

Third Sunday of Easter – April 10, 2016
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Revelation 5:11-14

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12) In a loud voice they were saying: **"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"** 13) **Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"** 14) The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Music is an important part of a child's life. Moms and dads sing their children to sleep with lullabies. Little children love to sing. And in fact singing can be an excellent tool to help children learn – I'm guessing most of us learned our ABC's by singing the "alphabet song". Perhaps some of you learned the books of the Bible with a song – and of course it's a song that taught many of us that we can be sure that Jesus loves us – Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so... Yes Jesus loves me!

The sound of singing and rejoicing over Jesus and his love for us – that's what our text for today contains. Once again our text (just like last week) comes from the visions which John saw while he was in exile on the Island of Patmos. He saw legions of angels surrounding the throne of God. There are thousands upon thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand of them. He also saw some living creatures – he had seen these creatures before. He described them in (Revelation 4:6-8) **In front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 7) The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. 8) Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: " 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,' who was, and is, and is to come."**

It is difficult for us to be absolutely certain about the identity of these creatures. There are those who see some similarities between John's vision and a vision the prophet Ezekiel had. Ezekiel identified the living creatures he saw as cherubim – a rank of angels. There are also some similarities to the seraphim (another rank of angels) that Isaiah saw in a vision. It is possible that the living creatures in John's vision are a particular rank of angels. But, because there are some fairly significant differences between the living creatures John saw and the ones Ezekiel and Isaiah saw there are some who simply suggest that the 4 creatures represent all the living things in God's creation. It really doesn't matter what these creatures are or what they represent. What is important are the actions of these creatures and the praises they offer.

Next to the throne, John saw 24 elders – again these elders had been mentioned previously by John. He had seen them sitting on thrones. While Jesus was still on this earth, he promised his disciples that someday they would be seated on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel. So, it would seem likely that the 12 apostles also called elders in the NT account for 12 of those whom John saw. The other 12 elders seem to represent the 12 tribes of Israel. The 24 elders would represent the believers from the OT and the NT – we would say the church of God.

Once again, the important thing for us to consider is their actions and songs or words of praise. As we focus our attention on these songs:

Let Us Sing With Angels to the Lamb

1. As we praise him here for our forgiveness
2. As we praise him forever in glory

What a joy it is for us as Christians in this world to know that we are not alone. At times, it may seem as if Christians are in the minority in our increasingly godless society and world. However, when we realize that we are linked together with the saints above and the mighty throngs of angels – we will no longer feel isolated.

This privilege of being counted among the saints and angels is a gift from our gracious Savior who laid down his life to provide us with the forgiveness of our sins. He tore down the wall of sin that separated us from God. He suffered the death we rightfully deserve for our sins. As proof of our salvation, he rose from the dead – assuring us that God’s anger no longer burns against us. His resurrection has become the guarantee that our sins are forgiven and that we too shall live with him to praise him forever in glory.

Paul reminds us (2 Corinthians 8:9) **You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.**

Jesus, the Lamb of God, who was humbly led to death, is now exalted and sitting on the right hand of God. John sees the exalted Lamb around the throne and he hears the songs of praise directed to the one who earn forgiveness for us.

In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

In his letter to the Philippians the apostle Paul encourages Christians to follow the loving and forgiving example of Christ Jesus. He tells us, (Philippians 2:3-11) **Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4) not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. 5) In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6) Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7) rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8) And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death-- even death on a cross! 9) Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10) that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11) and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

John saw these words being fulfilled as he observed the glorified and exalted lamb of God. Jesus, the Son of God and the son of Mary; who was slain, lives. He is worthy to receive power and strength. The power and strength that was evident at the creation of the world and which Jesus had shown when he overthrew Satan is his forever and ever. The wealth which Jesus is worthy to receive is the things in heaven and earth which he put aside when he became poor for our sakes. It includes all the material things which he created, all the creatures he made as well as the people he redeemed with his blood.

He is worthy to receive wisdom – now in his state of exaltation Jesus makes full use of his divine wisdom. Divine honor, glory and praise are his due. What a contrast this is to the insults, shame, disgrace and ridicule which were heaped on him during his innocent sufferings and death as our Savior.

All of this praise Jesus has earned as our Savior from sin. It’s easy for us to understand why we would rejoice at this gift. It’s also easy for us to understand that the angels who are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation would be eager to sing Jesus praises and give him divine honor and glory for accomplishing our salvation. But it wasn’t just mankind who was affected by the fall into sin. God’s entire creation suffers the terrible consequences of sin. That’s why the Scriptures tell us (Romans 8:19-23) **For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20) For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21) that**

the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. 22) We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23) Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

John saw this glorious time of redemption when we will enjoy the ultimate blessings made possible because of Christ's forgiveness in his vision as he heard a song of hope which rejoices in our eternal fellowship with God.

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" 14) The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

In his explanation to the second article Luther spoke of Jesus' saving work teaching us to confess: **I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord. He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.**

All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally.

As John's vision unfolded he saw the redeemed joining all creation praising the Lord Jesus. It was God's intention from the very being that his creation would give praise him for all eternity. Because of Christ's sacrifice, the divine purpose of creation has been achieved. Already now we lift our voices to give praise to God and we seek to serve him with our lives here in time as we wait for Christ's return to take us to our eternal home in heaven where we will truly join with angels to praise him for all eternity.

It's truly a comforting picture that Jesus shared with John. Jesus wanted John and the church to know and understand that there is nothing that will undermine or destroy the work of our risen Savior. The songs of this text are a wonderful reminder to us that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Our text closes by drawing our attention once more to the living creature and the elders. The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Amen expresses the absolute confidence that everything the angels and all of creation has sang about will happen. It will be so – is the thought contained in the word Amen. And as if to show that it is so – the elders fall down and worship the Lamb – who earned forgiveness for them and gave them the opportunity to praise him in glory forever.

Let us join our "Amens" and our worship together with the saints and angels as we give expression to the joyous fellowship which Christ has made possible for us with his redeeming work. May these songs lift our spirits and lighten our burdens until the Lord brings us to eternal glory. **"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" ... "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" Amen.**