

Joining Together in Prayer

Glory to God

The news came first to an assembly. Shepherds were gathered on a Judean hillside, the gospel of Luke tells us, “keeping watch over their flocks by night.” (Luke 2:8b) They were not random passers-by. These were people who had come to a particular place for a particular work.

Luke says an angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds with good news of great joy. The angel announced the coming of the Messiah, the Lord. Suddenly the angel was surrounded by the heavenly host, together singing the praise of God. The Gloria echoes and joins in the praise.

*Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good will.*

The Gloria is not used on every Sunday of the church year. We do not hear the hymn during the Sundays of Advent and Lent, nor do we hear it when the Feast of All Souls falls on a Sunday. When the Gloria is part of our celebration, we recall that first night, and that first gathering, the moment at which the announcement of the Incarnation—God With Us—fell upon our ears. The peace of which the angels sing is the healing, the wholeness of mind and body, the reunion of God and man once known in the garden

Such bounty, such mercy—God among us, suffering as we suffer, working as we work, taking with us food and drink—requires a response. The shepherds agree to go at once to Bethlehem, “and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” (Luke 2:15b)

We do the work, the *leitourgia*, for which we have gathered. We respond to the good news of Christ with a hymn of praise, continuing and amplifying the angels’ song.

We praise God the Father, again and again, praise. The repetition and multiplication of praise is familiar to the lover. How to describe the beloved? There are no words, or not enough words, or insufficient words. The lover is left only to repeat the wonders of the beloved, piling words on words in an attempt, always failing, always striving, to capture the fullness of truth.

*We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great glory.*



We move from praise of the Father into praise of the Son, the Only Begotten Son. There is no break, no pause. As the Father and the Son are one in being, consubstantial, as the new translation of the Creed has it, so our hymn flows on in unbroken praise. And, as the shepherds go to Bethlehem to *see*, so our hymn reveals to us the face of Christ. This is the Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father. He is the Lamb, who takes away the sins of the world, the merciful One. Because we know this, because we have seen and heard the good news among us, we can boldly ask, “Receive our prayer. Have mercy on us.”

*Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of the father,
have mercy on us.*

The hymn closes with praise to the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is a bracing honesty to the words. No one should be deceived about the number and appeal of the many gods who beckon us. Fitness, money, career, sexual vitality, all these are gods demanding sacrifice and service. But we sing together of the One God, who is alone the Holy One, who is alone the Lord, who is alone the Most High.

*For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord.
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.*

This hymn knits us together. Who are we? We are the people who praise, bless, adore and glorify God. Thus gathered, thus collected, we sit together to hear how God’s mercy has been, and is, revealed in human history.



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