**The Festival of Christmas Eve,**

24 December 2019,

*Concordia Lutheran Mission*,

Terrebonne, OR.

**“The Babe in the Manger is the Captain of the Lord’s Host Born to Save Men from their Sins.**”

And 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, good will toward men.

**St. Luke 2:13-14**.

**Introduction**.

The heavenly hosts preach the Gospel. Hosts means “armies”[[1]](#footnote-1)1. These hosts are the heavenly armies that have an unblemished record of victory after victory over the enemies of Israel without fail. What caused them to sheath their swords and become preachers of the Gospel? *Their Commander commanded them to sheath their swords and preach the Gospel*.

Who is their Commander? *Their Commander is the Babe lying in the manger in Bethlehem*. The Son of God is the Captain of the Lord’s Host.[[2]](#footnote-2)2 He is the Angel of the Lord who guided Israel out of Egypt. Now the Captain of the Lord’s Host is Incarnate.

But for what purpose is He born? The Captain of the Lord’s hosts is born for the Salvation of men.[[3]](#footnote-3)3 All the Power of the Captain of the Lord’s Host is harnessed and garnered in the human nature because of the Incarnation of the Captain of the Lord’s Host for the salvation of men. We see that the Captain of the Lord’s Host was powerful to deliver Israel from Egyptian tyranny and provide for them repeatedly. Now He presses that Power into the Atonement of all sins for all men to save.

This Same Captain of the Lord’s Host sends His heavenly hosts to preach the Gospel to this day and continues to send men to preach the Gospel so the Good News of His Salvation comforts hearts with saving faith and gives life everlasting.

**I. The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts, Jesus Born in Bethlehem, Presses His Almighty Power into the Salvation of Men through His Passion.**

**A. Only God’s Glory Couched in God’s Mercy Comforts Men.**

The shepherds were “sore afraid” when God’s glory appeared with the angel, a member of God’s heavenly armies. Why were they “sore afraid”? They were sore afraid because God’s holiness apart from His Mercy in Christ is lethal to men because we all are sinners. To a sinner, someone who is unholy, God’s holiness is like a solvent that dissolves us body and soul. The prophet Isaiah, who was certainly a holy man, experienced this dissolution when he saw Christ in a bit of His uncovered Majesty in the Temple and despaired that he was undone altogether:

Then said I [Isaiah], Woe *is* me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.[[4]](#footnote-4)4

The angel, however, comforted the shepherds with the Absolution of sin so they could stand in the presence of God’s holiness and not perish. The angel said, “Fear not”, namely, don’t worry, we haven’t come to slay you as sinners and enemies of the Lord but rather to Absolve you through the announcement of the Good News of the Birth of the Savior and save:

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And 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, good will toward men.[[5]](#footnote-5)5[[6]](#footnote-6)6

**B. The Captain of the Lord’s Host is Powerful to Save Men from Sin by the Cross.**

These Lord’s hosts provide no fear for sinners because they are commanded by the Babe Born in Bethlehem and lying in manger, Jesus of Nazareth, to preach the saving Gospel and save men from their sins. Of the Remarkable Ability of the Commander of the Lord’s hosts we read in the book of **Joshua**:

And it came to pass when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn to his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come: And Joshua fell on is face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the captain of the Lord’s host said unto Joshua, Looseth thy shoe from off thy foot for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.[[7]](#footnote-7)7

This Captain of the Lord’s hosts is the Angel of the Lord who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and likewise commanded him to remove his shoe:

And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush *was* not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the LORD that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses, And he said, Here *am* I. And he said, Draw not nigh thither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy ground.[[8]](#footnote-8)8

The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes of the Captain of the Lord’s hosts:

