

"Gloria"

Our youngest daughter, Phoebe, turned 3 on November 22. Three is a wonderful age for children, I think. They are old enough to know what's going on around them. They are old enough to have a conversation. They are old enough to play real board games like *High ho cherry o*. And yet they are still little children proven by their dependance on parents for things like comfort when the lights are turned out at night; the right clothing when it's cold outside and the proper food at dinner time. And for me, there's something else that proves their dependance and that is the way that they hug.

Yesterday, as I was at the door getting ready to leave for work, Phoebe comes sliding down the steps, jumps into my arms, and with her head on my shoulder and her arms wrapped around me as tight as she could, gives me the biggest three year old hug! I wrapped my arms around her and held her tight. And as I did, I had this amazing feeling come over me that this child— this precious little three year old child belonged to my wife; she belonged to my family; she belonged to God; she belonged to me. It was a great start to the day and I left the house with a huge smile on my face and a song in my heart because of that gift of a hug from little Phoebe.

For me that image of a heart felt hug from my three year old daughter and my reaction to it captures some of what is happening in our gospel reading tonight. In this text we have the astonishing announcement by the angel that the Messiah, the Christ, has been born as a baby. And something probably not fully grasped by the shepherds themselves is that this baby is also the Lord God himself in the flesh! And this news from the angel is backed up— not by just a couple of angels who happened to be in the area— but as the text says, by a "multitude of the heavenly hosts," which means thousands and thousands of angels praising God because of the news about Jesus! And what news are they praising? The news that the eternal, all-powerful, almighty Son of God has just "taken the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7). The news that, "God has sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law" (Gal. 4:4-5). This news of great joy is what made the angels sing, "Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth!" Their joy was in the fact

that the newborn Jesus was the unfolding of God's plan of rescue. Their joy was a reaction to the gift of God's peace. And this peace is much more than the English word can capture. It's more than the absence of conflict or a quiet moment at home when no one is crying or pouting. This peace is a right relationship with God. To put it simply, it's the idea that no matter what we may be going through, "all is well" because while we were still trapped in our sin, God was providing a Savior named Jesus. That's why thousands of angels appeared that night praising God. They were absolutely thrilled that you and me were going to be OK. Their song, which we now know as the *Gloria*, was their prayer of joy. And it is our prayer of joy as well.

You know, a few weeks ago I preached on a part of our traditional liturgy that I told you was my favorite hymn of praise, "This is the feast." And I reminded you that we don't sing that particular hymn of praise at this service but that night we did. Remember that? We all kind of joined together with "*This is the feast of victory for our God, alleluia.*" Well tonight, we have another opportunity because **the most traditional hymn of praise** in the liturgy is the *Gloria* and it is based on the angel's song. The beginning goes like this... "*Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth.*" Sing it with me.... "*Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth. It goes on with the words, "Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father: We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory."* And what about the classic hymn, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing?" Sing the first part of verse one with me. "*Hark! The herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn king; Peace on earth, and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled"* And the song we will end with tonight: *Angels We Have Heard on High; Sweetly singing o'er the plains; And the mountains in reply; echoing their joyous strains. Everybody: Gloria, in excelsis Deo*, which means Glory to God in the Highest.

You see, when there is a song in our hearts for what God did for you and us Christ, we can't help but sing the Gloria. So I ask you tonight do you see the birth of the Christ as a life-changer or just another holiday among many? When you sing those wonderful hymns, do you understand the magnitude of what caused the multitude of angels to sing Glory to God in the highest? Do you realize that this most amazing gift of Christ, which includes the gift of God's healing, the gift of God's forgiveness, and the gift of new life is actually for you?

You know, there's another story in the Gospel of Luke that can really help us here. In chapter 5, we read about a young man who had been paralyzed his whole life. Jesus had come to his village and seemed to be healing everyone who was sick. So of course, this young man wanted to be in the presence of the Lord too but the crowds were great and

there was no where for his friends to lay him. So they took him up on the roof and lowered him down with his bed, the text says, before Jesus. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed young man in front of him, “Man your sins are forgiven, rise, pick up your bed and go home.” And immediately, we read, he rose up and went home glorifying God. I'll bet that means he was singing. My friends, when there is a song in our hearts for what God did for us in Christ—when there is a song in our hearts for the inner healing that we all have in Christ Jesus, we can't help but sing the Gloria because where God's glory is, there must be peace.

When we finally understand this— that Christ is for us— that this is the way God the Father chose to save the world. When we finally understand and most importantly believe that these things actually happened and are true, **then** just like that hug I described to you earlier between Phoebe and me, we take Christ into our arms and hold him knowing that he is our own and he will hold onto to us forever. When we finally understand this, we join the heavenly host singing *Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth. Amen.*