

## The Song of Angels

Christmas Eve – 12/24/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 2:1-20 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 14, [The angels sing the song, known as the *Gloria in Excelsis*,] **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!”**

### **Introduction**

- ⊗ I think when most people think of the night Christ was born, they think of it as being very serene and quiet; a night with virtually no noise at all. But that thinking doesn't come because the Bible says it was abnormally quiet or that in order for it to be an especially holy night, it must, by definition be without any noise.
  - ➔ Rather, we think this way because that's what we're told by hymns like “*O Little Town of Bethlehem*” and, of course, “*Silent Night*.” Now, in fairness to those hymns, I don't believe the authors were trying to add to God's Word or attempting to say that this “silence” was a historical fact. More likely they used the idea of silence as a poetic device to get us to consider the tranquility of Jesus' birth; so we would realize that every other care and concern and sorrow and fear that humans face just faded away in the moment that God's only-begotten Son first breathed the air He was going to fill with salvation.
- ⊗ On the one hand, there is a certain beauty in considering that kind of metaphorical silence on the night of Jesus' birth. But on the other hand, there is great beauty to be found in considering the unmistakable noise of Christmas; to consider the songs of sorrow that were ringing through the air around the world on the night of Christ's birth and how they can now be transformed into tremendous songs of joy.

### **I. Many Sing the Song of Sorrow**

- ⊗ There is no doubt that there was most certainly wailing somewhere that night. Just a few miles away in Jerusalem, King Herod might have cried out in his sleep; having nightmares over the blood he had shed; how he had already taken the lives of his own wife and his own sons, just to protect his throne; a throne that didn't really even belong to him. Perhaps Israel's false king sang a song of sorrow that night; crying out for a peace that he could never achieve, no matter how much blood he shed.
  - ➔ And certainly, around the world, various emperors and kings and chiefs sang that same song there on the night of Christ's birth; furious that all of their strength; all of their wisdom; all of their wrath could not conquer their enemies or secure their glory or bring true peace to their people.
- ⊗ Likely throughout the world that night, wives sang the song of sorrow in empty beds; weeping over husbands that never came home from war. Husbands sang it as their wives died in childbirth. Mothers sang the song of sorrow as they watched their children swallowed up by diseases they couldn't stop or drive away. Fathers sang with them as their children wailed with empty stomachs because they were unable to make the rain fall on the earth or force the barren ground to yield its fruit.
- ⊗ Even more, throughout the world that night, a myriad of sinners lost in darkness sang the song of sorrow; unable to see the light of God because their sight was clouded with unbelief; even as they bloodied their hands crafting idols who wouldn't answer their prayers, and sacrificed the flesh of animals, sometimes even the flesh of men thinking that might bring them nearer to God.
  - ➔ Yet they couldn't find Him; couldn't find His mercy, His forgiveness, His salvation, His arms; weighed down with condemnation, guilt and confusion.

✘ But these are not the realities only of a time 2000 years ago in Israel, because across space and time, tonight, we too are singing the same song of sorrow. As we look out at this world around us, we also see a world of darkness; a world filled with war and bloodshed; with hatred and cruelty.

➔ Our versions of kings and emperors today still rise up against other nations and pour out violence; seeking to puff up their own glory, glory that will be forgotten in one short generation or two. Yes, anger and bitterness poison our world. Neighbors who are supposed to look out for one another look for reasons to hate and stay away from each other. People who were supposed to be loyal to us, so quickly cast us aside; betray us; lie about us and walk away from us. As we look out on this world, teeming with all of that sin outside of us, of course we sing the song of sorrow.

✘ But we sing that song again when we finally are brought to see the same world teeming with our own sins too. Just as we were betrayed, we have betrayed. Just as we were hurt, we also hurt. We've worshiped ourselves. We've made idols of our own pride, our greed and selfishness. We tried so hard to build a world of light and glory and comfort for ourselves by trusting in our own strength; in our own goodness.

➔ And what has come out of all that effort? Even more darkness; more cold; more loneliness; more sorrow; and more sin. So tonight, on the night of Christ's birth, here we all are, far from silent. Here we are singing the song of sorrow.

## **II. A Heavenly Song of Joy**

✘ But just as the shepherds heard that night "out in the field", "fear not", my dear friends, the night is not ruined. Look in faith and see the angel of the Lord bursting into the night sky in Bethlehem; see how he has come, armed with a new song for you and me to sing. He's appeared in that silent night sky with the full glory of the Lord shining all around him; armed with words of peace so significant that it silences every song of sorrow; giving you and me the right to join in and sing the heavenly song of joy.

➔ "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" (vv. 11–12). It begins with just the one angel's declaration, but then the song grows in voices and majesty, with "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is well pleased!'" (v. 14).

✘ And what do those words of this song say to you; to us; to all of mankind? They shout out to Herod and every other king that the hour has come for them to turn from their brutality and see instead that peace has now arrived.

➔ Indeed, flowing within the veins of that little child in Bethlehem was the only blood that could give all of mankind true peace with God. That little child would grow into the man who would carry His cross to Calvary, shed His blood, and win salvation; win peace; win eternal life for all who believe and trust in Him alone.

✘ Here, in these angelic words; this song from heaven, the wife and mother who mourns her lifeless kin can now know comfort; knowing that the One who will conquer the grave has now arrived. Here, the father and husband who failed to drive away starvation and disease can rest as the infant Christ rests in His mother's arms; knowing that nothing will stop the Son of God from crushing Satan; from destroying sin; from conquering death in His bloody cross and from His empty tomb. Here, those wandering in darkness, dashing themselves to pieces on worthless idols can hear the song of the angels; rush to Bethlehem; and look upon the infant Christ in God's gift of faith and know that they see the very face of God.

→ And tonight, my dear friends, you can do likewise. Tonight, you can join those of every tribe and nation and generation who weep the tears of sorrow. You can join all those who share your song of sorrow over this sinful, fallen world. You can go to Bethlehem in faith and join the angel's song of joy because the very Son of God is born...for you!

→ There in the manger before you lies the One who will crush every sorrow; shatter every grave; dry every tear; and clothe every believer, including you, in the eternal comfort of his/her Father in heaven.

⌘ Tonight, even the kings of this earth can sing with joy when they lay their heavy crowns at the infant feet of Jesus, knowing that He will do – that He actually has done – what only the King of kings could do; give mankind peace with God, and peace with one another.

→ And in the same way, dear Christian, you too can bring Him anything – and everything that weighs you down – all of your sins, your iniquities, your festering, clawing guilt that won't leave you alone.

→ Bring them and leave them all at the foot of the manger here tonight, because this is the Son of God; born to carry them on His bloodied back all the way to the cross. And there at Calvary, Jesus, your Lord finished the journey that begins in Bethlehem tonight. He destroyed every ounce of your guilt. He buried every one of your sins in a grave that will never be opened. With His all-powerful, nail-pierced hands, He breaks the devil's grip upon you; He has killed the beast that torments you; and He gives you the right to live with Him in His heavenly kingdom forever.

## **Conclusion**

⌘ So, you know what? In light of all of that, this is not the night for us to sit here with long faces in silence. No, this holy night is a time for us to fill it with songs of great joy; to join in with singing saints of every nation; with angels and archangels, and the entire "multitude of the heavenly host" (v.13) and proclaim the song of Jesus' great love; to join the angel choir in celebrating His victory; to never stop singing our praises to God, because Jesus our Lord will never stop singing His song of salvation to us! Amen.