

December
2014
January
2015



HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH

Words from the Cross

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***"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those
with whom He is pleased!"***

Luke 2:14



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This brief, but lovely song the angels sang on the night of Jesus' birth contains the whole Christmas Gospel. Every word in it is filled to the brim with the grace and mercy of God, which is why we use it every Sunday in the Divine Service.

Glory be to God is not really a very good translation. The word 'glory' stands for something that can hardly be expressed in human language. God's glory, His unspeakable being that excites us and at the same time causes us tremble, fills us with joy and attracts us to Him. At the same time it makes us want to cover our faces in fear and shame because of our many sins. This glory is a light that our earthly eyes cannot endure, a light none of us could ever reach on our own. When Isaiah was allowed to see a glimpse of God's glory he said, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5).

A wonderful miracle occurred or we would never be able to experience this light. God descended to earth—not in annihilating splendor, but in the shape of a newborn human child. And now, all heaven's angels sing, amazingly, overwhelmingly, and joyously about this wonder. "Glory be to God," they say. To Him be the power and the glory that fills the heavens with songs of praise. But now that power and glory descend in order to bring peace to the earth.

Peace is another word so abundantly filled with meaning that it is hard to translate. Meaning both peace and tranquility, peace also connotes harmony, a delightful and secure situation, the wonderful order of things God incorporated into His creation, but was largely lost with the Fall. Now, the angels tell us, that peace will be restored. All will be well again. Forgiveness, renewal, and all the wonderful powers of divine mercy will descend upon us—upon the people on whom His favor rests. That is what it says. We can translate it: people with whom He is pleased. What is important is that God's wonderful grace, His fatherly love, His desire to save, His untiring mercy, now embrace us completely—especially those who have fallen from Him: the outcasts, the unfortunate, those who are badly treated.

It was no accident that only the shepherds received this message. They were members of the lower classes of their society. They were only allowed to take the work no one else would take. That is why they were keeping watch at night while the rest of Bethlehem's residents slept soundly. Yet, it was to them, the weak, the lowly and the downtrodden, that the angels sang. The same is true with us. We too are spiritually weak, lowly, and downtrodden, yet neither God nor His angels overlook us as we hear their song and repeat it to our eternal joy and salvation.

Yours in Christ,
Pastor Skelton