Here is reported of a wonderful appearance which Joshua experienced. By Jericho he saw a Man with a bared sword. He was Captain of the army of the Lord, which is the host of angels. This was the Angel of the Lord, who was of [one] essence with God, the faithful Angel of the covenant, the Son of God who led Israel all the way from Egypt and from Sinai.[[9]](#footnote-9)9 He will now with His heavenly host go before the army of Israel and help them in their victory over their enemies. This is a title that is becoming to Christ to this day, because He is the Captain of the army of the Lord. With his host of angels He camps about those that fear him, and fights for His Church against the world and evil.1[[10]](#footnote-10)0

The Captain of the Lord’s Host is the Powerful Angel of the Lord who delivered Israel from Egyptian tyranny. Moses writes:

And the angel of the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night.1[[11]](#footnote-11)1

Again, Moses writes:

And the angel of God ,which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them ; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them ....1[[12]](#footnote-12)2

The Angel of the Lord appeared to Israel throughout Israel’s history. The Angel of the Lord appeared to the parents of Samson:

And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, What *is* thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour? And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it *is* [Wonderful]. ... And Manoah said unto his wife, ... we have seen God.1[[13]](#footnote-13)3

The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes of the Angel of the Lord:

... Isaiah calls this little Child which is born to us: **Wonderful**. This Name is taken from the book of Judges 13:18. There the angel of the Lord Himself appears to the wife of Manoah and announces to her the birth of Samson. This same angel was the Son of God, the Angel of the great counsel -- as the seventy translators [of the Septuagint] have in this case rendered this reference of Isaiah, where He Himself is called God. When Manoah asks for the name of this angel, he answers: **Why do you ask for my name, which, of course, is Wondrous?**1[[14]](#footnote-14)4

God’s Angel of the Lord is God Himself and able to perform powerful miracles for men in order to save them from their sins. We see His history of an ability to perform more than man could ever do. Now the Angel of the Lord, the Captain of the Lord’s hosts, also presses His Almighty Power into the Service of men by being born in Bethlehem to live a holy life for all men and to die on the Cross in order to redeem all men from sin and save. All the Power of the Captain of the Lord’s Host is harnessed in and garnered by the human nature because of the Incarnation of the Captain of the Lord’s Host for the salvation of men. The prophet Isaiah writes:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, the everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.1[[15]](#footnote-15)5

Isaiah calls Christ the “Mighty God”. Christ is the Mighty God, the Mighty Angel of the Lord, pressing His Power and Majesty into the Service of fallen by being born of a woman to shoulder and fulfill all men’s obligations under the law and save. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.1[[16]](#footnote-16)6

For pressing His Almighty Power into the Salvation of men by being born of a woman we see again why the Captain of the Lord’s host is called Wonderful.1[[17]](#footnote-17)7 The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

This Child is also Wonderful on account of His office, He came to redeem us from death, and yet lets Himself be killed. He came to get rid of the Devil’s power over us, and yet in deep humiliation lets Himself be tempted by the Devil. He came to exalt us, and yet lets the greatest shame over Him. He came to make us rich, and yet Himself becomes “blood poor” [destitute]. He came to have a kingdom established for Himself, and yet lets Himself be murdered and crucified, as Isaiah consequently says: **Whose dominion is upon His shoulder**.1[[18]](#footnote-18)8

The Almighty Captain of the Lord’s hosts was born in Bethlehem in order to press His Almighty Power and Majesty into the Salvation of men through His Passion.

**II. The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts Orders His Heavenly Armies to Preach the Gospel to Save All Men.**

**A. The Commander of the Lord’s Hosts, the Babe in Bethlehem, orders His heavenly armies to sheath their swords and preach the Gospel.**

On that Christmas night, the Captain of the Lord’s hosts, the Babe in the manger in Bethlehem, ordered His heavenly armies to sheath their swords and preach the Gospel to save men from their sins. The Evangelist St. Luke writes:

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And 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, good will toward men.1[[19]](#footnote-19)9

The Captain of the Lord’s hosts turns His heavenly soldiers into preachers of the Gospel. Because this is the Preaching of the Captain of the Lord’s hosts, this preaching of the heavenly hosts is the Power of God unto Salvation. The Apostle St. Paul writes of the Gospel:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.2[[20]](#footnote-20)0

