

Glory to God (*Gloria*)

The Roman Missal (2000)

Glory to God in the highest (Latin Gloria in excelsis Deo), 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.

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, with the Holy Spirit,

in the glory of God the Father. Amen.¹

Scripture

The Song of the Angelic Hosts at the Nativity

And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. *And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear.* And the angel said to them, “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased.”* (Latin *gloria in altissimis Deo et in terra pax in hominibus bonae voluntatis*) (Luke 2:8-14)

Tradition

Pope St. Telesphorus Adds the *Gloria* to the Mass (2nd Century)

Telesphorus, born in Greece... decreed... that Mass be celebrated at night on the day of the Lord's birth [25th December]... also that the the hymn of the angels, namely, the

¹ Roman Missal, *The Order of Mass*, no. 8.

“*Gloria in excelsis Deo*,” is to be sung before the sacrifice. He was crowned with martyrdom.²

Pope St. Symmachus Decrees that the *Gloria* Be Sung Every Sunday (5th-6th Century)

Symmachus [498-514], born in Sardica [...] decreed that on every Lord’s Day or birthday of the martyrs the *Gloria in excelsis* hymn be sung.³

The Omission of the *Gloria* During Advent and Lent (9th Century)

Amalar of Metz (9th Century): I observed the omission of the *Gloria in excelsis Deo* in the days of the Lord’s Advent... When the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*... is omitted for a time, it is taken up much more avidly when it is restored, and it shines more brightly in the spirits of the devout, when it is recovered from the rust. *Like a new song, the Gloria in excelsis Deo is restored on the night of the Lord’s Nativity, that we may remember all the more that this very song was first celebrated with the hymns of the angels at that time.*⁴

Mystery

William Durandus on the *Gloria* and the Incarnation (13th Century)

William Durandus (13th Century): The *Gloria in excelsis Deo*... was heard being sung by the angels, as one reads in the Gospel of St. Luke [Luke 2:14]. This hymn of angels bears witness to the nativity of Christ, in relation to time... *The priest, at first, sings it alone... The choir, which responds with singing, represents the multitude of which the Gospel speaks, ‘suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest...’ [Luke 2:13-14]... A God-man is born, because peace is restored between God and man... So we sing this hymn, because men worship on earth He who the angels worship in heaven.*⁵

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. According to tradition, which Pope added the *Gloria* to the Mass? Why is it significant that this Pope in particular made this alteration?

² *Liber Pontificalis* 9.1-2. In Lawrence J. Johnson, ed., *Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources* (4 vols.; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2009), 4:54. The last line is from Davis, *The Book of the Pontiffs*, 4.

³ *Liber Pontificalis* 53.1. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 4:58.

⁴ Amalar, *On the Liturgy*, 3.40. In Amalar of Metz, *On the Liturgy*, 2:247.

⁵ Durandus, *Rationale of the Divine Offices*, 3.4.1, 2, 3, 5. In Durandus, *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, 79-82.

2. Why is the *Gloria* omitted from the Mass during Advent and Lent?

For Further Reading

1. Joseph Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*. 2 vols.; trans. Francis A. Brunner, C.S.S.R.; repr.; Notre Dame, Ind.: Christian Classics, 2012 [orig. 1951]. 1:333-346.
2. Amalar of Metz. *On the Liturgy: Volume II. Books 3-4*. Translated by Eric Knibbs. Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014. [One of the first Western complete explanations of the Mass ever written. A good example of early medieval allegorical interpretation of the rites and ceremonies of the liturgy.]