

Wednesday of Rorate Coeli, A ✠ D 2009

Luke 2:13-15

Based on a sermon by Dr. Luther, preached St. Stephen's Day, 1534.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 The angels sing. This carol, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, which has been missing from the Church's song since the beginning of Advent, is a song of the mercy God has shown—not to angels, but to men. They sing for you. And they bid you join their song.

2 They divide their song into three parts: 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.

3 Their first petition 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. In effect they were saying: God has sent His Son, for which we should thank and praise Him to all eternity. For this grace and blessing we, the angels, want to praise and glorify God, and all peoples should follow our example by praising and glorifying Him.

4 Their second petition 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 of people to death, war, and bloodshed. In short, on earth, there is nothing but lack of peace, or turmoil. Each person harms the next person, whether by word, deed, or by mere thoughts; no one practices faithfulness toward his neighbor. This is the essence of life on this 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 with 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.

5 That is followed by their third petition, 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 so 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 Savior who is Christ the Lord! If people mistreat me and persecute me because of this Savior, 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.

6 That is the third petition: 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. In Him, the God who took human flesh, Christian, you have 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 you sincerely with their song.

7 And they are right. That God took human flesh elevated humanity above even the angels. That took human flesh in order to redeem humanity, gives humanity something the angels have never experienced: mercy. That God took human flesh in order to die to win forgiveness for you elevates you over angels, gives you the gift not offered to angels: forgiveness.

8 So sing with them. Join their song that praised God for what He has done for you. He has shown mercy, in the infant Jesus who was born to be the crucified Jesus, who was crucified to be the Savior Jesus. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, goodwill to men. God delights to show mercy, to forgive your sin. In Holy Baptism, this forgiveness became yours. You live in that baptized reality every day. You return to that reality every time you confess your sins and receive Holy Absolution. You live in that reality, elevated above angels, yet singing with them, every time you eat the Body and drink the Blood of this same Jesus, born with your flesh, crucified with your sins, raised with forgiveness for you.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Pastor Jeff Hemmer

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