

"Three Glorias"

Luke 2:1-20

The Nativity of Our Lord December 25, 2017

Christmas Day

The Word of the Lord from Luke 2: 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." (Lk. 2:13-14a)

1. Shepherds of Bethlehem, the first Gloria is for you.

First, the angel of the Lord appears as the glory of the Lord shines around you. And into your trembling ears, the angel announces:

Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

It's after that news that the hosts of angels appear and sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The Baby is born, and for this the Lord is to be glorified. Why? Mark this well, O shepherds, that you might appreciate the gift that is given to you. The angel said the long-awaited Savior has come, the One that people have waited for since Adam and Eve first fell into sin. The Savior is the Christ, chosen and anointed by the Lord, so His work of salvation will not fail. Furthermore, this Christ is the Lord Himself. God hasn't sent another messenger or prophet. This time, He's come Himself to save. That's why the glory of the Lord was shining around you-God and His glory go together, and His presence so near in Bethlehem shone out to the field where you are.

The Savior is the Christ is the Lord. That's astonishing enough. But did you catch the next part of the message, shepherds? The Savior is the Christ is the Lord is...a baby. A newborn infant. Almighty God is wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger.

So make haste, shepherds! Go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord has made known to you. Find the sign-the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes-and worship the Lord, your Savior. Go and see, but go by what you hear; what you hear, not what you see. Because now that the angels are gone, you're not going to see anything unusual. You'll find a young husband and wife, so poor that their newborn Child is lying in a manger. The majority of Bethlehem will see a baby, nothing more, and the Infant isn't going to look glorious at all.

But then again, He's not supposed to look glorious. When the Lord appears in glory, He frightens people-after all, just His angels were enough to leave you sore afraid. No, when the Lord comes with mercy, He comes humbly, cloaking His glory in ordinary looking things-like a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger. But you've got His Word on it, spoken to you by His angels: this baby is the Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Oh, and don't forget, shepherds, the other thing the angel said: "Unto you is born." Unto you! This Baby isn't born just for the rich, the elite, the popular, the athletic or media superstars; the angel

said specifically that this Baby is born for you. This is your Savior, Christ the Lord; God has come to dwell with you. He's taken your flesh to take your place; for since His conception nine months before, He's come into this world to go to a hill called Calvary to save you from your sin.

That's why, even though most of Bethlehem sleeps through this gracious miracle, you hasten to the Baby and remember the angels. You remember their song of glory in the highest, and that glory will continue.

2. Pilgrims in Jerusalem, the second Gloria is yours.

You're standing along the street, echoing the angels as you shout with delight, "Glory in the highest!" (Lk. 19:38) It's not Christmas anymore. The Savior born in Bethlehem is all grown up now, and He's riding into Jerusalem on a colt, the foal of a donkey. You've come for the Passover, to sacrifice the lamb, but now you line the streets waving palms and shouting "Hosanna!"

It's not the same scene at all. You're not shepherds on the night-watch, summoned by angels to a manger. It's broad daylight at a festival time, and it seems like, instead of a few grubby herdsmen, the whole city is gathered this time around.

It's a different scene, but in some ways still the same. You're gathered here because you've heard-you've heard the Word about the One riding in on a donkey. His name is Jesus, "Yahweh saves," and many believe that He is truly the Christ, as shepherds believed long before. Gathered by His Word, you shout His praises. "Hosanna." "Save now." "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." And, of course you shout, "Glory in the highest!"

You sing the glory to the Lord because the Lord is there. He has the same human flesh that was once wrapped in swaddling clothes, and He's still at work to save you. In fact, by the end of the week, He will complete the plan to win salvation for all the world. But while He dies for all the world, remember He was born to be the Savior for you. He's going to that cross for you. And because He wins your redemption all by Himself, He deserves all the glory.

So you wave your palms and shout your "Hosannas" and "Glorias." But do not forget, lest you be offended: when the Lord comes with mercy to save, He doesn't come looking glorious. He comes humbly, cloaking His glory in service and meekness. That's how it was in Bethlehem, and that's how it will be in Jerusalem. In a few days, He won't even look as splended as a man riding a donkey; in a few days, He'll look as inglorious as possible as He hangs on a cross and dies for the sins of the world. Once again, His body will be wrapped in cloths and laid down to rest-in a tomb, not a manger. And it won't look glorious at all.

