

**"Six Divine Songs of Emmanuel"
"The Gloria in Excelsis"**

Luke 2:1-20

December 24/25, 2002

Christmas [Eve]

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Boise, Idaho

Pastor Tim Pauls

I. In the Manger

Go ahead-take a look inside. There's no need for you to be anxious or frightened. Go ahead-take a look: The angels already told you what you will find. You'll find glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

Look inside, and you'll find glory because God is there; and where God is, there is glory. Think of the Exodus out of Egypt, when the Lord Himself led the people of Israel in a glorious pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night-when He parted the Red Sea and escorted His people through on dry land. Think of Mt. Sinai, when Moses went up to get the Ten Commandments. The Lord descended in glory there, and there was cloud and fire and smoke and lightning. That glory was a magnificent, terrifying thing; and the angel says that there is a better glory to be found here. Glory and God go together. Take a look.

Look inside, because there's peace on earth; and goodness knows we could all use some more peace. We live in a world of weapons inspections, terror alerts, news reports of chemical and nuclear weapons, the imminent threat of war. It's a world of violence, and it appears that our nation will experience its share. "Peace through strength" is the watchword of the day, and peace is what we need. Look inside, for a strong peace is there to be found.

Look inside, and you will find goodwill toward men. Ah, a strong will is tough enough to find these days in world that preaches tolerance and acceptance at all costs, that mislabels every disagreement as bigotry. Yes, it's difficult enough to find one who demonstrates resolve, purpose, steel. And a good will? Good luck. No one is good but God alone. But go on: Look inside. You'll find goodwill toward men.

Look inside. Look in the manger. The angels told you exactly what you will find: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

Look inside, and you see - a baby.

Now wait. I know what you're thinking: He's a baby. You need help and solutions; you're looking for glory, peace and goodwill. And you see a baby.

The Baby doesn't appear all that glorious. The frame of the manger and the earthy stable smells probably don't help much, but babies just aren't glorious as a general rule. This One looks healthy

enough-ten fingers, ten toes, a chest that rises and falls and a few bubbles around the mouth. He's got all the baby features going. But you don't see any glory at all.

Peace? Well, the Infant looks peaceful. He is, in fact, sleeping like a baby at the moment. But that's a vulnerable peace, shattered by the smallest little sound; that's why parents of newborns learn to tiptoe and think evil thoughts whenever the phone rings. You're looking for peace, but a strong peace that quells strife and ends violence. But you don't see any of that peace at all.

And goodwill? Newborn babies don't exhibit character those first days out of the womb, and this One is likely no different. Furthermore, from your experience with little children, you know this to be quite true: When children develop a will, it is not good. It does not curb misbehavior, but must be curbed and trained. You're looking for a good will, someone with the steely resolve to work for the good of man. You've left the flocks on the hills and walked to the inn; and all you see is the Baby.

He's cute and wonderful, of course, as all babies are; but you have problems. With all the hassles of life, sin is constantly tempting you to show how good your will is not. The devil is prowling around, seeking to afflict you and everybody else with all the grief that he can. And as you get older, you're quite aware that the clock is ticking, and every ailment is just a harbinger that death patiently waits at the door. The Baby's cute, but babies are no help. You can see that. Guess it's all up to you.

But repent, for I will tell you the mistake that you have made. Repent, because you're living by your eyes, when you ought to be living by your ears. You see, your eyes tell you "It's a baby," and then experience informs you that babies are just no help at all. But you have better information from your ears: The angels sang to you. They sang the Word of the Lord to you, and the Word of the Lord is far more trustworthy than your prejudiced experience. Keep your eyes; but go with your ears when you look in the manger. You see a baby; but you've found glory to God in the highest and peace, goodwill toward men.

The Baby is glorious, make no mistake; He's just not terrifying. That cloud of glory at the Red Sea and on Mt. Sinai were magnificent; they also terrified everybody, and all Israel wanted it to stay away. Except for a flash that lights up the sky around the shepherds when angels sing, the Baby hides His glory, concealing it in the flesh He has become. He has not come to terrify. He has come to glorify His Father by His glorious humility, compassion and servanthood. He does not measure His glory by the standards of the world, a world that measures glory by wealth and power. He measures it by the will of His Father: The more He does the will of His Father to save the world, the more glorious He is. He is glorious in that manger, because He has humbled Himself to be born of the Virgin, to become flesh. He will be even more glorious at Calvary, when He hangs bleeding for the sins of all. But if you think His glory is difficult to see now, beware of Calvary; when He is placed upon His glorious, cross-shaped throne to save you, all eyes will turn away in disgust.

The Baby brings peace. Peace through strength is the way of the world, and the world's way of peace is the way of law: You enforce laws to make people be peaceful and to suppress evil and violence, sin and Satan. But this does not destroy evil; it only restrains the devil and his work while he looks for other ways to kill and destroy. This Baby is here to do more than just slow the devil down; He's going to defeat him. How do you defeat lies? With truth. How do you defeat pride? With perfect humility. Rebellion against God? By perfect submission to the Father. Selfishness? Through selfless sacrifice. This is what the Baby will do: In His glorious humility and submission to His Father, He will selflessly sacrifice Himself on the cross for the sins of the world. This will completely undo the

devil and the curse of sin. It will do far more than bring peace among men; it will restore peace between man and God.

