

#1690

Cf. #6 #64 #122 #343 #344 #686 #684 #744
#920 #977 #1044 #1164#1165 #1340 #1514 #1689

Luke 2:14¹
“Glory to God
in the highest”
Christmas Eve
Supplementary Lectionary Series “B,”
Gospels, adapted

Pastor A. J. Kunde
Grace WELS Durand MI
7:00 p.m. Christmas Eve
Saturday, December 24, 2011
Candlelight Service

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

GLORY IN THE HIGHEST TO GOD!
I. GOD ESTABLISHES PEACE ON EARTH
II. GOD GIVES THIS PEACE TO MEN OF GOOD WILL

In the Name of Jesus, our newborn LORD and King, who brings peace to the nations, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

It was not a time of peace when Jesus was born. The Roman Empire under Caesar Augustus had extended the tentacles of its grasp to include Galilee, Samaria and Judea – including Bethlehem. Rome forced military service upon those they deemed fit to serve. The census that was taking place at this time was also forced. The taxes being collected were forced. In addition, it was the time of the reign of wicked King Herod the Great.

Herod the Great's claim to fame was the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. He was, however, a ruthless schemer and murderer. He had his own wife and children murdered so that he could assure for himself the throne and rule. Moreover, as you know, he ordered in Bethlehem and its vicinity the slaughter of all the male babies who were two years old and under (cf. Matthew 2); he was afraid that this child born King of the Jews would seize his power. It was not a time of peace. It was a time of unrest, disturbance, wickedness and evil, war and rebellion. It was a time no different than our time today. Yet the angels who appeared to the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem call this a time of “peace on earth.”

The establishment of this “peace on earth” is God's work not man's. Thus, the angels give highest glory to God in their song of praise. The angels sing: GLORY IN THE HIGHEST TO GOD! For, I. GOD ESTABLISHES PEACE ON EARTH; and, II. GOD GIVES THIS PEACE TO MEN OF GOOD WILL.

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

GLORY IN THE HIGHEST TO GOD!
I. GOD ESTABLISHES PEACE ON EARTH

“Glory in the highest to God,” for he establishes “peace on earth.” It was not the kind of peace for which the Jews were looking. Understandably, they wanted peace and freedom from wicked and ruthless King Herod. They wanted peace from his fits of rage against any who offended him. The Jews wanted peace from the Romans who tolerated no rebellion or hint of rebellion. The mighty Roman Army crushed those who rebelled. Nor was it a time of peace for those Jews who were engaged in making a living – accumulating wealth and money.

We are told about some of those Jews. In particular we are told about those in the “motel business.” They were making a significant financial gain from the Roman census and taxation; they could not or would not find room in their inn for a pregnant woman about to give birth (cf. 2:7b). There was money to be made during this time. Pregnant women would have to wait. So we find the baby Jesus, LORD and King of heaven and earth, being born in a barn in Bethlehem and placed in a manger – a feeding trough for animals. Yet it was through this baby that God establishes peace.

Through this baby born in Bethlehem, God establishes peace – peace with himself. You see, God is a God who cannot tolerate sin and cannot tolerate sinners. David writes in Psalm Five,

**⁴ You are not a God who takes pleasure in evil;
with you the wicked cannot dwell.**

**⁵ The arrogant cannot stand in your presence;
you hate all who do wrong (Psalm 5:4,5).**

The wicked cannot live with God. The arrogant, prideful, and self-centered, cannot come into God’s presence. God hates all who do wrong. Since wickedness, arrogance, pride and the doing of wrong is characteristic of all people, then God is not at peace with mankind. Rather God hates mankind who is sinful – and that includes all people, for all people by nature are sinful. St. Paul reports, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

God’s action toward sinful mankind is to judge and condemn them; to crush, punish and send them to eternal suffering in hell. All this is true because of man’s sinfulness. But ... but if sin is removed ... if sin is taken away, then God’s anger, punishment and condemnation is removed too. If sin is removed, then God is at peace with mankind. This is what God himself establishes by sending this baby – his Son – into the world. Glory to in the highest to God for he establishes peace on earth through his Son.

APPROPRIATION

God has established peace on earth through his Son born in Bethlehem. God has, therefore, established peace with you.

This peace that God has established with you is not an earthly peace, just as it was not an earthly peace back at the time of Jesus' birth. Wicked King Herod was still in power. Rome still dominated the western and mid-eastern world with its fierce army. People were still involved in earning a living and making money. People were still pursuing prosperity, possessions, property and pleasure. Just as then, so now; you have not obtained peace with God by yourself. For by nature, you too are an enemy of God.

