

Glory & Peace: An Angelic Original

First UMC of Pocatello

December 24, 2021

Luke 2:1-20

After he had returned with news of Mary's "Yes," the angel Gabriel, shining conductor of the Heavenly Host, charged his ensemble with composing a song worthy of the birth of God.

"You have been God's messengers since the beginning," Gabriel said. "You know what's at stake."

The angels leapt into action, knowing that for beings such as them, nine months would pass as quickly as a day. Cases were cracked open, reeds were wetted and fitted to mouthpieces, drums were tightened and tuned. It was time to start writing the soundtrack to salvation.

In rehearsal, one of the angels said to the rest, "Peace. I think the song must be about peace. Here, listen." And, taking up her luminous instrument, the angel launched into a euphoric melody that had been placed upon her bright angel heart.

Oh, how it stirred them!

"Transcendent!" cried one from the host. "Majestic!" exclaimed another.

Michael, the warrior archangel, winged himself forward and declared, "Yes, peace. Peace is good. But where is this peace? Peace isn't simply a feeling; it must have a place to live!"

Ah, it was going to be one of those good rehearsals, where one idea leads to another, and raw material is spun into gold. An electric chatter of affirmation passed through the players. They considered all

that they had seen since their own emergence out of the light of God. Soon, multicolored suggestions flashed around the room.

“Peace in the family!” said one, remembering Adam’s accusatory finger, Cain’s bloody rock. She had been the one to stay the knife in Abraham’s hand long ago on Mt. Moriah.

“Peace among nations,” said another, mulling over those long, dark centuries of judges and kings, those faraway, mournful lands of exile.

“Peace between humankind and the waters,” said a third, recalling the flooded earth, the lonely ark, Egyptian chariots washed up on shore.

“Peace – they need it in their blessing-starved souls!” This angel had wrestled with the man named Jacob, and had come to know that a human being might fight forever to possess an elusive inner treasure.

So many elaborations on the original theme! So many additions to the original tune!

The first angel scribbled furiously and wondered how it all would fit.

“Do you think there’s a way to capture all these colors at once,” she asked the group. “Surely there must be a word that says it all.”

In answer, the angel of death, remembering the bitter work of Passover, came forward: “If there is to be peace, true and lasting, I believe it must be over all things I touch. Perhaps, ‘Peace on earth’? For all the earth knows me.”

Peace on earth! Of course.

How clearly they saw it now. For the earth is all things – rock and water and tree and grass; bird and beast and human being; household and nation; body and soul; neighbor and enemy.

Hadn't the Creator's own inaugural song for an earth freshly formed been, "Good, good, very good"? On, the eve of redemption, should not the song of the Heavenly Host have a scope and simplicity to match? *Peace on earth*. They basked in this revelation.

A question floated up from the string section: "Friends, we know what, we know where – but now I wonder, peace for whom?"

Now, this was a good question, because while some of the angels were rescuers, others were avengers.

"It should be peace for all, for God loves all," said one.

"No, it should be a special peace for the faithful, who have heard and trusted the Word of God," said another.

Better to leave it open and provocative, they agreed. After all, it had never been for the angels to presume upon the mysterious workings of God's freely given grace.

And with that, they had a finished line: *On earth, peace among those whom God favors!*

They sang it together over and over, layering on the harmonies and the parts.

The next rehearsal was abuzz with anticipation and nervous energy. Gabriel had come with more news. The chosen family were on their way from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

There was only one more week to go!

When they played their song for Gabriel, he glistened with delight. After a moment of reflection, he told the host that he thought the song would benefit from one more line, some kind of doxology, some praise

that would acknowledge the source and the goal of the peace that they had so appropriately named.

“But quickly! The family is on the move.” And then, departing from them, he descended to watch over Mary & Joseph’s journey.

The ensemble conferred and agreed. One line is good, but two would be better. They had a line for the world, now they needed a line for their Beloved God, who, at long last, *was coming into the world*.

It didn’t take them long to find the right acclamation.

“Glory.”

“Glory to God.”

“Glory to God in heaven.”

“Glory to God in the *highest* heaven.”

This line came very naturally and hardly needed workshopping. The angels had long dwelt in God’s glory, ferrying its warmth and joy to the world. They knew that God wanted nothing more than to welcome human beings *into* that glory. They had seen God call Abraham out from his tent in the middle of the night to look up at the stars and find faith. They had seen Moses emerge with shining face after talking with God in the Tent of Meeting. They knew that God had placed the longing for glory deep in the human heart. They had heard the songs of Miriam and David and Mary.

To say “Glory” is to dole out richly from what is bottomless. With a word like that right there at the start, the host decided that everyone must be in right away, on beat one, measure one, every voice and every noise, as if to say:

“Glory to God for being good.”

“Glory to God for being patiently attentive.”

“Glory to God for the beautiful gifts of creation.”

“Glory to God for not forsaking the world that God had made.”

“Glory to God for forgiveness, for the power to overcome all evil, for daily bread.”

“Glory to God for now being emptied of glory, for embarking on that redemptive journey from lofty eternity to fragile human flesh.”

It would be two movements, then, for their composition. One to say, “Glory!” – the birth of Christ is the supreme joy of heaven. The other to say, “Peace!” – the birth of Christ is of dearest benefit to all the earth.

With that, the brilliant company rehearsed its song:

*Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom God favors!*

In their revelry, wings crashed together in rumbling, drumming, thunderous ovation.

Suddenly, with a flash, Gabriel is among them.

“Friends, the hour has come! The answer to our ageless waiting is here! You must go – tonight! To Bethlehem, fly! For there you will find him, lowly and lying in a manger.”

Oh, they feel so many things so intensely that it is difficult to name the colors that envelope them in the heat of their passion. Uniformed in red longing and golden awe and sea-blue confidence and evergreen tenderness, they wing themselves up and away.

And as they fly, fly, fly, one of the angels turns back and cries out a final question: “But Gabriel! We’ve worked so hard for so long. We know the song is for everyone, but there will only ever be one inaugural concert. Who shall be the first to hear it? To whom shall we go?”

And this is what the Angel of Light said:

“Whoever is awake, whoever is still, whoever is watching the stars with a heart open and curious for more – go and sing for them.”

And so, with that, heaven’s curtain was drawn back above a group of nightshift workers lounging in a field just beyond the backwater town of Bethlehem. The angels took their places as these nameless, ordinary fellows opened their ears and lent their hearing to every future, lonesome seeker.

*Glory to God in the highest heaven, is what they heard,
And on earth, peace among those whom God favors!*

*Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom God favors!*

Oh, the angels have never tired of singing what they so lovingly prepared. And if *you* are awake, if *you* are still, if you turn your face to the stars and listen, you can still hear their song.

[MUSIC BEGINS] Amen.