save sinners from their sins.

Since we will to be found faithful to all that Jesus commanded us to do and teach, we are compelled to proclaim that, in the manner in which God saved us from sin, death, and hell, the cradle can never be far from the cross. Physically here the visible icon of Jesus' Presence with His people stands about forty feet from a manger scene. As that processional crucifix passed by us, we showed our respect. In so doing, our homage was actually presented to the One Who dwells among His people. He even now, joined with our human flesh, rules among us, granting us peace with God and our brothers and sisters in Christ through the Spirit and the Word.

Spiritually, Jesus, who was born to bear the sins of the whole world into death and the grave, has never left His people since He rose from the dead to declare us, you, right with our heavenly Father. He Who dwelt with the Father and Spirit in eternity before the incarnation; Who in time had His infant flesh wrapped in strips of linen; Whose human and divine natures reclined at His mother's breast; still comes to be with His people in the fight against evil through earthly means – water, Word, Bread and Wine. These, His tangible Means of Grace remain with us in His Church until we each, with our own eyes, shall behold Him Whose birth anniversary we recall this dark night.

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke 2:13-14.

Though the hymns, lessons and carols from the evening service in this place echoed out into the darkening evening and faded away hours ago, God did not leave His people until the procession at this High Mass. He dwells with us in Spirit and Truth. For those who are the Baptized, Jesus is found in us, for the Holy Spirit unites us into Jesus' Body on earth. Held fast by Him in His Truth, we are joined by the multitudes we cannot see with our sin-dimmed eyes. In fact, to behold His glory, we would react like the shepherds in the fields outside of Bethlehem did long ago, as our text declares:

*And (an) angel of (the) Lord stood by them;  
And (the) glory of (the) Lord encircled them;  
And they feared (a) great fear.<sup>2</sup>*

To the first men who beheld that glory, came a messenger sent by God. Now, from the description of the text, you likely have thought of how wonderful that night might have been. You might have reflected on how great it would have been to be among those simple folk who were tending the sheep, keeping them safe for use in the sacrifices which regularly took place at the Temple of the Jews about six miles away.

Yet, our inspired text informs us that the reaction of those shepherds, who were just doing their jobs, was quite different from "wonderful," or "great." Perhaps your understanding of the experience those men would have had is colored by artistic, media, and print images of the appearance of God's glory and angels. When was the last time you saw an image which actually depicts the *biblical* descriptions of angels and God's glory?

God dwells in humanly inaccessible glory. God's brilliance turns the darkness of night into a brighter glory than that of the sun. Thus, when His glory appears to sinners, they fall to the ground in fear.

Angels, God's spiritual messengers, are biblically depicted as mighty warriors. They appear as huge, muscled men, ripped and equipped for battle against the forces of darkness and the evil one. From the angel with the flaming sword set by God at

---

<sup>2</sup> Luke 2:9.

the Garden of Eden after Adam's Fall; to God's revelation through the prophet of the Angel Armies surrounding Israel; to the appearance of the Lord's angel and soldiers to the shepherds that night Jesus' birth was announced, God's unveiling His host brings terror to sinners – even those who are forgiven. Remember, we hear every year that the shepherds “were afraid with a great fear.”

As I announced earlier, God in Christ Jesus is here among us even now. His glory is in us. His angels are about us. We are surrounded by powerful warriors, bearing the full might of God's cleansing fire. This is so even as His human angels declare His Word and administer and distribute His Sacraments to us. Why then is our reaction not as that of the shepherds when God's Presence was announced? First, God, for our sakes, has veiled His glory for our benefit. Second, God has allowed us to hear, know and believe the words which God's messenger soldier spoke long ago to trembling shepherds. These words God, through His human angels, has spoken to every generation of sinner/saints since:

*“All of you, do not fear!  
For, behold, I gospelize to all of you  
(a) great joy which is to be for all the people,  
because He was born to you all today, (the) Savior,  
Who remains Christ (the) Lord; in (a) City of David.  
And this will be the sign for all of you:  
You will find (an) infant having been wrapped  
and reclining in (a) feed trough.”<sup>3</sup>*

The message to sinners troubled by the glorious presence of God is one which shows His grace and mercy for us. In the ancient language, the angel of the Lord begins God's consolation with just two words, which at their roots are: “Not fear!” God's Word of Good News immediately follows His call to turn from fear. What is it that the heavenly messenger gospelizes that brings great joy for all the people?

Yes, it is that the Savior was born. That very proclamation begins to tie the cradle to the cross. The angel declares the birth of the True Man, and immediately calls

---

<sup>3</sup> Luke 2:10b-12.

Him, Savior. To those who know the Old Covenant prophecies, God's Truth that the One born of God and the Virgin would save His people from their sins by dying for them.

If that line of Good News were not enough to tie the cradle to the cross, the next angelic words, "Who remains Christ the Lord." With those words, the faithful are led by the Spirit of God to remember the promises given by God to Eve, to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and through the prophets, especially Isaiah and Micah. The Savior is the Lord's Anointed One, marked to rule through His conquering death in His death, victoriously over sin by covering sinners with His Blood. He was, and is, the greater Son of David, given to effect an eternal rule, dominion, and glory through birth and cross, life into death into life again.

As you come forward to partake of the fruits of the cross and rebirth, you sinner/saints are free to recall that He whose infant life-filled limbs were once wrapped in strips of linen in the manger, also had His adult lifeless limbs wrapped for burial. Here, we partake of the life, death, and eternal life of Christ. Here, we dine amidst the heavenly soldiers, who, with their flaming swords are keeping us from the evil one and his minions. Here, equipped with God's gifts, we are led forth by God in the fight. We follow our Savior, Who was born to die to set us, you, free from sin and eternal death. With that eternal reality on earth, God's heavenly warriors still proclaim peace. That makes for a very Merry Christmas!

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

*Christmas Eve Midnight (Lutheran Service Book one-year series)*

*Psalm 96; Isaiah 9:2-7; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14*

*December 24-25, 2014*

*Pastor Michael H. Merchouse*

***Soli Deo Gloria***