You are by nature an enemy of God – in conflict with God. The Apostle Paul includes you when he writes,

⁵ Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires ⁶ The mind of sinful man is death ... ⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's Law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God (cf. Romans 8:5-8).

St. Paul is describing you. If you think that you do not “live according to the sinful nature,” then listen to how Jesus describes your sinful nature – your sinful heart.

Jesus says,

²¹ “For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly (Mark 7:21,22).

So, do you really think you do not “live according to the sinful nature?” Then, have you ever had “evil thoughts?” Have you ever been guilty of “sexual immorality,” “adultery,” or “lewdness” in thoughts, words, actions, attitudes or behavior? Have you ever been guilty of taking something that did not belong to you – “theft”? Have you ever been guilty of wanting something that you ought not have – “envy” and “greed”? Have you ever thought yourself to be better than another person or group of people – “arrogance”? Have you ever listened to or passed along gossip or rumor – “slander”? Moreover, remember the condemnation that the Apostle James lays upon you: “Whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10). Why this that? Because God demands perfection (cf. Leviticus 19:2b; Matthew 5:48). You have a sinful nature and, therefore, are not by nature at peace with God. But ... God has established peace with you.

Glory in the highest to God, for God has established peace with you. God has done this through this baby born in Bethlehem – his One and Only Son. St. Paul writes in his Second Epistle the Corinthians, “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19a). “Reconciling” is the same as establishing peace. Through his Son, Jesus, born in Bethlehem, God reconciled and

established peace with “the world” – with all mankind. But it is only through faith in Jesus that a person benefits from this peace – only by faith in Jesus that you benefit from this peace.

Only by faith in Jesus, do you benefit from this peace with God. Again, St. Paul states, “Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our LORD Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand” (Romans 5:1,2). It is by grace through faith in Jesus that you have peace with God. By that faith, you are also therefore a person “of good will.”

GLORY IN THE HIGHEST TO GOD! II. GOD GIVES THIS PEACE TO MEN OF GOOD WILL

The NIV translation of the last part of this verse reads, “and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests” (2:14b) A more literal translation would be: “and upon earth peace among men of good will” (2:14b, cf. Greek). The term “good will” is descriptive – grammatically, a descriptive genitive. It describes those upon whom God’s peace rests. In addition, it is objective. A subjective understanding would mean that these “men of good will” generated or authored this “good will” of themselves. The objective understanding is that these men are given this “good will” – they are recipients of this “good will.” So, this good will or favor is given to them. Given to them by whom?

Who gave these men “good will” or “favor?” Obviously God did; and he does this through this baby lying in the manger in Bethlehem. This “good will” and “favor” is also found in these men, these persons, by faith. It is by faith in this babe in Bethlehem that God’s “good will” and “favor” rests upon these persons; and this faith is also a gift to them of God’s grace – his undeserved love for them. There is indeed peace upon the earth for all, but not all receive this peace; not all are “men [or, people] of good will.”

Many reject this baby in Bethlehem. Wicked King Herod the Great will soon reject this baby and try to kill him. During the time of this baby’s earthly public ministry, many will reject and be hostile toward him. Those who reject him will eventually have their way and crucify him. But through that cross – the cross of Jesus this baby in Bethlehem – through that cross God establishes peace on earth. That peace will be enjoyed by believers – they will be the people “of good will” – given to them by God. Glory in the highest to God.

APPROPRIATION

Give glory in the highest to God, for he has counted you among those people “of good will.” We have seen previously that this “good will” or “favor” is not yours by nature, for you are a sinful person. By nature, out of your heart “come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly” (Mark 7:21b,22), as you heard previously. God’s “good will” and “favor” are given to you by grace through the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit who creates faith in your heart in Jesus as your Savior. The Holy Spirit does this through the Good News or Gospel, including the Gospel proclaimed by the angel to the shepherds on Christmas Eve: “Do not be afraid. I bring you Good News of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the LORD” (2:10b,11). This Good News is given to you so that “you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his Name” (John 20:31). As a believer in Jesus, God looks upon you as a person “of good will.” More than that, as a believer in Jesus, God looks upon you as one of his dear children – all by faith alone in his One and Only Son, Jesus, born in Bethlehem.

CONCLUSION

All glory in the highest to God. In his love and grace, he establishes peace on earth through his Son, Jesus. All glory in the highest to God; God’s Son, Jesus, takes away the sin of the world. All glory in the highest to God; God has established peace with you by creating faith in Jesus in your heart through the Good News – the Gospel. All glory in the highest to God; by faith in Jesus, you are now a person of good will – a person upon whom God’s favor rests. All glory in the highest to God for sending his Son, Jesus, to be your Savior. Amen.