

Bishop Jaime Soto – Christmas Homily,
December 25, 2012

Psalm 80 repeats a consistent theme of the Old Testament. More than a theme, it is the constant ache of the chosen people and all people of good will. The repeated refrain of the psalm is: “O God of hosts, restore us; let us see your face and we shall be saved.” More than peace, more than justice, more than liberation from one’s enemies, more than a good harvest and prosperity, salvation was believed to be found in seeing and knowing the invisible God. “Let us see your face and we shall be saved.” This ancient desire of the heart recognized that knowing God would bring all else. To know God is to know peace. To see God is to be free. To know the Almighty is to receive a great bounty. To be with one’s creator is to have your heart’s every desire.

So to shepherds keeping night watch over their sheep did the angel go with the good news. The angel tells them that the Savior has been born. At long last, answering the ancient ache of the human heart, the angel urged them to hurry to Bethlehem. There they would find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Having given this wondrous tidings to the humble shepherds, all of heaven overflows with song singing those words we have made our own this night, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

The celestial choir sang about God’s glory being revealed. This glory would bring peace to those on whom God’s favor rests. To know God’s glory in the humble person of Jesus and to know the peace he would bring is for those upon whom God’s favor smiles.

Consider this. In the beginning chapters of the gospel of Luke, an angel messenger is sent to three people. First, the angel comes to Zachariah as he is fulfilling his priestly duties in the temple. The angel announced to Zachariah the birth of John the Baptist. Second, the angel comes to the young Virgin Mary in Nazareth. The archangel Gabriel announces to her that she would give birth to Emmanuel, the Savior of his people. Finally, the angel comes to the shepherds. This signals to us, that this divine visitation is a significant moment in the salvation story.

Each of these visitations was personal. God came to them personally. He came close to them. God came so they would not only know who he was and what he was doing. He came so that they might share in the saving mission. They were not spectators. They, including the Shepherds, would take their part. Mary would bring to birth the “Word made flesh”. The shepherds were not minor players in the sacred saga. The glorious news was brought to them so they could see the face of God and be saved. They would know the glory of God and bring that amazing glory to others so that they too might be saved by the Savior huddled in the soft, tender arms of His mother Mary. The angelic choir sang of what they already knew, the glory of God and the peace this glory brought to those to whom it was revealed. What the heavens sang that night found its way into the heart and voice of the shepherds as they timidly approached the holy child with His mother Mary.

May that saving song find its way into our hearts as well. Know that God’s angels have brought to you and yours the gift of faith so that like those shepherds you might come to hear and see the face of God that saves us. God’s favor has rested upon you so that you might rest in his peace. The Lord Jesus comes to you so that through you his glory might be known to others. Do not hesitate at what faith urges all of us to do. As the angel said to Mary and to the shepherds long ago, “Do not be afraid”. Fear has no place around the manger scene. Only faith. The Shepherds had no idea of the glory they would see or the glory they would bring to others. Do not hinder what faith compels. With the popular Christmas carol may we encourage one another, “Do you hear what I hear? ... Do you see what I see?” In the light of His face, we all shall be saved.