

The Divine Service: Gloria in Excelsis

4th–11th C.

P Glory be to God on High,

Luke 2:14; John 1:29

C and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee.

we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee, for Thy great glory.

O Lord God, heav'nly King, God the Father Almighty.

O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ;

O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,

that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.

Thou that takest away the sin of the world, receive our prayer.

Thou that sittest at the right hand of God the Father, have mercy upon us.

For Thou only art holy; Thou only art the Lord.

Thou only, O Christ, with the Holy Ghost,

art most high in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

The Gloria in Excelsis (Latin for “Glory on High”) is the second of the Divine Service’s five ordinaries, sung each Sunday except for penitential seasons of Advent and Lent, except that it is sung on Maundy Thursday. The Gloria breaks out right on the heels of the Kyrie. Faith glorifies God for the mercy asked for, even before the eyes see that it has been granted (compare Luke 17:11–19). This is fitting, for although we have not yet seen “all things in subjection,” we have seen *him* (Heb 1:1–3; 2:7–13).

As in the Sanctus, song from above is joined to song from below, and we worship “with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven.” Angels began the Gloria at Christmas (Luke 2:14), when the only-begotten Son, the image of the Father (John 14:1–14), was born of Mary, “for us men and for our salvation.” Why is it fitting here to sing the song announcing Christ’s presence on earth to save?

The Church has from ancient times continued the song, adding a Trinitarian hymn of praise. We praise, bless, worship, glorify, and give thanks to God for his great glory, beginning with the Father Almighty, heavenly King, and concluding with the Holy Ghost. But the bulk of the hymn focuses on Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). What great glory is the hymn talking about, principally? (John 1:14–18; 5:41–44; 12:20–32) How does the way the Gloria continues fit with the way the angels began the Gloria long ago? (To what, on earth, does the second part of their little song connect God’s heavenly glory?)

The Kyrie’s prayer for mercy, for our prayers to be answered, echoes through this glorious song, for it is God’s glory to have mercy for Christ’s sake. He suffered to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29). He, exalted, sits at the right hand of God (Mark 12:35–37; 14:61–62; 16:19). He alone is holy; he alone is the Lord. And—glory be to God on high—he comes to us!