

**Introduction:**

- A. This next moment is not a time for audience participation. Don't say anything. *Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti ... Shhh.* Just leave it alone. Let it hang there in the air. Unresolved. *Illus.:* I read that Mozart's kids would come in late at night and play that on the piano, leaving the last note off like that. Mozart couldn't stand it. He'd have to come downstairs to play the last note.

It was like that in the rarified air of heaven and throughout the polluted hearts on earth for centuries for millennia. *Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti ...* Adam and Eve thrust out of Eden. *sol, la, ti ...* Abraham staring wistfully at the countless stars. *sol, la, ti ...* Moses looking longingly into the Promised Land he would never walk. *sol, la, ti ...* David dreaming of a temple he would never see. *sol, la, ti ...* Isaiah promising from his dark time, “*The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.*” Malachi, the last of the prophets, in his last words, “*for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays.*” *Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti...* Then both heaven and earth waited for 400 years in a kind of tension, a **disquiet**.

- B. Then out of a deep and silent night sky, the resolution: “*I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*” *Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti, do!*
- C. The shepherds, I suspect, were speechless but the angels of heaven could not remain silent, bursting into praise. “*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.’*”

All those angels stepping through the curtain of heaven to sing for that tiny audience of shepherds. **But then again, they weren't just singing for the shepherds.** They were giving "*glory to God in the highest heaven,*" where four mighty and mysterious beings surround the throne of Almighty God, where the 24 white-clad, golden-crowned elders sit in stately splendor. The angels' bright praises mixed with the percussion of the "*flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder*" that come from the throne. They were singing for God himself, high and lifted up. "*Glory to God in the highest heaven!*" The vast choir of angels were the world's first and best carolers. **Now each Christmas, those angels are our praise masters, our lyricists, our worship leaders.** They teach us two wonderful phrases to sing at the birth of Christ.

**I. WE JOIN THE ANGELS IN SINGING "GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST HEAVEN."**

- A. Heaven, of course, has always been filled with high praise for God's glory. God told Job that when he created the world "*the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy*" [38:7]. **Ps. 103** says,

*Praise the Lord, you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
who obey his word.*

*Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts,  
you his servants who do his will.*

But this praise on the night of Jesus' birth expressed the highest, happiest exuberance of heaven.

- B. Let's think about why. Illus.: You've perhaps heard the expression, 'a Gordian knot.' It comes from a Greek legend about a man named Gordius who tied his oxcart to a post with such an intricate, complicated knot that no one could

untie it. Not only was the knot tight, but the ends of the rope were somehow buried in the middle of the knot. The legend also said that whoever would one day untie that knot would rule Asia. **The expression, a Gordian knot, means a problem so intricate and complex that it defies solution.**

God faced a Gordian knot, a seemingly insoluble problem. The loving heart of God yearned to save the people he had created from their sins. But how? In the legend of the Gordian knot, when Alexander the Great came upon the Gordian knot, he simply chopped it with his sword and claimed Asia. **But not even the Almighty God could do that with the knot he faced.** He could not go against his own character. He could not violate his own law. As the righteous Judge of all the earth he could not just forget about sin nor sinners. Plus he had to fulfill all his own intricate, detailed promises of deliverance. So how did he solve the problem?

- C. **God became man.** It was a solution that stunned and thrilled even the highest, holiest, most brilliant beings of glory. I've never forgotten something I read as a young man by **J. I. Packer** in his book, *Knowing God*. He was speaking of how difficult it is for some people to believe in miracles. Then he writes that "*the real difficulty...lies, not in the Good Friday message of atonement, nor in the Easter message of resurrection, but in the Christmas message of incarnation. The really staggering Christian claim is that Jesus of Nazareth was God made man... and that He took humanity without loss of deity, so that Jesus of Nazareth was as truly and fully divine as He was human. ... Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this truth of the incarnation.*" [p.46] **No wonder the angels praised God!**

D. Let me remind you of the impossible knot that God untangled through Jesus, the Messiah and Lord:

1. This world had been man-handled; wrecked, poisoned to its core. **But God re-created this fallen world, beginning with Jesus**, the second Adam, who was both Son of God and Son of Man; populated by redeemed, reborn, immortal citizens of a new heaven and earth. **Glory to God in the highest heaven!**
2. God worked salvation for men and women while they were still active in their sins. He figured out how people who were born natural and incorrigible sinners could be reconciled to him and born again, no longer sinful nor mortal, alive forever with the very breath and Spirit of God. **Glory to God in the highest heaven!**
3. God found a way for one man of infinite value to die as a sufficient substitute for the sins of the world, satisfying of the Almighty Judge. What's more, he found a way for those sinners to be drawn to salvation without violating their free will, even though they are rebels through and through. **Glory to God in the highest heaven!**
4. God found a way to keep all his intricate and specific promises and prophecies of how he would save— promises to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses, to David and all the prophets; and how to fulfill every pictured, symbolic promise of the Old Testament—Passover and Promised Land, manna and wine, rock and temple, Prophet, Priest and King, Lamb and Lion. All in that one man! **Glory to God in the highest heaven!**
5. God found a way to turn the devil's own schemes against him, to be the devil's victim so that he might be the devil's conqueror. **Glory to God in the highest heaven!**