**B. The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts, the Babe in Bethlehem, continues to order His heavenly soldiers to sheath their swords to continue to preach the Gospel and for all believers to preach the saving Gospel.**

The Captain o f the Lord’s hosts, the Babe lying in the manger, continues to order His heavenly soldiers to sheath their swords in order to preach the Gospel to all men for their salvation. The Evangelist St. Luke writes of the preaching of the heavenly hosts:

And 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, good will toward men.2[[21]](#footnote-21)1

The heavenly armies preached peace, i.e., God’s reconciliation to sinners in Christ, and good will, i.e., God is good willed toward all men in Christ to save, not just to the Jews but they preached God’s peace and God’s good will was “toward men”, namely, all men. This heavenly preaching we hear today every Sunday in the Liturgy of the Church and tonight in the Service in the **Gloria in Excelsis** (Glory in the Highest):

V: Glory be to God on high: R: And on earth peace, good will toward men.2[[22]](#footnote-22)2

What does heavenly preaching sound like? We hear it every Sunday and this evening in the Service. It’s the same preaching as the Church because Christ, the Captain of the Lord’s hosts, the Babe lying the manger in Bethlehem, has sent both his heavenly armies and the Church to preach the same saving Gospel of “peace on earth, good will toward men.”

**Conclusion**.

The Babe in the manger in Bethlehem is mighty to save us and all men from their sins because He is the Almighty Captain of the Lord’s hosts. We see His great power to defeat any and all enemies of Israel. Now He is born of a woman in Bethlehem to press that same Almighty Power and Majesty into the salvation of all men through His Passion.

The Commander of the Lord’s hosts, the Babe in the manger in Bethlehem, commands His heavenly soldiers to sheath their swords and become preachers of the Gospel. This preaching continues throughout the world to the end of time through Liturgy of the Church where we hear the heavenly preaching of the Gospel in order to give men the greatest of Christmas gifts: life everlasting.

