

Introduction:

- A. This is not a time for audience participation: *Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti ... Shhh.* Just leave it alone. Let it hang there in the air. Unresolved. It was like that in the rarified air of heaven and throughout the polluted hearts on earth for centuries; for millennia. *Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti ...* Adam and Eve thrust out of Eden. Abraham staring at the countless stars. Moses looking longingly into the Promised Land he would never walk. David dreaming of a temple he would never see. Isaiah promising from his dark time, “*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.*” Malachi, the last of the prophets, in his last words, “*for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays.*” *Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti...* And heaven and earth waited in a kind of **disquiet** for 400 years.
- B. Then out of a deep and silent night sky, the resolution: “*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.*” The shepherds, I suspect, were speechless but all the angels of heaven burst into praise. “*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God.*” It would not surprise me if every one of the innumerable angels rushed out onto the stage of the night sky there near Bethlehem to praise God in the hearing of the shepherds. What a tiny audience for such a vast choir. The birth of Jesus the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord set off such praise as even heaven had never known and that earth could not imagine. **Each Christmas, those angels are our praise masters, our lyricists, our worship leaders.**

I. WE PRAISE GOD WITH THE ANGELS BECAUSE CHRIST’S BIRTH BRINGS “GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST”

- A. Heaven, of course, has always been filled with praise for God’s glory. God told Job that when he created the world

“the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy” [38:7]. Isaiah heard the cherubim and seraphim chanting, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.”

- B. But this praise, on the night of Jesus’ birth, was the highest, happiest exuberance of heaven. Let’s think about why.

Illus.: You’ve perhaps heard the expression, ‘a Gordian knot.’ It comes from a Greek legend about a man named Gordius who tied his oxcart to a post with such an intricate, complicated knot that no one could untie it. Not only was the knot tight, but the ends of the rope were somehow buried in the middle of the knot. The legend also said that whoever would one day untie that knot would rule Asia.

The expression, a Gordian knot, means a problem so intricate and complex that it defies solution. God faced a Gordian knot. The loving heart of God yearned to save the people he had created from their sins. But it was almost too hard, even for Almighty God. According to the legend, when Alexander the Great came upon the Gordian knot, he simply chopped it with his sword and claimed Asia. **But God couldn’t do that with the knot he faced.** He could not go against his own character. He could not violate his own law. And he must fulfill all his own intricate, detailed promises. So how did he solve the problem?

- C. God became man. It was a solution that stunned and thrilled even the highest, holiest, brightest beings of glory. I’ve never forgotten something I read as a young man by **J. I. Packer** in his book, *Knowing God*. He was speaking of how difficult it is for some people to believe in miracles.

Then he writes that *“the real difficulty...lies, not in the Good Friday message of atonement, nor in the Easter message of resurrection, but in the Christmas message of incarnation. The really staggering Christian claim is that Jesus of Nazareth was God made man... and that He took humanity without loss of deity, so that Jesus of Nazareth was as truly and fully divine as He was human. ... Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the incarnation.”*

[p.46] **No wonder the angels praised God!**

D. Let me remind you of the impossible knot that God untied in our salvation through Jesus, the Messiah in the manger:

1. God set out to re-create his fallen world, beginning with a second Adam, who was not only Son of God but also Son of Man; with reborn citizens and a new heaven and earth. **Glory to God in the highest!**
2. God worked salvation for men and women while they were still active in their sins. He figured out how people born natural and incorrigible sinners could be born again neither sinful nor mortal, alive forever with the very breath and Spirit of God. **Glory to God in the highest!**
3. God found a way for one man of infinite value to die as a sufficient substitute for the sins of the world, satisfying of the Almighty Judge. What's more, he found a way for those sinners to be drawn to salvation without violating their free will, even though they are rebels through and through. **Glory to God in the highest!**
4. God found a way to keep all his intricate and specific promises and prophecies of *how* he would save—promises to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses, to David and all the prophets; and how to fulfill every pictured promise of the Old Testament—Passover and Promised Land, manna and wine, rock and temple, Prophet, Priest and King, Lamb and Lion. All in that one man! **Glory to God in the highest!**
5. God found a way to turn the devil's own schemes against him, to be the devil's victim so that he might be the devil's conqueror. **Glory to God in the highest!**
6. And in all this God Almighty served his sinful subjects out of measureless love and mercy so that we are not only forgiven but adopted, clothed in garments of praise, and crowned with love and compassion. Incredibly, we are friends of God, the bride and co-heirs with Christ, the temples of the Holy Spirit, and the very city of the living God. **Glory to God in the highest!**