The Baby brings goodwill; that is, the Baby brings with Him a will that is good. No one is good but God, which gives us a strong clue as to this Infant's identity. This is the Son of God, who comes to do the good will of His Father. You are looking for one with purpose, a steely resolve that resists corruption? You have found Him: Resolved to do His Father's will, He will endure hunger in the wilderness, the betrayal of friends, the stripes of the scourge and the nails of the cross. He is good, and this is His good will. It is not something this Newborn will develop over time as He matures; He has had it from eternity.

So, don't go with just your eyes. Your eyes see a baby, and this is true; but it is not all. Go with your ears, because your ears hear the song of the angels-the angels who sing the Word of the Lord. The angels tell you what you find in the manger: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

II. Gloria in Excelsis

The news of the angels is far too good to sing of just once a year; so, what the angels sang into your ears, you now sing with your own tongue. Every Sunday (Order of Matins excepted) that we gather for worship, we sing this angelic Christmas carol called the Gloria in Excelsis: "Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." We sing this all year round, lest we forget, or take for granted, the miracle in the manger-God become flesh for our salvation. If our worship does not center on the One "who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, [and] was crucified, dead and buried," then our worship has gone wayward indeed. We sing so that we remember-remember the One born to bring glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

But we do not just sing to remember a past memory; we sing to celebrate a present reality. We rejoice in the Babe in the manger, but Jesus is not there anymore. We give thanks for our Lord on the cross, but the price has been paid and He no longer hangs there for our sins. We remember Jesus in the tomb; but He is not there-He is risen! Risen, He lives and rules.

And He comes to you today with glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men. Toward you.

You still need help: Jesus has conquered sin, death and the devil; but He has not yet vanquished them to hell. He waits, so that He might save more sinners from their clutches. In the meantime, these unholy foes still haunt you. The devil still prowls with temptation, coaxing you away from the life Christ has won to sins that seductively appeal to your weaknesses. Those sins then haunt you with guilt, tempting you to believe either that God has let you down or that He can't forgive you now. And all the while, death hangs around in his shadowy cowl, seeking to haunt you with affliction, disease and grief for lost loved ones.

You still need help, and Jesus is here-He is as much "here" as He was "there" in the manger. In the manger, He is God and man, the "Word made flesh." When the Word of God is proclaimed, the Word-made-flesh is present here. He is God with an infant body and blood in Bethlehem; He promises that, in His holy Supper, He is still present with His body and blood for the forgiveness of

your sins.

He is just as much here as He was there. And He is here to save you.

Once again, go with your ears and not your eyes. Your eyes see some thin wafers of bread and a chalice of wine; they see a preacher speaking, stumbling over a word here or there as he does so. You don't see much glory, peace or goodwill. Your eyes see ritual, repetitiveness, normality.

But then again, your eyes only saw a baby when you looked in the manger; it was the angels' song that clued you in. You live by faith, not by sight-and that faith comes from hearing the Word of God. And the Word declares that Jesus is here, a present help in time of trouble.

You struggle with temptation, sin and guilt. You will as long as you live, and your eyes will show you some of the preliminary consequences for your sinfulness. Confess the sin, and hear the angels' hymn: Glory be to God on high; and on earth peace, goodwill toward men. The hymn rings out because the Savior is here with glory, peace and goodwill. His glory is to do the will of His Father-and His Father's will took Him to the cross for your redemption. He comes to you now to give you the benefits of that cross. He declares, "I have suffered God's judgment for these sins, so that you do not have to. By My goodwill, I have lived a sinless life so that I can credit you with My perfect obedience. By My death, I have destroyed the strife between you and God; I have restored peace. Therefore, you are forgiven-My peace and goodwill I leave with you." If the Savior is absent, your sins will condemn you. But the Savior is present here, present to forgive you. Your sins are forgiven, and your ongoing struggles serve to highlight the need for the Savior's presence, to draw you to Him again and again. Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

You must still endure affliction, from irritating colds to chronic illness to terminal conditions. You must endure these in your own body, and you will suffer their attacks upon friends and loved ones, too. Apart from the Savior, death has the final, remorseless word, and this is what your eyes see: jaundice and tremors, prescriptions and pain, caskets and gravesides. But you are not apart from the Savior. He declares into your ears today, "I was born in that manger to go to the cross, to conquer death and rise again. I have defeated death for you and put it under My feet; until I vanquish it completely, I will use it for My purposes, to deliver you from a world and body of sin and death to life eternal and a body incorruptible." He makes this promise to you today, because He is present here to promise. Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

On this Christmas, then, rejoice. You gather here to celebrate the birth of your Savior. And though your eyes only see a babe in the manger, your ears hear the truth of the angels' song: In that manger is the glory of God, and He has come to bring peace and goodwill to men. You gather here to celebrate this truth, and the Lord does not leave you empty-handed. By His Word and by His presence, He forgives your sins here and now. As you depart this place, you depart forgiven, redeemed and prepared to live forever. Don't see it? Well, no. But the angels' hymn proclaims that Christ is here, and your ears have heard what you cannot see.

Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

Glorifying His Father, the Son of God brings His peace and goodwill to you with these words: You are forgiven for all of your sins, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen