

## Understanding the Mass: The Gloria

The “Gloria” is an exhilarating prayer placed just before the opening collect or presidential prayer. The “Gloria” is such an exciting prayer that it is often missed in Advent and Lent. Historically, “*the Gloria is known as the ‘greater doxology.’ Some call it the ‘Angelic Hymn’ since its first words are those of the angels at Bethlehem.*”<sup>1</sup>

Remember the words from St. Luke’s Gospel. They read,

*Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel beheld, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.”*

*And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.*

*(Luke 2:8-14)*



In his book, “The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass,” Lawrence Johnson declares that the Gloria,

*...has come down to us from the treasury of early Christian hymns modeled on the psalms and canticles of the Bible. First found in Greek and Syrian sources, this song of praise was used as an Easter hymn of dawn and gradually found a place at the conclusion of the morning prayer in the east. It entered the west, perhaps by way of Gaul, and by the beginning of the sixth century was already incorporated into the Pope’s Christmas Mass at Rome, and then at Sunday Masses and Feasts of martyrs when the bishop presided. The hymn was used by priests only at the Easter Vigil. By the eleventh century it was sung at all Masses on Sundays and festive occasions. The Gloria is a hymn-anthem containing a series*

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<sup>1</sup> The Mystery of Faith: A Study of the Structural Elements of the Order of the Mass Pg. 21

*of acclamations. The text today mentions all three persons of the Trinity; this Trinitarian characteristic is even more pronounced in some of the hymns early text. Set to simple melodies, the Gloria it was originally a song of the whole assembly. With the development of elaborate musical settings, it came to be chanted by the choir alone. Today the people normally participate in the singing. It may be argued that the 2010 English version of this hymn in the Roman Missal is more faithful than the previous translation in reflecting the hymn's Latin text.*

In his book, “A Biblical Walk through the Mass: Understanding What We Do and Say in the Liturgy,” Edward Sri emphasizes the Trinitarian pattern of the prayer. He writes, “beginning with praise of the Father, who is addressed as ‘God, almighty Father’ and ‘heavenly King—two common biblical titles for God.”<sup>2</sup> He notes several scriptures for God as Father. They include “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said: I am God the Almighty. Walk in my presence and be blameless.” (Gen 17:1), “Then God spoke to Moses, and said to him: I am the Lord. As God the Almighty I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but by my name, Lord, I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they were residing as aliens.” (Ex 6:2-4), and “Therefore, come forth from them and be separate,” says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; father to you, and you shall be Almighty” (2 Cor 16-18). called ‘Almighty,’ in Psalm the “Book of Revelation, “living creatures, each of them with and out. Day and night they do not stop exclaiming: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come,’” (Rev. 4:8), We give thanks to you, Lord God almighty, who are and who were. For you have assumed your great power and have established your reign,” (Rev. 11:17) “Great and wonderful are your works, Lord God almighty. Just and true are your



then I will receive you and I will be a sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Moreover, Sri notes that God is 68:14, and “Lord God Almighty,’ in in several places. First, “The four six wings, were covered with eyes inside

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<sup>2</sup> A Biblical Walk through the Mass: Understanding What We Do and Say in the Liturgy Pg. 43

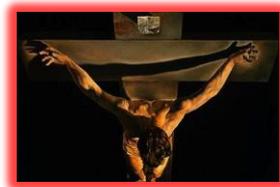
ways, O king of the nations,”(Rev 15:3), and “Then I heard something like the sound of a great multitude or the sound of rushing water or mighty peals of thunder, as they said: “Alleluia! The Lord has established his reign, [our] God, the almighty” (Rev 19:6).<sup>3</sup> In addition Sri emphasizes that the scriptures refer to God the Father as “Heavenly King.” He notes that Psalm 98:6, 99:4, Isaiah 43:15 God the Father is described as king. And “as the King of Israel in (Is 44:6). The King of glory (Ps 24:7-10\_, and even the great King over all gods (Ps. 95:3).”<sup>4</sup>

Ultimately, As the Gloria puts it, we say, “***Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father.***” Hence, God in his essence is described in the Gloria.

Next, comes Jesus, and all he has done for us is expressed in the prayer of the Gloria. We pray and, saying, “***Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ.***”

First and foremost Jesus is Lord. St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians contains an ancient Christian hymn proclaiming that,

*Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, something to be grasped. the form of a slave, found human in becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee*




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<sup>3</sup> Ibid Pg. 43

<sup>4</sup> Ibid pg. 43

*should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:5-11).*

This “next part of the Gloria, in a sense, tells a story—the story of Christ. Like a three-act play, the Gloria sums up the story of Christ’s saving work moving from 1) his coming, to 2) his redeeming death, to 3) his triumphant resurrection and ascension into heaven.”<sup>5</sup>

Scripturally, “in the first act,” Jesus is identified as the Son of God (***Only Begotten Son***). In John’s Gospel we read, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life, (John 3:16), *But Jesus answered them, “My Father is at work until now, so I am at work.” For this reason the Jews tried all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the Sabbath but he also called God his own father, making himself equal to God,”* (John 5:17-18), and “*The Father and I are one.*” The Jews again picked up rocks to stone him. Jesus answered them, “*I have shown you many good works from my Father. For which of these are you trying to stone me?*” The Jews answered him, “*We are not stoning you for a good work but for blasphemy. You, a man, are making yourself God.*” Jesus answered them, “*Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, “You are gods”’? If it calls them gods to whom the word of God came, and scripture cannot be set aside, can you say that the one whom the Father has consecrated and sent into the world blasphemes because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? If I do not perform my Father’s works, do not believe me; but if I perform them, even if you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may realize [and understand] that the Father is in me and I am in the Father?*” (John 10:30-38). Sri notes that “*these titles echo a dramatic line in the prologue of the fourth gospel that focuses our attention on the incarnation—the mystery in which the Son of God became man.*”<sup>6</sup> Moreover, St. Paul describes Jesus as “*the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was proclaimed to you by us,*” (2 Cor 1:19), and that God “*He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son*” (Col 1:13). Sri adds, that, “*when we address Jesus as ‘only begotten Son,’ we recognize him as not merely as teacher, messenger, or prophet sent from God. We use the rich*

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid Pg. 44

<sup>6</sup> Ibid Pg. 45

*theological language of St. John and join him as praising Jesus as divine Son, the eternal Word, who was made flesh and dwelt among us.”*<sup>7</sup>

*“In the ‘second act,’ the Gloria’s reference to Jesus as **Lamb of God** moves the story forward to Christ’s redemptive mission. It recalls the theme of the Lamb’s victory over sin in death in the Book of Revelation, and the worship of the Lamb by the angels and saints in heaven.”* The book of Revelation reads,

*Then I saw standing in the midst of the throne the four living creatures and the elders, a Lamb that seemed to have been slain. He had seven horns and seven eyes; these are the [seven] spirits of God sent out into the whole world. He came and received the scroll from the right hand of the one who sat on the throne. When he took it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each of the elders held a harp and gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the holy ones. They sang a new hymn: “Worthy are you to receive the scroll and to break open its seals, for you were slain and with your blood you purchased for God those from every tribe and tongue, people and nation. You made them a kingdom and priests for our God, and they will reign on earth.” I looked again and heard the voices of many angels who surrounded the throne and the living creatures and the elders. They were countless in number, and they cried out in a loud voice: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing.” Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe, cry out: “To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever.” The four living creatures answered, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped (Rev 5:6-14).*

Furthermore, when Jesus was testified about in John’s Gospel, John the Baptist

proclaimed, “Behold, the sin of the world” John “these words reveal Jesus as up his life on the cross for our on that first Passover night in



*Lamb of God, who takes away the 1:29). Edward Sri explains that the new Passover Lamb, which offers sins. Just as the lamb was sacrificed Egypt in order to spare Israel from*

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid Pg. 45

death, so Jesus is the new Passover lamb who is sacrificed on Calvary in order to save all humanity from the curse and death caused by sin.”<sup>8</sup>

“Finally, in the ‘third act,’ the *Gloria* reverently leads us to praise Jesus in the unique position of authority he now possesses in heaven.”<sup>9</sup> The Gospel of Matthew reads,

*The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age (Matt 28:16-20).*

The Gospel of Mark reads, “*So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God. But they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the word through accompanying signs*” (Mark 16:19-20). Sri adds, “In the Bible, the right hand is the position of authority (see Ps 110:1; Heb 1:13). In the *Gloria*, we bear witness to Christ’s reign over heaven and earth, his kingdom will have no end (Dn 7:14). And we humbly ask him ‘to receive our prayer’ and ‘have mercy on us.’”<sup>10</sup>

We respond “***For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ.***” “Calling Jesus ‘the most high’ recalls a biblical title for God as the supreme being over all other gods.”<sup>11</sup> The Book of Genesis reads, “*Melchizedek<sup>12</sup>, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was a priest of God Most High. He blessed Abram with these words: “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything (Gen 14:17-20).* In the New Testament

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid Pg. 46

<sup>9</sup> Ibid Pg. 56

<sup>10</sup> Ibid Pg. 46

<sup>11</sup> Ibid Pg. 48

<sup>12</sup> Typologically a figure of Jesus

Hebrews reads, *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help”* (Heb 4:14-16).

We have already discussed Jesus as Lord above with the famous hymn from Philippians. However, Sri emphasized that the title “Lord (*Kyros*) in the Bible is a title for God.”<sup>13</sup> When St. Paul writes, *“Indeed, even though there are so-called gods in heaven and on earth (there are, to be sure, many “gods” and many “lords”), yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things are and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are and through whom we exist.* (1 Cor 8:5-6), He means that Jesus Christ is on the same level with God the Father through whom all things exist. True Disciples of Jesus know that Jesus Christ is Lord and what that means on a basic level.

*“The Gloria concludes with the mention of the Third Person of the Trinity: the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is praised ‘With the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father.’ Thus, the hymn is succinctly culminated with homage paid to the Holy Spirit.”*<sup>14</sup> Remember, it is through the

Holy Spirit, has been at work in Spirit hovered over 1:2), and the Holy conception of Jesus. *her in reply, “The Holy power of the Most High child to be born will be*



especially, in Luke’s Gospel that all of salvation history. The the waters in Creation (Gen Spirit was responsible for the Luke writes, *“And the angel said to Spirit will come upon you, and the will overshadow you. Therefore the called holy, the Son of God”* (Luke

1:35). Hence, the Holy Spirit is given the same praise as God the Father and the Son by all the beings in the heavens as well as all those on earth.

<sup>13</sup> A Biblical Walk through the Mass: Understanding What We Do and Say in the Liturgy Pg. 48

<sup>14</sup> Ibid Pg. 49

In summary, we sing the Gloria because it is an “outburst of joy and praise.” In his book, “What Happens at Mass”, Fr. Jeremy Driscoll O.S.B, explains that “*we are singing now for the same reason the angels sang; namely, that God has sent his Son among us born in our same flesh. Humble and lowly he comes among us , and so, struck with awe at this unexpected shape of the divine plan, as the angels themselves were, we cry out in a hymn to God’s glory.*”<sup>15</sup>

We say “Amen.” We believe. We ratify all the truths we have exclaimed in the Gloria.

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<sup>15</sup> What Happens at Mass Pg. 26



Photo Sources:

Angels and Shepherd's Pg. 1

<https://themasterstable.files.wordpress.com/2008/12/the-angels-song-and-the-shepherds-visit.jpg>

Angels adoring Pg. 2 <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/236x/9e/3d/71/9e3d71def67fee9467d4320f24377289.jpg>

Jesus on Cross Pg. 3

<https://charlestinsley.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/crucifixion.jpg>

J-Bap Pg. 5 <http://boisecathedral.org/media/1/StJohnTheBaptist.jpg>

Trinity Pg. 7 [http://www.trinityiconographers.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/trinity\\_icon-248x300.jpg](http://www.trinityiconographers.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/trinity_icon-248x300.jpg)

