

Luke 2.14: THE SONG OF THE ANGELS - GLORIA

Chelmsford Christmas Day 25/12/2008

1. THERE WAS JOY IN THE STABLE

Mothers - do you remember how you felt when your first child was born?
Did you say, "Oh no - not months ahead of dirty nappies to change"?
Of course, not - you felt absolutely elated!
The fact that the pregnancy was perhaps difficult was neither here nor there.
You had a baby, and that was all that mattered.

Fathers - do you remember how you felt when you first became a father?
Did you say, "Oh no - not another mouth to feed!"?
Of course not - you too were over the moon with joy.
For you too this was such a wonderfully special occasion.
Somehow the fact that a baby is a "*loud noise at one end, and has no sense of responsibility at the other end*", was neither here nor there.

Likewise when Jesus was born, I'm sure that **Mary & Joseph were over-joyed**.
True, the circumstances surrounding the birth were not the easiest
Jesus was not born into a germ-free, white-washed, disinfectant-smelling labour room -
rather into a mucky smelly cow-shed.
But at the end of the day the surroundings were immaterial - **mother and baby were well**. And in the days before the rise of modern medical science this was a real blessing.
Yes, it is surely no exaggeration to say that on that first Christmas day there was great **joy in the stable**.

2. THERE WAS JOY IN HEAVEN

Joy wasn't restricted to the stable. There was joy beyond in heaven
Luke in his account of the nativity writes: "**Suddenly a great army of heaven's angels appeared...singing praises to God: 'Glory to God in the highest heaven'**" (vv13,14a). Yes, the angels too could not contain themselves for joy.

I'm told that at the time of Jesus, when a birth was expected, friends and local musicians would come to the house: when the birth was announced,

- if it was a boy, the musicians would break into music and song - there were congratulations all round - the birth of a boy was always cause of much rejoicing
- if it was a girl, then the musicians would go away silently - the birth of a daughter was also an occasion for much regret,.

Those were the day when male chauvinistic piggery really flourished.

But when Jesus was born, there were no friends to make music or to burst into song.
For Mary and Joseph were far away from home and from friends.
But that night heaven made up for their loss: the angels sang: "**Glory to God**".
What's more, it wasn't just a small group of angels – "**a great army of heaven's angels**": not just 100s, but 1000s of angels.
What's more, they didn't just give a one-off shout of praise.

They put on a full concert performance – they sang ‘gloria’ after ‘gloria’ after ‘gloria’.
What an incredible experience this must have been.
The angelic choir that night would have made even the most rousing rendition of the Hallelujah chorus seem extraordinarily tame.
The shepherds must have been quite overwhelmed.

3. LET THERE BE JOY IN YOUR HEART

But there was more to the message of the angels than the Gloria. For the angels went on to declare: **“Peace on earth to those with whom he is well pleased”**

So reads the GNB - & with minor variations so too do all the modern versions of the Bible.

- NIV: **"and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests"**
- NRSV: **"and on earth peace among those whom he favours"**
- REB: **"and peace to all in whom he delights"**

The fact is that the old AV translation - **"Peace to men of goodwill"** - is misleading. The reference is not in the first place to Rotary or to Round Table, but to God. The good will being exercised is not by us, but by God. Peace is not offered to those who are filled with goodwill toward their fellow-men, but rather by a God who is filled with goodwill toward all.

Eugene Peterson's version in *The Message* is therefore misleading: the angels did not say: **“peace to all men and women who please him”** – but rather **“peace to all”** because in spite of the mess we have made of this world, God delights in the men and women whom he has created.

At that first Christmas God wanted to bless us all. God even wanted to bless shepherds – shepherds who were renowned for their dishonesty – shepherds who because of their job very rarely darkened the door of their local synagogue.
Jesus is good news for all.

The song of the angels needs to be tied in closely with the opening message of the arch-angel to the shepherds: **"Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to ALL the people. This very day in David's town your Saviour was born - Christ the Lord"**.

God's love includes us all - for all of us need the Saviour.

“Peace on earth” was the angels' Christmas greeting

The peace they had in mind was not an end to war, but rather the blessings that peace brings. Harmony, prosperity, well-being, joy – life at it's very best.

I.e. God's offer of peace to all is an offer of *life* to all - it is an offer of *salvation* to all.

"Peace on earth to all those whom God favours"

If we are honest with ourselves, *none of us deserve the gift of God's love* in Jesus – the new life he wants to give us.

However many £50 notes we may decide to put in our Christmas offering today, none of us can deserve God's favour. But God directs his favour to all.

Here is cause for joy - here is cause for us to burst out with praise and with the angels sing "**Glory to God in the highest**" - for "*joy the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved*" (Henri Nouwen). Or in the words of another aphorism: '*Joy is peace dancing; peace is joy resting*' (author unknown)

***Yes, there was joy in the stable – and there was joy in heaven.
Let there be joy in your heart today.***