**The Festival of Christmas,**

25 December 2021.

 *Concordia Lutheran Mission,*

Terrebonne, Oregon.

**“Heavenly Preaching is the Gospel.”**

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

**St. Luke 2:13.**

**Introduction**.

 What does heavenly preaching sound like? Actually, we are very familiar with it already because we sing the “Gloria in Excelsis [glory in the highest]” every Sunday during the Service. This “Gloria in Excelsis” is the preaching of the Gospel by God’s Heavenly Hosts to the shepherds on the night of Jesus’ Birth.

 God’s Glory is His Mercy in the Free Forgiveness of all sins for Christ’s Sake and, thereby, Peace and Good Will Toward all men. God’s Glory is, as the Heavenly Hosts say, in the Highest, that is the Heights of Heaven, in the Very Heart of the Holy Trinity, convincing us that God, indeed, forgives and for us at all times.

 The “Gloria in Excelsis” is heavenly preaching on earth heard on Christmas 2000 years ago that we sing and hear every Sunday and on Festivals like Christmas in Church in the “Gloria in Excelsis”.

**I. The Captain of the Heavenly Hosts Saves Men from their Sins by His Passion.**

**A. Jesus is the Captain of the Heavenly Hosts.**

But who and what are these heavenly hosts? These heavenly hosts are the armies of angels God Himself marshals for the service of His Kingdom, including the service of men, and His Glory. The Greek word St. Luke uses is *stratia*, which means army. We get words like “strategy” and “strategic” from this Greek word.

 Considering that heavenly armies appeared at Jesus’ Birth one might reasonably conclude that was a reason why the shepherds were “sore afraid”. These armies had defeated Israel’s enemies throughout his history, including Pharaoh. The shepherds could very well feel like enemies because they are sinners and the angels are holy. When juxtaposed against holiness, men dissolve because they are unholy, holiness acting like a solvent to unholiness. Moreover, the shepherds were not only unholiness juxtaposed to heavenly holiness, but they were juxtaposed to a power of great multitudes of armies that could easily slay them as they had slain Israel’s enemies throughout history.

The Commander and the Captain of the Lord’s heavenly armies (hosts) is none other than the Son of God[[1]](#footnote-1)1, the Angel of the Lord who led Israel out of Egypt and protected Israel. In the **Book of Joshua** we read:

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 is sword drawn in 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 LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his 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, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot, for the place whereon thou standest is holy.[[2]](#footnote-2)2 And Joshua did so.[[3]](#footnote-3)3

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.[[4]](#footnote-4)4 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.[[5]](#footnote-5)5

 Jesus is the Captain of the Heavenly Armies.

**B. The Captain of the Heavenly Armies Saves men from sin by His Passion**.

 Where, however, was the Captain of the Lord’s Heavenly Armies that Christmas night when the Heavenly Armies appeared to the shepherds? The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts was lying in the Manger in Bethlehem. The Evangelist St. Luke writes:

Then said Mary unto the angel, how shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall com upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.[[6]](#footnote-6)6

 Just as the Captain of the Lord’s Armies (Hosts) was ever vigilant in watching over and protecting Israel, so He was not taking it easy lying in a manger but was busy effecting our salvation from sin and the salvation of all men. From His conception, birth, and, indeed, Jesus’ entire life He was busy fulfilling our obligations under the Law. 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.[[7]](#footnote-7)7

Even from the womb Jesus tells us He was busily worshiping God and fulfilling the First Commandment for us and for all men. David records Jesus’ words in **Psalm 22:10**:

I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou *art* my God from my mother’s belly.[[8]](#footnote-8)8

Luther writes of Christ enjoying a pure conception and birth for us and for all men:

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.[[9]](#footnote-9)9

 Finally, Christ paid the price for our sinful conception, birth, and sinful lives, by His Suffering and Death on the Cross. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.1[[10]](#footnote-10)0

The world crucified the “Lord of glory”, the Captain of the Lord Hosts. How dreadful! Yet this came about because the Captain of the Lord’s Armies had already determined from eternity to die at that precise moment on Good Friday for the sins of all men. Even though men sought to adorn Christ’s death for them and all men with the garland of murder, nevertheless, Christ has already determined to die on Good Friday to Atone for the sins of His murderers and, indeed, of all men. The Apostle St. John records Jesus’ words:

