

Christmas Sermon

by Martin Luther

After the angel's proclamation, the whole army of the heavenly hosts sings a hymn of praise. A good message or sermon should be followed by a joyful hymn. That's why the dear angels rejoice over the birth of this Saviour of all the



world, and follow up the glorious proclamation with a joyful hymn in these words: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

They divide their song into three assertions or points that form a triad, so that they cite three things: God, earth, mankind; and to each of these they attach an appropriate prayer request. To God be the glory; to the earth, peace; to all mankind, great joy.

Their first assertion is: GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST. What the blessed angels wish for God is glory, that is, they sing and wish that we people will recognize in this newly born infant the true God, and they thank God for the great, endless blessing, that out of pure grace and mercy God has sent his Son, and permitted him to become a true human being, in order that he might be able to redeem the entire human race. . . .

The second assertion is: PEACE ON EARTH. They also wish that there will be peace on earth, and that the kingdom of Christ, which is a kingdom of peace, will flourish on the earth. The kingdom of the world is characterized by stealing, robbery, murder, clubbing people to death, war, and bloodshed. In short, on the earth there is nothing but lack of peace, or turmoil. Each person harms the next person, no one practices faithfulness toward his neighbor, each one beats the next person over the head. That is the essence of life on the earth! That is why the blessed angels wish for us Christians a peaceful life, so that we will be friendly toward one another, each one demonstrating to the other person love, faithfulness, and reciprocal service, bearing one another's burdens so that no one will be at odds with anyone else, and that everyone helps and shares good counsel to his neighbor. It is the wish and the prayer of the angels that God will provide these things on earth, so that our life on earth will be friendly and peaceful. That is the second assertion or petition of the angels.

And that is followed by their third request: GOODWILL TOWARD MEN. In effect they are saying: It is our sincere desire that all men glorify God in the highest and that they live at peace with one another. Unfortunately, it is impossible for these conditions to exist at all times because many people pay no attention whatsoever to the gospel. They refuse to accept this Son of God. Instead of that, they persecute both the gospel and the Son. May God, therefore, grant to the Christians a cheerful, joy-filled heart so that they will say: I have a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord! If people mistreat me and persecute me because of this Saviour, I'll rejoice over that too. I will maintain good cheer and joy in the midst of suffering. That is the kind of heart the blessed

angels desire for us Christians, so that we may have joy in the face of hatred and go on singing when the devil goes on a rampage. The angels want us to be proud in Christ and in him to defy all misfortune; and if the devil attacks us, that we mock and ridicule him by saying, Satan, you can only attack my body, my life, my property, and so on. You might as well give up on that, too, Satan, for you cannot harm me since I have an eternal Savior, who will delight me with joy as a recompense for all my physical suffering here on earth.

That is the third assertion: that we will have a cheerful, joyful, defiant state of mind in the face of whatever suffering we may experience, so that we can tell the devil, You do not have permission to make life so bitter for me that it would deprive me of the joy I find in this infant. That is the meaning of eudokia: a cheerful, unruffled, joyful, and courageous heart that pays little attention to misfortune and confidently tells the devil, Go ahead, be as mean and poisonous as you wish; I will not let my joy be embittered or destroyed by your wrath. Christ fills me with more joy than any amount of suffering you can impose on me. That kind of heart the angels wish for us sincerely with their song.

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