

"A Song of Glory"—Luke 2:13-14

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "A Song of Glory", is Luke 2:13-14 → *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 among those with whom He is pleased!"* This is the text.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus:

What does it take to get your **undivided** attention? Have you ever been in a conversation with someone and felt like s/he really was not paying attention to you, really hearing everything you had to say? Actually, this is probably more common than we think. In the midst of our self-centered, narcissistic lives it is very easy for us to be distracted by all kinds of things and not give our undivided attention to others.

So . . . what does it take for God to get your **undivided** attention? A miracle? A tragedy? A lecture from your mother or father? How about a dream where you're visited by what appears to be you dead relative or even an angel? Or maybe just a dream which leaves you disturbed throughout the day?

The LORD uses many ways to get our undivided attention and we see

the evidence of this throughout the Christmas account in the Scriptures. For the Magi He used the star. This makes sense since they were astrologers who lived their lives by interpreting the stars, so they would recognize the star which pointed to the birth of Jesus, the King of the Jews. For the Jewish people personally involved with Jesus' birth God used angels to herald the birth of Jesus. Thus we consider one of the "songs" of Christmas which the Church has entitled the "Gloria in Excelsis."

Throughout the history of God's dealings with His people angels have played a prominent part, from Genesis to Revelation. Yet, angels and their work have been so misunderstood throughout the years that many misconceptions have arisen about them, such as . . .

- when people die they become angels. You do not die and become an angel.
- angels can see and know everything you do. Nope. They are not God Who alone is omniscient (i.e. all-knowing), omnipotent (i.e. all-powerful) and omnipresent (i.e. present everywhere). These attributes belong to God **alone** and it is blasphemy to attribute them to anyone else.

Colossians 2:18 warns us of the danger of such misconceptions. It says, *Let no one disqualify you* (i.e. turn you away from depending upon the Person & Work of Jesus **alone** for your salvation), *insisting on*

asceticism and worship of angels . . . and not holding fast to Jesus. Unfortunately, even amongst many Christians today the idolatrous *worship of angels* is prevalent as they think of their “spirituality” (whatever that means).

So what exactly are angels as God defines them in His revelation, the Bible? Angels are given two specific functions in the Scriptures:

- ① They are heralds—God’s messengers sent by Him to announce how He is going to work on behalf of His people. In connection to Christ’s birth angels played a very important role as heralds. *The angel Gabriel **was sent from God** . . . to a virgin whose name was Mary* to tell her about the Person & Work of Jesus (cf. Luke 1:26-27). *An angel of the Lord appeared to her fiancé, Joseph, in a dream* to tell him about the Person & Work of Jesus (cf. Matthew 1:20-23). Verse 13 of our text says *a multitude of the heavenly host joined the angel* which told the shepherds about the birth of Jesus to give God glory and praise.
- ② Hebrews 1:14 uses a rhetorical question to describe the work of angels. It says: Are not angels *all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?* They are described as spiritual messengers **sent by God** to help His people at various times and in various situations in their lives. Thus, God

Who is all-seeing in our lives reveals to them what's happening, and sends them where and to whom they are to go. They do His bidding and work on His behalf. This is the concept behind Jesus' words in Matthew 18:10 → *See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father Who is in heaven.* These Scripture passages form the basis for the "guardian angel" concept. The Greek which has been translated in our text as *the heavenly host* literally reads "a multitude of heavenly soldiers." It certainly gives one a different picture. Maybe the angels depicted on Christmas cards should be suited up with armor and wielding a sword.

Of the songs of Christmas we've considered this Advent season (i.e. the Magnificat by Mary; the Benedictus by Zechariah; and the Nunc Dimittis by Simeon), the Gloria in Excelsis is probably most familiar even to people outside of the Christian faith. Some form of it is included in many Christmas songs and very prevalent on Christmas cards. In fact, many have cherished it's message of peace on earth, good will toward men so much that the Christmas season is filled with an abundance of human care projects and giving. I have had numerous World War II veterans tell stories of cease fire for a time on the front lines Christmas Eve, even hearing soldiers singing Christmas hymns. Hmmm, soldiers singing glory to God in recognition of the birth of Jesus?

However, the *peace . . . on earth among those with whom God is pleased* (Verse 14) is something much more enduring than simply a season of being nice and getting along with others. Even amidst the acts of kindness we still witness the ugly face of sin in each other which causes *enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions*, (cf. Galatians 5:20) and so forth. For many the acts of generosity and kindness do not dispel the turmoil waging in their sinful hearts. The peace of which the angels speak is given as a gift of faith in Jesus. It is a peace given as a gift in Jesus and His atoning work on the cross for you. Romans 5:1-2 describes this peace: *Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God **through our Lord Jesus Christ**. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

It is also this forgiven relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ which explains what it means to be *among those with whom God is pleased*. I wonder how many people believe that God is well pleased with them because of their generosity, and acts of human care and kindness. However, Hebrews 11:6 says that *without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him*. You seek Him on His terms and those terms have been determined in the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. *God is well pleased* with those

who trust in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins because His righteous covers their life completely, including their acts of kindness and generosity. *For we are **His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*** (cf. Ephesians 2:10)

We join in this song of glory with *the heavenly host* because God has forgiven us of our sins in Jesus, making peace with Him. This is expressed in our liturgy when we sing these words of *the heavenly host* following the Confession of our sins & the pronouncement of the Absolution. We join in this song of glory with *the heavenly host* by praising God, giving Him all the glory for our lives, now and eternally. We join in this song of glory with *the heavenly host* as we serve our neighbor with good works which reflect His grace and love in Jesus Christ, doing *all to the glory of God* (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:31). Amen.

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,

ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name;

worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.

(Psalm 29:1-2)

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