No man taketh it [My Life] from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received o my Father.1[[11]](#footnote-11)1

Because Jesus is the Lord of Glory and the Captain of the Lord’s Heavenly Armies, death could not hold Him of Almighty power but was rather vanquished for us by Him. The Apostle St. Peter states in His Pentecost sermon:

Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.1[[12]](#footnote-12)2

 The Blessed Work of Christ’s Passion takes us right into the very Heart of God the Holy Trinity. The angelic choir sang “Glory to God in the Highest”. God’s Glory is to forgive sins and save. This Glory resides in the very Heights of Heaven, nothing higher. Of such Glorious Height and Depth is our Salvation that it reaches to the very Heights of Heaven and into the innermost Heart of God. Luther writes:

But now bestir yourself to the end: first, not to behold Christ's sufferings any longer; for they have already done their work and terrified you; but press through all difficulties and behold his friendly heart, how full of love it is toward you, which love constrained him to bear the heavy load of your conscience and your sin. Thus will your heart be loving and sweet toward him, and the assurance of your faith be strengthened. Then ascend higher through the heart of Christ to the heart of God, and see that Christ would not have been able to love you if God had not willed it in eternal love, to which Christ is obedient in his love toward you; there you will find the divine, good father heart, and, as Christ says, be thus drawn to the Father through Christ. Then will you understand the saying of Christ in Jn 3, 16: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,” etc. That means to know God aright, if we apprehend him not by his power and wisdom, which terrify us, but by his goodness and love, there our faith and confidence can then stand unmovable and man is truly thus born anew in God.1[[13]](#footnote-13)3

 The Captain of the Lord’s Armies (Hosts) saved men from their sins by His Passion.

**II. The Captain of the Lord’s Heavenly Armies (Hosts) Saves Men from sin by the Gospel.**

**A. The Captain of the Lord’s Heavenly Armies sent the Armies to Preach the Gospel to the Shepherds.**

 In addition to effecting the salvation of all men, the Babe in the Manger also was busy sending the angels to preach the Gospel to the shepherds. *The Captain of the Lord’s Heavenly Armies (Hosts) ordered them to sheath their swords and Preach not wrath and condemnation for sin but rather the Good News of the Forgiveness of sins, the Gospel*. The Evangelist St. Luke writes:

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[[14]](#footnote-14)4

**B. The Captain of the Lord’s Heavenly Armies (Hosts) saves men from sin through the Gospel.**

Just as the Captain of the Lord’s Armies (Hosts) sent the shepherds the Greatest Christmas Present, the Gospel, so today, 2000 Christmases later, He continues send to us and to all men the Greatest Christmas Present ever, the Saving Gospel. The Apostle St. Matthew writes:

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.1[[15]](#footnote-15)5

**Conclusion**.

 The Saving Gospel takes us right into the Very Heights of Heaven and the Heart of God because it is God’s “glory in the highest”. Our Salvation is certain because it resides in the Heights of Heaven and in the Heart of God.

 With the glorious “Glory in Excelcis” God brings His Gracious Heaven to earth to save sinners with the Great Christmas Gift of the Gospel and take them up unto Himself forever as did He on the first Christmas for the shepherds for all men on Christmas today unto the end of the age.

 ***Amen.***

1. 1“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And 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.” **I Corinthians 10:1-4**. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2Compare **Exodus 3**:5: “And [the Angel of the Lord] said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy ground.” Amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3**Joshua 5:13-15** [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4“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-4)
5. 5*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-5)
6. 6**St. Luke 1:34-35**. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7**Galatians 4:4-5**. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8**Psalm 22:10**. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9Marin Luther*, Luther’s Works*, Vol. 52, pp. 14, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 10**I Corinthians 2:7-8**. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 11**St. John10:18**. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 12**Acts 2:24**. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 13Martin Luther, *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. 1.2, p. 190, underscore added. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 14**St. Luke 2:** [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 15**St. Mark 16:15**. “As my *Prophet*, He *revealed Himself* by word and deed, and *by the preaching of the Gospel* still *reveals Himself* as the Son of god and the *Redeemer* of the world.” *The Small Catechism*, p. 107, question 132. A. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)