

Glory to God in the Lowest
A Christmas Meditation by the Rev. Scott Herr
First Presbyterian, New Canaan, CT – December 24, 2022

Please Read:
Luke 2:14

Every year I enjoy Vince Guaraldi's jazz piano soundtrack from *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, the classic holiday cartoon. I can't remember how old I was when we first watched this children's TV classic, but I've enjoyed seeing it almost every year since. Charlie Brown got so frustrated because no one remembered the true meaning of Christmas. Do you remember at the climax of the show, he cries out in frustration, "Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?" And then very quietly his friend Linus walks out on stage and recites from Luke chapter 2: "And the angel said unto them, Fear not . . . for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord."

The text continues "And suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors!" I've always wondered about that phrase. What about *glory to God* in the places, people, situations and relationships where we really live?

I'm thinking about those suffering from war in Ukraine. They're having a white Christmas in Kyiv, but without electricity and water. I'm thinking about those millions impacted by historic floods in Pakistan, the drought in East Africa, or the 100 million-plus displaced persons in our world, or the vulnerable plagued by the tripledemic of COVID, RSV and flu. Gun violence continues to afflict our nation. And many of us here have lost loved ones, some very close to us this year. Some are going through a painful divorce, others just find life depressing right now.... And we ask, what about glory to God in the lowest?

And yet, tonight the angels' surprising news is that God comes to us exactly where we are. That's the message. *Emmanuel*. God with us. All of us. That may seem too inclusive. Universalist, even. But clearly that's what the angel said: "I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people." I don't know if you've ever notice, but everything changes with a little comma. Instead of "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom God is pleased," read, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people, with whom God is pleased."

Yarrow and Carrie Cheney are gifted animators and film makers. Yarrow was running the shop in Paris that worked on *Despicable Me*, *The Lorax* and *Despicable*

Me 2. He also co-directed *The Secret Life of Pets* and directed *The Grinch*. Recently Yarrow animated, and Carrie authored the children's book, *Superworld: Save Noah...* which has the fascinating plot of a comet coming to earth and when it explodes gives everyone superhero powers... except a boy named Noah. Spoiler alert: The surprise ending is that it's Noah, *little old normal nothing special about him Noah*, who will save the world.

Isn't that the plot twist of Christmas? God giving up the divine superpowers to come as an infant to save us? As Rachel Held Evans once put it, the core Christian conviction is that God is with us, plain old ordinary us. God is with us in our fears and in our pain, in our morning sickness and in our ear infections, in our refugee crises and in our endurance of Empire, in smelly barns and unimpressive backwater towns, in the labor pains of a new mother and in the cries of a tiny infant. In all these things, God is with us—and God is for us.¹

Maybe that's what we need to remember this holy night, that God comes to meet us where we really are, even at our lowest, and wants the glory of God's healing love to touch and transform us so we can share that compassion and healing grace with those around us who are not feeling the whole joy-to-the-world-bling-bling-reason-for-the-season-thing ...

It's quiet. Almost goes unnoticed. "How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given." Yes, God imparts to human hearts the blessings of God's heaven. No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin, where *meek souls* will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in."

I joined the special church Christmas party on Thursday. Special Church serves mentally and/or physically impaired people in our community. Well, the party was lovely and I was deeply moved when it came time to tell the story... Everyone received a piece of the nativity scene. Nicky got Mary. Peter got Joseph, James got a Wise Man, etc.

Julia a young woman who was developmentally normal until she was a teenager, contracted a serious disease that has crippled her body and rendered her unable to communicate except with a drooling kind of howl. It's hard for her to sit up straight in her wheelchair and so she looks at you kind of sideways. Julia received an angel, and the story was going along, and then it came to the angels' announcement to the shepherds. Amazingly, *just then* Julia lifted up her angel toward the creche. She

¹ Rachel Held Evans with Jeff Chu, *Wholehearted Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2021), 3–5, 6.

knew exactly what part of the story we were reading, and it was as if she was saying, “Hey, I’m here, and I’m part of this Christmas story, too. This story is for me, too!”

I tried to hide my tears, but it was so beautiful. And I thought, glory to God in the lowest, for sure. Even here, God is with us, reminding all of us, every single one of us that we are not alone, that we are not forgotten, that we are loved.

Friends, maybe you feel you’ve lost your superpowers! Maybe it’s been a tough year. But God, in the mystery of divine wisdom, continues to come just where we are. Into our messiness, complications and vulnerability. Thank God the Christmas story is about God coming into our world, our world sadly fraught with disappointment, death, dislocation and disorientation... And yet, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. The Savior continues to come to us full of grace and truth.

That’s what Christmas is all about: “And the angel said unto them, Fear not . . . for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord.”

In the name of the One who is our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen.