**The Festival of Christmas Eve,**

24 December 2022,

 *Concordia Lutheran Mission,*

 Terrebonne, Oregon.

**“The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts (Armies) Lying in the Manger Commands His Hosts**

**to Preach the Saving Gospel to Men.”**

And the angel said unto them unto them, Fear not:

for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

**St. Luke 2:10**.

**Introduction**.

 Why would the shepherds fear the appearance of the angel of the Lord? The shepherds feared greatly the appearance of the angel because with the angel came the Lord’s glory. The Lord’s glory is holy and the shepherds are not holy. Unholiness cannot bear the presence of holiness but must flee in fear and dread.

 The angel, however, preached the Holiness of the Gospel to the shepherds when he said, “Fear not.” In other words, the judgment that should befall you because of your unholiness will not come to pass but rather the favorable judgment of Gospel, namely, forgiveness of sins and salvation.

 The judgment condemning them doesn’t come about but rather favorable judgment for sinners because the Captain of the Lord’s Hosts (Armies[[1]](#footnote-1)1) who was lying in the manger in Bethlehem, Jesus of Nazareth, told them to sheath their swords and preach the Gospel of peace, good will toward sinners. For the Captain of the Lord’s Hosts (Armies) would Atone for the sins of all men and bring peace and good will from God for all men by His Passion.

 The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts (Armies) is the Babe lying in the manger in Bethlehem marshaling for powers of heaven to save men from their sins.

**I. The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts (Armies) Saves Men from their Sins.**

**A. The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts (Armies) lies in the Manger in Bethlehem.**

It is quite understandable the shepherds were “sore afraid” at the appearance of the angel because the angel was a member of the Lord’s Hosts, namely, the Lord’s Armies. The Heavenly Armies have an unblemished record of defeating every and all opponents. Who would not fear the armies of the Lord? The armies of the Lord had laid waste to all enemies of the Gospel encountered in the history of Israel, including the great world power Egypt. Moses writes:

And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night.[[2]](#footnote-2)2

This same Lord liberated Israel from the great world power Egypt and crushed the Egyptian armies at the Red Sea. This same Lord defeated other enemies of the saving Gospel, e.g., the city of Jericho in Joshua’s day. Joshua writes:

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 word drawn in his hand: and Joshua went 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 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.[[3]](#footnote-3)3 And Joshua did so.[[4]](#footnote-4)4

The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes of this remarkable event:

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

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.[[6]](#footnote-6)6

 For good cause the shepherds were “sore afraid” because these Heavenly Armies were holy and they were not. Certainly, they would slay them just as they slew other unholy men who opposed the Saving Holiness of the Gospel.

**B. The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts saves men from sin by His Passion.**

But the Captain of the Lord’s Hosts did not press His Almighty Power into the destruction of these shepherds but rather marshaled His Almighty Power into their Salvation. The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts need not become Incarnate, be born of the Virgin St. Mary, and lie in a manger in Bethlehem, order to do that. He could do it by His Almighty Power alone. Rather, the Blessed Fact that He lies humbly in a manger shows that He has come to Press His Almighty Power into the Service of men as a man.

As a man, the Captain of the Lord’s Hosts lived a holy life for all men bereft of holiness because of sin. The Apostle St. Matthew writes:

But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.[[7]](#footnote-7)7

From His Birth, Jesus enjoyed a Holy Life for all men. Luther writes:

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.[[8]](#footnote-8)8

 Jesus’ entire life was geared toward giving all men a holy life before God and, thereby, everlasting life. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

Jerome Kromayer (professor of theology at Leipzig, d. 1670) ... says: “Christ passed through all stages of our life in order that He might thoroughly heal our sinful conception and birth.”[[9]](#footnote-9)9

 Jesus also passed through the stage of death in order that He might deliver us from death. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory? The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law. But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.1[[10]](#footnote-10)0

**II. The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts Saves Men by the Gospel.**

**A. The Captain of the Lord’s Host commands his Heavenly Armies to sheath their swords and Preach the Saving Gospel.**

At His Birth, Jesus, the Commander of the Heavenly Hosts lying in the manger in Bethlehem, commanded His Heavenly Hosts to sheath their swords and preach the Gospel. The Evangelist St. Luke writes:

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 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 Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.1[[11]](#footnote-11)1

In this Preaching of the Heavenly Hosts was a holiness that did not cause unholy men to shrink from and flee from God but rather a holiness that dispelled fear and saved. That Holiness is the Holiness of the Gospel. “Fear not.” In other words, your sins are Absolved by the Captain of the Lord’s Hosts Himself and your are saved and gain life everlasting. You have nothing to fear anymore.

 The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts lying in the manger in Bethlehem commands His Heavenly Armies to sheath their swords and Preach the peace and good will toward men of the Gospel, and, thereby, save and give life everlasting.

**B. The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts continues to Preach the Gospel and save to this day.**

The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts continues to this day to Preach the Peace and Salvation to all men, as the prophets said He would. The Prophet Zechariah writes:

And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off; and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion *shall be* from sea *even* to sea, and from the river *even* to the ends of the earth.1[[12]](#footnote-12)2

Luther writes:

*And he shall teach peace to the Gentiles.* It is for this reason that He will need neither chariot, nor horse, nor bow, nor battle. For He will be a “Prince of Peace,” as Is. 9:6 also says; and this peace is to be not only among the Jews, of whom only a few will accept it, but also among the Gentiles. Therefore His rule will consist in the Word or in speech, because He says here that He will speak, or teach, peace to the Gentiles.1[[13]](#footnote-13)3

**Conclusion**.

 The Captain of the Lord’s Hosts is the Babe lying in the manger in Bethlehem marshaling powers of heaven to save men from their sins through His Passion.

 To this day He still marshals the power of heaven to save men and give life everlasting through the Preaching of the Gospel, of Peace on earth and Good Will toward men.

  ***Amen.***

1. **1Hosts means “army”. The Greek in St. Luke’s Christmas story reads, “*stratias* [armies] *ouraniou* [of heaven]”.**  [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2**Exodus 13:21**. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3Compare **Exodus 3:5**: “And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feett, for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy ground.” [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4**Joshua 5:13-15**. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5“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-5)
6. 6*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-6)
7. 7**St. Matthew 1:20**. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8Marin Luther*, Luther’s Works*, Vol. 52, pp. 14, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 306. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 10**I Corinthians 15:54**, **55-57**. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 11**St. Luke 2:** [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 12**Zechariah 9:19**. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 13Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 20, pp. 289, 290. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)