

The Canticles of Christmas: Gloria

Perhaps you have seen on YouTube the instances of “flash mobs,” where folks are going about their Christmas shopping in the mall when suddenly voices break out from all directions singing beautiful Christmas carols. The expressions on the shoppers’ faces are priceless! Never has there been a “flash mob” like the one recorded in Luke 2:13-14.

Luke 2:8-15

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

Many people enjoy the lights and beautiful music performed during the Advent season, but some actually listen carefully to the message that is sung. The shepherds were certainly this way. They were shocked at the multitude of angels appearing before them, yet they listened carefully and heeded the announcement and imitated the worship they heard from the angels. The message of the angels falls in three categories: 1) the praise of God 2) the peace offered by God 3) the description of those who receive the peace.

I. **The angels sing glory to God in the highest because they had witnessed the glory of God on many occasions, but this occasion was like none other.**

They had, in fact, on many occasions been commissioned by the Lord to carry out His mission on behalf of His people — to protect them, to provide for them, to strengthen them. But they give the highest praise to God because now He was doing what no angel could possibly perform. He was sending His own son to reconcile sinners to God and thereby win for them eternal life. no angel, no matter how strong or committed, could accomplish such a feat.

II. **The angels sang glory to God because of what He offers to those on the earth: peace.**

In the Old Testament, the prophets often promise peace (Cf: Isaiah 9:5, 7; 11:6-9; Micah 5:4). This peace is of a cosmic order: the wolf shall lie down with the lamb and the child shall crawl over the hole of the snake. That’s real peace! The Apostle Paul also explains in Romans 5:1 that we who have been justified through faith now have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. That peace is the removal of God’s wrath from us because Jesus Himself has borne that wrath in our place; therefore, we can be assured of the glory of eternal life. But in this life, this peace is to be cultivated in our hearts. Paul says in Philippians 4:6-7, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” This peace comes through contemplation and prayer. Paul also describes for us a peace among the brothers and sisters in Christ in Ephesians 2:14: “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...” This peace is to find full expression in the fellowship of believers. But that’s not all: Paul also explains that we are to extend this peace even to those who despise us — “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably

with all.” (Romans 12:18). For this reason, regardless of how we are treated by others, we are always to promote and pursue peace among our neighbors.

III. **This peace is for those with whom God is pleased.**

Who are these folks with whom He is pleased? Clearly these are His people, who by simple faith, put their trust in His provision for our salvation. No matter how insignificant, how poor, how beaten down, we are the ones of His special love. In the case of Mary and Zechariah, the very simple folks had sung to heaven. In the case of the angels, heaven has spoken to the very simple — even the common shepherds among us.

Discussion Questions

1. What is so unusual about the song in Luke 2:14?
2. Why did the angels sing glory to God “in the highest”? How was God’s glory displayed in the events in Bethlehem?
3. How had God used angels in Israel’s history? What was God doing in Bethlehem that the angels could not do?
4. Describe the peace that the angels announced to the shepherds.
5. In Luke 2:14, whom do the angels say will receive the peace of God? Describe these people.

Going Deeper

1. Have you fully received the gift of peace offered in Jesus Christ? How do you know?
2. How can you this week more fully express the peace of God to others?