

The Vigil of the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord  
St. Luke 2:1-14  
December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Glory to God in the Highest

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we give thanks unto Thee, that of Thy mercy and compassion Thou didst suffer Thy dear Son to become incarnate, and didst through Him redeem us from sin and everlasting death: We beseech Thee, enlighten our hearts by Thy Holy Spirit, that we may ever be thankful for such grace, and comfort ourselves with the same in all tribulation and temptation, and at last obtain eternal salvation through the same, Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth, peace goodwill toward men.’” This proclamation of the Evangelist St. Luke in his Gospel peels back the curtain into Heaven for us. This birth of a Savior—the Child born in Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger—reveals for us the reward of His birth. We get a glimpse of Heaven, as the heavenly host sings the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the song we chant tonight for the first time since the beginning of the Advent season. The birth of our Lord + Jesus may be a humble birth: to poor parents, in lowly means and lowly surroundings, but this birth is a glorious birth for this birth opens up the gates of Heaven with the song of the angels.

This song which we will join in with all the host of Heaven, the company of the angels, saints, prophets and Patriarchs all gathered around the throne of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. He comes to us tonight in lowly means and in a humble beginning, but we will join Him in Heaven and praise Him in all of His glory. Even as we get a foretaste of that heavenly worship whenever we gather together as two or three or more in His Name. He gives us His gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation, and we sing His praise.

The Sundays in Advent, being a penitential season, have been subdued in their nature. We have missed the preludes and postludes, the accompaniment of music, and the *Gloria in Excelsis*. Our worship was a reflection of the humble birth of our Lord. We poor, miserable sinners unworthy of our Lord’s grace and mercy. Like St. John the Baptist, we are unworthy to even touch His shoe; to unlatch His sandal. Tonight, all that changes. The bells ring out, our voices are raised in singing all the wonderful Christmas hymns, the Gloria in Excelsis returns, the entire service in chanted. All this adorns the wonderful message of our Lord’s birth; it dresses up the wonderful message of the birth of our Savior.

It is a celebration! The Church celebrates with a song on her lips. We join our songs to the eternal song of Heaven. In our song we proclaim all the good things that our Lord + Jesus has done for us. He has fulfilled the Law perfectly for us. The Law which we are unable to keep. He redeems us from our sins—the sins that we commit because of our disobedience to the Law of God—with His very own

Blood. He sheds His Blood and breaks His Body for us on the tree of the holy cross. Our Lord offers up His life for us, and we sing of His glorious death and resurrection. The angels in Heaven—the heavenly host of St. Luke’s Gospel reading—proclaim this great news to the shepherds abiding in the fields of Bethlehem in song.

Our Lord + Jesus cannot fulfill the Law of God for us and suffer and die in our place if He is not born. The Lord + Jesus is born into our flesh. He puts on the flesh of man. God has put on our flesh. What a wonderful thing to sing about! Our Savior dwells with us. He does not just stay up in Heaven, and wave His hand or say the “magic” word to save us. No, He shows us His love for us by deigning to pay the penalty of our sins as one of us. He does what we are unable to do. Truly we should sing “Glory to God in the highest” for His redemption is for all mankind. He who believes has the gifts He won for us on the tree of the holy cross; the gifts He purchased for us with His own precious, innocent Blood.

This glorious message of salvation—a Savior born for all mankind, Who will redeem His people from their sins—is first proclaimed by the angels to poor shepherds as they watched their flocks by night. These shepherds we are told by St. Luke lived in the fields with their sheep. They never left their flocks. They cared for their sheep. They did not live in a house. The Lord + Jesus at His birth also has no home. He also is living among the sheep as He is placed by His mother Mary and His father Joseph into a manger. There was no room for them in the inn.

The Lord + Jesus is born among the sheep and placed in the food trough of the sheep, and the first proclamation of this wonderful birth by the angel host of Heaven is to shepherds who dwell among the sheep and care for their sheep. The messengers of our Lord—His angels who proclaim His Word—also care for their sheep. In the following verses of St. Luke’s Gospel, which we do not have in our reading, because those verses actually are appointed for the Christmas dawn service, we are told the shepherds go to see this wonderful thing that the angels sang about to them.

Upon seeing this Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths—the Babe who the angel told them was born in Bethlehem—they go out into the surrounding region and proclaim the good news to all. A Savior is born this night. The shepherds of the Lord + Jesus—His ministers—still preach the good news of the Savior to their spiritual sheep. The ministers of the Lord point us to the manger; to the Savior Who dwells with us in the flesh. Here is your salvation. Here is your Lord. Here is the One Who has come into the world to defeat sin, death and the devil, and open up your way to your eternal home in Heaven.

Our Lord + Jesus comes at midnight; He is born when everyone is asleep; when no one is paying attention. His arrival at midnight is why many churches celebrate this joyous event at midnight. Nobody paid much attention to His birth because it was at midnight. Even the shepherds had to be told by the angels of Heaven. They were the only ones who were awake; keeping watch over their flocks by night. The world is still asleep as our Lord + Jesus comes to us. Our world has so distorted what this holy day is all about that the birth of our Lord and Savior—the birth of God in our flesh—is lost. The world would rather hear about some fat man in red pajamas. Or worse, the world would rather have a watered down, sappy, over emotional type of holiday. One that is devoid of anything of substance. The world wants to have you concentrate on your joyous, loving, caring, feelings. But feelings cannot be artificially created. Having these types of feelings are pointless if there is not some meaning behind them.

This night gives us joy and hope and love—it makes us sing—because there is real salvation for us being given to us. A Savior is born. Our Redeemer from sin, death and the devil is born for us. We have cause for rejoicing. This holy day is not about presents, or family gatherings, or food—these certainly have their proper place—but this holy day is about our Lord and Savior being born in our flesh. It is about the Lord God coming down from Heaven to be born as One of us, in order that He might redeem us from sin, death and the devil. Our Lord + Jesus gives us the greatest gift anyone can give. He gives Himself.

We are given our Lord + Jesus tonight in His Body and Blood given in bread and wine. Just as we joined our voices to the angels of Heaven in the Gloria in Excelsis at the beginning of the service. We will also join our voices to the angels of Heaven, and all the saints, as we sing the song that proclaims Hosanna to the Son of David. Just as our Lord + Jesus came to us in lowly means at His birth in Bethlehem, He comes to us tonight in the lowly means of bread and wine, to give us the present of forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation.

Therefore, my dear friends, lift up your voices in song. Give thanks to the Lord + Jesus for putting on our flesh, and being born among us. Let us join our voices to the whole host of the heavenly choir and sing for all eternity of the great news that our Lord and Savior has been born to us this night in the city of David. Let us follow the example of the shepherds and go and see this thing told about to us this night, and share that message of salvation—the message of a Savior found in the Lord + Jesus Christ alone—to all who would hear. Even as your Shepherd, through the mouth of His minister, proclaims into your ears this night that He is your Savior, born for you this night. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

Lord God, Gracious Father, Who in the fulness of time didst send Thy Son to become man, to assume our flesh and become our Brother, we thank Thee for Thy truth and fatherly goodness in giving us this Savior, by whose birth we are delivered from sin, death, Satan, and Hell; and we beseech Thee, keep us until the end in true knowledge of our Redeemer, that, with all the holy angels, we may rejoice at His Nativity, and behold Him, together with Thee and the Holy Ghost, in glory and majesty, world without end. Amen.

**The Votum:**

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*