

**Luke 2:13-21**

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 he favors!'

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

**“Gloria’s God”****Rev. Charles Schuster****December 14, 2008**

Angels appear to the shepherds. They said it was a multitude of heavenly hosts. Carl Michaelson, who was one of David’s professors said, “You don’t trust anybody whose theology doesn’t include angels.” Praising God and saying “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will to all,” a heavenly choir, voices on high, praising God, glory to God. The similarity is too great, the parallel too obvious. The heavenly choir, our adult choir, glory to God. Gloria.

I speak from a distant and somewhat uninformed platform, and therefore I speak without apology. A heavenly choir like our choir today, a multitude of heavenly hosts, an assemblage of the dissimilar, a random group producing a collective harmony, a gaggle of geese, a smattering of saints in a field of dreams or a chapel or a sanctuary, doing their best, giving it what for. Wow. If such a choir, singing glory to God and a director, a director, probably a doctor somebody, an affable chap, who just waves his arms, a compelling presence who can stop the noise with a flick a baton, a subtle controller, moves a hand signal in the manner that could activate a high bid at a first-class auction. Or, if given from the dugout in the middle of a baseball game, could cause someone to steal second base or lay down a bunt. The bobbing of the head, the crossing of the eyes, the shooting of a contemptuous gaze, that would motivate or awaken non-singers to a solo sound. Sections in the choir would come in. Sections in the choir would come in, complete with ego and id, and they present themselves with the illusion that each of them is all of it, and if it were the case that some sickness would strike, there would be none of it.

There would be bass singers in the heavenly choir, bullfrog bass singers, like magi, wise men, they come from afar, and afar is a place to which they’ll return. Christmas joy is for the bullfrog basses who have other places to be, whose schedules are interrupted as they were recruited to be part of the heavenly choir, volunteered for the main event by someone in their house, probably a spouse, who suggested it, and so they did, prevailed

upon to be elsewhere because they had become a nuisance at home at Christmas. Bullfrog basses, a bit distracted in their performance, mentally leaving before it's over, arriving after it's supposed to start, a Bronco game to watch, condescending to bring their precious gold, but precious little, myrrh which is of worth to morticians and corpses, and frankincense, some hallucinogenic weed that brings a mellow fellow to the demeanor of a bullfrog bass. You wonder what they're smoking. They came into the concert and they are special, they are a fraternal order. They dress alike, they walk alike, there are these signals they give each other, but they're not all there. Christmas is an interruption to them, Christmas is not real to them, get it on, get it sung, get it over with, the bullfrog basses come in on the sly so as not to be seen by their friends, for they're not quite comfortable being there, shifty eyes, peptic stomach, sing low sweet chariot, they sound like amphibians, they look like swamp dwellers, bullfrog basses in the heavenly choir. Christmas is an interruption for them. Glory to God in the highest. God help us if the whole choir is basses.

Tedious tenors in the choir want to be basses. In fact, before the basses come in, which they come in late, the tenors try to take their chairs so that they can get a better view of the audience. Tedious tenors who would make good innkeepers or record-keepers or money-changers, tedious tenors are picky and negative and a bit difficult to be around. Tedious tenors are critics. They compare this year's performance to last year's performance, and it was always better last year than this, and they seem to remember the head count of the audience, and it was always bigger when the old director led the choir. Tedious tenors have perfect pitch and tone and every note is precise, but sometimes they miss the purpose of the song. Christmas is a disappointment for them. They are obsessed with tedium, possessed with trivia. They know more and more about nothing and think they know everything. Tedious tenors sing their part in a grandiose way. Some day they'll get to be basses, maybe. Some day, they will take over the choir. Some day they will get what's coming to them. Christmas is disappointment. It never quite lives up to its expectations, and so they're disappointed in the day, and they take out their despair on everyone around them, and at the rehearsal the tedious tenors in their high squeaky voices try to tell the director how to read the score, and it almost closes down the choir. God help us if the entire choir is tenors.

Awful altos. Altos are awful singers, they're the ones you try to put where they'll do the least harm. They're the ones that, when top management comes, you give them show money so they won't be around. Christmas for them is a challenge. They never quite measured up, and they feel a little guilty, and they should. Awful altos' main virtue is, they do little harm as long as they sing through their noses and keep it kind of soft. The problem with altos is that they aspire to be sopranos, and they have the capacity for volume, and when they get up in voice, an alto can call a hog to dinner or make a hound dog sing. An alto can round up a herd of sheep, an alto can hurt your ears, an alto can wreck a requiem, and if you have a silent section, it would be good to put them in that. They should move their lips and save their vocal cords. Shepherds make good altos. They mean well, but out away from the town they can sing to the stars, and coyotes bark, and sheep circle in fear. They think they are unworthy, and they are. Christmas for them is a time of guilt. Glory to God, and God help us if the whole choir is altos.

Sopranos.... sopranos, screaming sopranos. Angels? Hah! I think not. They are the stars. In the soprano section of the heavenly chorus, everyone who ever played the Virgin Mary is there. Christmas is performance, and they are performers. Screaming sopranos strut their stuff. Screaming sopranos boast their excellence in a humble way. They know how much of the concert they carry with their voice. Screaming sopranos try to steal the show as their voices soar beyond the level of comfort. Crystal glasses shatter when they sing. Did you ever meet a soprano who ever admitted that she'd missed a note? Did you ever meet a soprano who sang falsetto not fortissimo? And they're pretty sure that if the word ever became song instead of flesh, it would be high-pitched, and they would sing it. Performance, screaming sopranos are on the first row of the choir. They just imagine that their position is because of the excellence of their talent, far above the others. The fact is, the director put them there to keep watch over them, so that he can put a sock in it when they get too loud, and urge the end of their constant bowing to the audience. It's hard for them to be angels, but they're not virgins. God help is if the entire choir is sopranos.

Bullfrog basses, tedious tenors, awful altos, screaming sopranos. Christmas. Christmas is an interruption for some of us, a disappointment for some of us, guilt-producing for some of us, a performance for some of us. What each brings to Christmas will differ. Less-than-perfect angels, less-than-perfect people. But Christmas is telling us, because we're apt to forget it, it matters who we are. It makes a difference what we do. It has consequence how we act. And what gives God glory is when we all can sing together, in some kind of harmonic mix, each important, all together, make it happen, it's beautiful. The heavenly host will sing it, the choir will repeat it. Us earthbound non-singers will know it. Christmas comes in ten days. Christmas is not about the worship of the Christ child, it's about the birth of the Christ child, and through that birth, it's about glory to God, peace, good will to all people. To all people. Tenors, believers, doubters, altos, seekers, theists, basses, finders, non-theists, sopranos, faithful, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims. Good will to all people, all people together in the chorus, making harmony.

That's what makes God happy. That's what brings glory to God, or God to glory. Glory to God, it's all of us together, making harmony, beautiful music. Just listen to our choir, and to our orchestra. They know how to do it.