**Amen.**

1. 1“And suddenly there was with the angel the multitude of the heavenly host, yea, the entire heavenly army. Only this one time, only at the birth of Christ the world of angels in their totality became visible on earth, because the Child in the manger is the Lord whom all the angels serve.” The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Wisdom for Today*, Vols. II & III, tr. the Rev. Arthur E. Beck, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary, no date, p.12. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2“Here is reported of a wonderful appearance which Joshua experienced. By Jericho he saw a Man with a bared sword. He was Captain of the army of the Lord, which is the host of angels. This was the Angel of the Lord, who was of [one] essence with God, the faithful Angel of the covenant, the Son of God who led Israel all the way from Egypt and from Sinai. he will now with His heavenly host go before the army of Israel and help them in their victory over their enemies. This is a title that is becoming to Christ to this day, because He is the Captain of the army of the Lord. With his host of angels He camps about those that fear him, and fights for His Church against the world and evil.” *Wisdom for Today, Volume I, The Biblical History of the Old Testament*, tr. the Rev. Arthur E. Beck, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, no date, p. 160, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3“Christ is born for you and ... his birth is yours, and come to pass for your benefit. For the Gospel teaches that Christ was born for our sake and that he did everything and suffered all things for our sake ... . Christ has a pure, innocent, holy birth. Man has an impure, sinful, damned birth, as David says in Psalm 51[:5] ... . There is simply no remedy for this except through the pure birth of Christ. ... Christ willed to be born so that we might be born in different manner ... . In this manner Christ takes to himself our birth and absorbs it in his birth; he present us with his birth so that we become pure and new in it, as if it were our own, so that every Christian might rejoice in this birth of Christ and glory in it no less than if he, too, like Christ, had been born bodily of Mary.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 52, pp. 14, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4**Isaiah 6:5**, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5**St. Luke 2:10-13**. The last verse, verse 13, appears in the liturgy as the **Gloria in Excelsis** (Glory in the Highest), *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 6**St. Luke 2:10-11.** [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7**Joshua 5:13-15.** [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8**Exodus 3:2-5**. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9“Jesus appears as God on the pages of the Old Testament. He reveals Himself under such titles as ‘the Angel of the Lord,’ ‘Jehovah,’ ‘Lord,’ etc. Whenever in the Old Testament the name ‘Lord’ occurs, it is pre-eminently not the Father, nor the Holy Spirit, but the Son of God. Ex. 13:21 Moses writes of the Israelites in the wilderness: ‘And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light.’ Who is this ‘Lord’? Ch. 14:19 He is called ‘the Angel of God,’ which is a well-known appellation of Jesus in the Old Testament. Here the Angel of God is directly termed ‘Lord.’ All doubt is removed by Paul (I Cor. 10:3-4): ‘Our fathers did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; *and that Rock was Christ*.’ ... Which person of the Godhead summoned Moses to the summit of Mount Sinai and gave him the two tables of the Law? Again it was the Son of God. The evidence is presented in the Ascension Psalm 68; vv. 7-8, and 17-18. And all doubt is excluded by Heb. 12:18-26, especially v. 24. ... Luther writes: ‘The God who led Israel out of Egypt and through the Red Sea; who went before them in a pillar of a cloud and of fire; who nourished them with bread from heaven and did all the miracles which Moses relates in his books; again, who brought them into the land of Canaan and gave them kings and the priesthood and everything, is this God and none other than Jesus of Nazareth, Mary’s, the Virgin’s, Son, whom we Christians call our God and Lord ... . Again, He it is who on Mountain Sinai gives Moses the Ten Commandments ... Yes, Jesus of Nazareth, who died for us on the cross is the God who says in the First Commandment: “I, the Lord, am thy God.” ... .’ So then, the same God on Sinai and Calvary. What comfort for the believers! Now the flames of Sinai can no longer fill us with terror. Indeed, we daily transgress the holy Law of Sinai, but we break through its condemnation and flee to the Redeemer on Calvary, who Himself fulfilled the Law for us and paid its penalty.” The Rev. Louis E. Roehm, *The Abiding Word*, Vol. 1, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946, pp. 20, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 10*Wisdom for Today, Volume I, The Biblical History of the Old Testament*, tr. the Rev. Arthur E.

    Beck, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, no date, p. 160, amplification in

    brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 11**Exodus 13;21**. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 12**Exodus 14:19**. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 13**Judges 13:17-18**, **19**, translation from the Hebrew in brackets is mine. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 14John Gerhard, *Seven Christmas Sermons*, tr. the Rev. Elmer M. Hohle, Decatur, IL: The Johann Gerhard Institute, first edition, November 1996, pp. 72, 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 15**Isaiah 9:6**. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 16**Galatians 4:4-6**. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 17“Yet hearts must be buoyed up and strengthened against this way of the cross. For we have the Word and the promise. Therefore the glory that has been promised is sure to follow. And meanwhile the church lives and is preserved by faith, which concludes firmly that GOD does not lie. And it learns this wonderful wisdom which is hidden from the flesh and reason, namely, that God is wonderful in His saints (Ps. 68:35) and that His counsels are wonderful. This is also why our Lord and Leader Jesus Christ has His name and is called WONDERFUL in Is. 9:6.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 5, p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. 18John Gerhard, *Seven Christmas Sermons*, tr. the Rev. Elmer M. Hohle, Decatur, IL: The Johann Gerhard Institute, first edition, November 1996, pp. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. 19**St. Luke 2:10-13**. The last verse, verse 13, appears in the liturgy as the **Gloria in Excelsis** (Glory in the Highest), *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. 20**Romans 1:16-17**. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. 21**St. Luke 2:10-13**. The last verse, verse 13, appears in the liturgy as the **Gloria in Excelsis** (Glory in the Highest), *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. 22*The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)