So go with what you hear, not what you see. Remember what you heard that was said by angels to shepherds: "Unto you is born a Savior." He suffers and dies for you, to save you. As St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:20, God makes Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

So remember: the glory of God is to serve His people. He delights to be a loving father to His children, which is why He allows His only-begotten Son to go to manger and cross. The glory of His Son is to do the will of His Father, and so He goes to death without complaint. These moments

in time, these bookends of Humiliation, these are times of highest glory-because Jesus has become flesh and died for you.

That's why, even while all of Jerusalem will mock Him at His death, you sing of glory in the highest. Because death doesn't stop Him, and the glory continues.

3. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the third Gloria is yours to sing. Some 2000 years after the birth of Christ the Savior, we still sing the song of the angels. In fact, this morning, as we do nearly every Sunday in the liturgy, we repeated the hymn again and sang, "Glory be to God on high."

Why? Because you've heard the sermon from angels to shepherds, and you know that God includes you in the proclamation with them: unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Long ago in the manger, Jesus was born with flesh and blood just like yours. Not just like everybody, but like yours. He became flesh to be your Savior; for as surely as the Lord handpicked those shepherds to hear the news, so He has sent His Word to gather you in. Jesus was born for you. Where you were born in sin and alien to God, Jesus was born for you-sinless, to credit you with His holy birth. Even as He was wrapped in swaddling clothes, He was at work to save you; and so you sing your Glorias to God.

But there's more. He's not a Baby anymore. That Savior also rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday to offer His back to the scourge, His hands and feet to the nails, His head to fists and thorns. In between birth and Passion, He lived a perfect life-to be your Savior.

Where you've doubted, He remained faithful. Where you've hated, He loved. Where you've told lies, He spoke truth. Where you've stolen, He provided. Why? To save you-to give you credit for His perfect life as He took the judgment for your sin and went to the cross. In the greatest act of servanthood and sacrifice, Christ died for the sins of the world. And, specifically, Christ died for you. And so you sing your Glorias to God.

But there's still more. Risen again and ascended into heaven, your Savior is still at work for your salvation-gloriously at work. You may not see the glory; but then again, the manger and cross didn't shine magnificently, either. Once again, you live by faith and not by sight. You live by what you have heard.

Today, in our epistle reading, you have heard this:

But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:4-7).

Why this epistle for Christmas? Because there is Christmas brought to you. Christ appeared to save man-that's the reason for His birth; and He has saved you-you personally-by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism. There, at the font, He declared, "I

was born for you. I lived and died and rose again for you. I baptize you, and I therefore give you My birth and life and death and resurrection in Baptism, to save you."

Likewise, He speaks to you His Word. The same Word that created the heavens and the earth, the same Word which conceived your Savior in Mary, the same Word that revealed the Infant to the shepherds is spoken to you. And as the Lord speaks His Word of grace to you, He works the miracle of forgiveness so that you might have life in His name.

And likewise, He feeds you His holy Supper. He gives you the same body and blood that once lay in the manger, hung on the cross, and rose from the dead, for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He is at work, in communion with you, to save you.

That's why you still sing your Glorias. Your Savior is just as present today as He was in Bethlehem and Calvary, and He is still doing His servant-work of saving you by His grace. So remember: His glory is in humble service, not big shows of glitz and glamour. Font, pulpit and altar look no more glorious than manger and cross; but here your Savior is at work unto you.

Remember, too: while the shepherds heard their Gloria and hastened to the Babe, most of Bethlehem slept in ignorance. Soon after the crowds sang their Glorias on Palm Sunday, almost all of Jerusalem mocked a dying Jesus. You live in an age where much of the world around you holds Jesus in contempt and finds no reason for wonder in God become flesh. A sermon that simply rejoices in the Lord's service of becoming flesh and dying on the cross is seen by many as far less useful than Boxing Day sales.

So it will always be until the Lord returns, but do not be dismayed. Your Savior is born. He has died to redeem you and He is risen again to serve you even now. That's why you sing your Glorias.

Indeed, glory to God in the highest, because you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen