

To the only wise God be glory for evermore

Luke 2:14, Romans 16:25-27

A Sermon for the Fourth Sunday of Advent

What makes Christmas? First of all, there are the things we commonly do, the traditions, made up of colors like red and green, silver and gold that glitter and shine, and call to mind what is precious. There are also lights and candles and tinsel that sparkle and twinkle. There are special foods and desserts. There is the great music of Christmas, and, of course, the presents, which makes everything mysterious and exciting. It's a time when families get together as the older generations connect with the younger ones as they together help make Christmas what it is.

Most of all, it's that story, that old, old story of Jesus and his love. We read that in Luke, but it doesn't start there. It starts way back at the beginning when God created the world and it went wrong. There was sin and death that were not planned. That was not the way it was supposed to be. God then planned to do something about it. He started out with Noah, then Abraham, then David, the great king with whom God would begin to establish that rule again.

Finally in the fullness of time he sent his own Son. He sent his Son this way, not that that was the whole story, because it continues. As we look at the Christmas story as told in Luke 2, we see the focus of the text is not really on the manger but on the angels. In Luke 2:14 the angels sing: "Glory to God in the highest!" It says "a multitude." How many is that? How big is the universe? The distance between the Earth and edge of the observable universe in any given direction is about 46.5 billion light years. The observable universe is thus a sphere of about 93 billion light years. If there is an angel for every mile, the multitude of angels would be more than an octillion (a 1 followed by 27 zeros), more than a nonillion, more than a decillion (a 1 followed by 33 zeros). Think of that multitude of angels singing "Glooorrriyy!" - Glory meaning power and awe and what is really important.

What is this glory? There is a painting by Salvador Dalí which has the formal title, St. John of the Cross, but the common name for it is "God's point of view." Because the way that Dalí is imagining it is looking down from heaven with God's eyes at what the earth is like. The Lord sees the earth through his Son on the cross. This is what the angels saw. Why did they sing "Glory to God in the highest!"? It is as if they were saying: "Look at how the Lord is solving the problem!" Even they never could have

imagined God sending his own Son to take care of sin and death. "Glory to God in the highest!"

What is it about? In the Gospel of John, which frequently talks about glory, at the end of Jesus' ministry it says in 12:27-28: "Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify thy name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

The glory of God is what God has done by taking care of sin and death. When it says in John 1:14: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father," this is what it is talking about.

We commonly sing: "Hallelujah!" That is a Hebrew sentence saying: "Let us praise the Lord!" And when we say "Amen," that is another Hebrew sentence saying: "It is true." And when we think of the great choruses in Handel's Messiah singing: "Hallelujah! For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever. King of kings, and Lord of lords, Hallelujah!" – we then join in with them for what the Lord has done. He has shown himself to be Lord of lords and King of kings, and everything is different because of what he has done by sending his Son to be born among us, to die and rise again. This is what we celebrate at Christmas time. Amen