E. God thought of all this. He solved all those insoluble problems. But it is not God's genius alone that brings him glory. The highest glory of God is his love. "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.*" God is worthy of the highest glory because his love reached down so far to save. What God showed in Bethlehem that even the angels had never before seen was how far his tender mercy could reach and how lowly was his love. **Here is the infinitely good God at his highest and best.**

II. WE PRAISE GOD WITH THE ANGELS BECAUSE CHRIST'S BIRTH MEANS "ON EARTH PEACE TO THOSE ON WHOM HIS FAVOR RESTS."

A. We're used to hearing the King James Version of the angels' praise, "*Peace on earth, goodwill toward men.*" It is almost always used in the context of a wish for world peace at Christmas, or as an admonition to us all to get along, to not be Scrooges. In fact, you might even think that the Bible says, "*Let there be peace on earth,*" because so many of our songs pick up that phrase. But the angels weren't singing for world peace. They were praising God for what he accomplished in the birth of Jesus—for the declaration of peace between God and man. Jesus didn't come so that we'd all get along. He came to reconcile us to God his Father. The God-Man made peace between God and sinners.

B. They tell people near death to "make their peace with God." But the angels praised God because *he made his peace with us.* **Titus 3:3-7** describes what Jesus did for us:

³At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he

poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

That is the peace that unloosed the praises of the angels.

- C. We read this newer translation, “*on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests,*” and we kind of wish we could go back to “*peace on earth, goodwill to men,*” because that doesn’t feel like it excludes anyone. “Those on whom his favor rests” certainly suggests some are left out.

But we underestimate the favor of God. It is true that the peace of God will not be enjoyed by those who want nothing to do with God, nor by those who flagrantly violate the good and right commands of God. God’s peace is only available to those who want God’s Peacemaker, Jesus.

- D. The thing is that, actually, this caveat of God—“peace to those on whom his favor rests”—is not narrow at all, but vast. People thought then—people *still* think—that only the upright or the properly religious can be right with God. But there is no one here who may not come into the peace of God. There are no sins so terrible that God will not forgive for Jesus’ sake. There is no country or language where God’s Peacemaker refuses to go. In John’s *Revelation* of the end of time he saw, “*there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb*” Rev. 7:9. That’s the picture of “*Those on whom God favor rests!*” God *commands* us to come, *invites* us to come, *pleads* and *waits* for us to come. Jesus said there is rejoicing among the angels of heaven when *one* sinner repents. Nothing stands in our way but our pride. Nothing is required of us but our repentance and faith. The last words of the Bible are, “*Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.*”

Illus.: Jerome, a priest and scholar, who died in 347 AD, translated the Bible from Greek to Latin. Near the end of his life, Jerome was living near Bethlehem translating some

of the Bible when he had a dream. In his dream, the Christ child appeared to him. He was so overwhelmed by the appearance of the Christ child that he felt he had to give him something. So he got some money and offered it, saying, *“Here! This is yours.”*

But the Christ child said, *“I don’t want it.”*

Jerome brought some more possessions.

The Christ child said, *“I don’t want them either.”*

Jerome said, *“If there is anything in the world that I can give you, tell me what it is. Tell me! What do you want? What do you want me to give you?”*

In his dream, the Christ child looked at him and said this: *“Give me your sin! That’s what I came for.”* [#3216]

Conclusion

And that is why the multitude of the heavenly host burst through the dark curtain of our sky to praise God in our hearing!

That is the glory of God in the highest.

That is the peace of God brought to the favored of earth.