

The Nativity of Our Lord; Christmas Eve; December 24, 2021  
+ Luke 2:13-14 +  
“Glory to God in the Highest”

**Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude from the heavenly army, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind.”**

“**Glory to God in the highest**” says the army of angels. Glory! Glory in the highest!

But just where do we find this great glory that draws an army of angels to proclaim glory in the highest to God? At the beginning of the story, we have a young husband and wife traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Are these newlyweds glorious? One is a carpenter, the other apparently a common young lady. Have we found our glory there? How about these two cities they travel between? The one they travel from, Nazareth, is a backwater in the north of Israel; the one they travel to, Bethlehem, is a midsize town in the breadbasket of the south. Neither city ranks with Paris or New York or Shanghai as a shiny metropolis.

Alright, maybe it’s *why* this humble young couple is traveling from lowly village to lowly town. The reason is to register to be taxed. Do we find glory in the highest there? When was the last time you saw paying tax as glorious?

When they arrive in Bethlehem to register, they’re turned away from the inn and land in the fields. There in the night young Mary gives birth to her firstborn and lays him, wrapped in cloths, in a manger. Under the cover of night, in the open country, without even the splendor of sunshine, Mary lays her first son in a feeding trough. There is no glaring glory here either.

And, other than Mary and Joseph, who are the first people in the world to know the news of the boy’s birth? Do the angels announce his birth in a royal court, a luxury marketplace, or even the town square? No, they go out to the fields, and announce the child’s birth to shepherds, who were considered the lowest of the low on the social ladder: unwashed, dirty, field-dwellers. That’s to whom the angels appear and sing, “**Glory to God in the highest!**” But still we have to ask: what glory? Why say that? Where do we find this glory that rises to God in the highest?

It’s hidden. But it’s here. First: Joseph and Mary were traveling to Bethlehem to register for this tax because **he was from the house and family line of David**. For centuries the Lord had been promising a Savior to the nation of Israel. Slowly, as the centuries unraveled, he revealed more and more details about where and how this Savior would be born, and the work he would do after he arrived. Among those details were these: the Savior would come from the line of King David, and be born in David’s hometown of Bethlehem. So now the glory begins breaking through.

Among the promises about the Savior was this, too: he would be born of a virgin, conceived in her by the Holy Spirit. And so when the child is born, Luke records **she gave birth to her firstborn son...** not “their firstborn son” or “Joseph’s,” who normally would have been the focus in that culture, just **her firstborn Son**. You see, the glory is subtle, but unmistakable. Luke is confirming that this son of Mary is also the promised Son of God.

And now we come to those angels singing above lowly shepherds. They, too, confirm that there is glory in Jesus’ birth. It’s true: he’s a baby, wrapped in cloths, in a manger. There’s plenty of humility on this

night: **“You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”** But here is where Christmas swings, where the entire mind of God whirls and turns everything upside down: it is in the depth of humility that divine glory hides. **“Today, in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord.”** It has happened in a small town. It has happened in the dark of night. He is a baby boy in a manger, born to unremarkable parents. But he is also the One promised to be born of a virgin, a descendant of great King David, born in David’s hometown. He is also the Savior of those shepherds and of the whole world. He is the Christ, the promised Messiah.

He is God, conceived by the Holy Spirit. He is human, the son of Mary. And he has come to keep the promise of salvation. He has come to rescue humankind from the curse of sin and the condemnation of eternity in hell. He has come as a human to live in my place and yours. He has come in human flesh to die on the cross to pay for our sins. He has come as God to live perfectly and to die for every human. This is the Savior, both human and divine, that God had promised for thousands of years. Now he has arrived. Now God’s salvation is here. He comes to live and die for us, to save us for eternity.

And that is glorious. It is glory in the highest. In Jesus Christ, we have the glory of heaven, promised to us for eternity. In Jesus’ work, God the Father has the glory of loving us and sending his Son to save us. Jesus has the glory of saving us with his holy life and death, and rising on Easter to eternal glory. The Holy Spirit has the glory of calling to trust in Jesus and receiving his saving work.

Christmas is all humility on the surface. But under the surface, when we look closely, there is glory everywhere: the glorious, promised salvation of God is lying in that manger in Bethlehem. So the angels sing, and do not hold back their glory: **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind.”** It wasn’t just a night to give glory to God, but glory in the highest. Because on that night Jesus came to bring peace between God and humankind with his salvation.

Christmas is glory wrapped in humility. And so is the life of the Christian, who trusts in Jesus for salvation. When you leave here tonight, when you wake up tomorrow and every day through the new year, remember: God hides glory under humility. So you may have a humble job. Your neighbors may see you as just a regular, unimpressive person. You may not turn heads with your looks or raise eyebrows with your wealth. And if that’s you (as it’s me), I have good news: not only has God sent his Son to save you from your sins, but you are in a uniquely qualified position to give him glory like those angels who sang on Christmas night.

Because, you see, God loves to wrap up glory in humble-looking things. Does your life look humble and ordinary? God doesn’t care. He loves to use humble-looking things, including you and me. So give glory to God, no matter how you look or where you stand in this world. Give him glory in everything you think, say, and do. Give him glory in the beautiful truth of Christmas: a lowly birth in a small town at night announced to shepherds in field – that was **“Glory to God in the highest”** because Jesus brought **“peace”** and **“good will”** by saving us from our sins.

Merry Christmas. Glory to God in the highest on this night, and in our lives always. Amen.