6. And in all this God Almighty served his sinful subjects out of measureless love and mercy so that we are not only forgiven but adopted, clothed in garments of praise, and crowned with love and compassion. Incredibly, we are friends of God, the bride and co-heirs with Christ, the temples of the Holy Spirit, and the very city of the living God. **Glory to God in the highest heaven!**

E. God thought of all this. He solved all those insoluble problems. But it is not God's genius alone that brings him glory. The highest glory of God is his love. "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.*" What God showed in Bethlehem, that even the angels had never before seen, was how far his tender mercy could reach and how lowly his love knelt to serve sinners. "*Glory to God in the highest heaven.*"

## II. WE JOIN THE ANGELS IN SINGING "ON EARTH PEACE TO THOSE ON WHOM HIS FAVOR RESTS."

A. We're used to hearing the King James Version of the angels' praise, "*Peace on earth, goodwill toward men,*" which isn't what Luke wrote. It is almost always used in the context of a wish for world peace at Christmas, or as an admonition to us all to get along, to not be Scrooges. But the angels weren't singing for world peace. They were praising God for what he accomplished in the birth of Jesus—for the declaration of peace between God and man. Jesus didn't come so that we'd all get along. **He came to reconcile us to God his Father.** He came calling people to repent so that we might receive God's free gift of the forgiveness of sin. That's the peace the angels sang about. That's the reconciliation that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, made possible.

- B. They tell people near death to “make their peace with God.” But the angels praised God because he made peace with us. **Titus 3:3-7** describes what Jesus did for us:

*At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.*

But then the angels sang, “on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” So Paul continues:

***But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.***

**That is the peace that unloosed the praises of the angels.**

- C. We read this newer translation, “*on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests,*” and we kind of wish we could go back to “*peace on earth, goodwill to men,*” because that doesn’t feel like it excludes anyone. “*Those on whom his favor rests*” certainly suggests some are left out—those on whom his favor *doesn’t* rest. I’ve shared with you in the past about the time my niece, an author, was ambushed on a national radio show when the interviewer said, “*A guy comes up to you on the street and says. ‘I don’t believe in Jesus. Am I going to hell?’ What do you say?’*” She was caught off guard, but dealt with it humbly and graciously. I had time to think about it and came up with this answer:

*“Would you like to avoid hell? Because God loves you so much that he sent his only Son, Jesus, so you don’t have to face hell. You can have eternal life instead. But if*

*you're asking if you can continue life ignoring God's love and the Savior he provided for you and still avoid hell, how would that be possible? If you don't reject the free gift God sacrificed to save you what more can he do?"*

- D. The thing is, though, that actually this caveat of God—  
"peace to those on whom his favor rests"—is not narrow at all, but vast. There is no one who is not welcome to the peace of God. There are no sins so terrible that God will not forgive for Jesus' sake. There is no country or language where God's Peacemaker, Jesus, refuses to go. In John's *Revelation* of the end of time he saw, "*there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb*" Rev. 7:9. That's the picture of "*Those on whom God favor rests!*"

God commands us to come, invites us to come, pleads and waits for us to come. Jesus said there is rejoicing among the angels of heaven when *one* sinner repents. ***Like your own Christmas!*** Nothing stands in our way but our pride or disinterest. Nothing is required of us but our repentance and faith. The last words of the Bible are, "*Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.*"

Illus.: Jerome, a priest and scholar, who died in 347 AD, translated the Bible from Greek to Latin. Near the end of his life, Jerome was living near Bethlehem translating some of the Bible when he had a dream. In his dream, the Christ child appeared to him. He was so overwhelmed by the appearance of the Christ child that he felt he had to give him something. So he got some money and offered it, saying, "*Here! This is yours.*"

But the Christ child said, "*I don't want it.*"

Jerome brought some more possessions.

The Christ child said, *“I don’t want them either.”*

Jerome said, *“If there is anything in the world that I can give you, tell me what it is. Tell me! What do you want? What do you want me to give you?”*

In his dream, the Christ child looked at him and said this: *“Give me your sin! That’s what I came for.”* [#3216]