

Luke 2: 1-14; “The Glory of the Lord Shone”, Sermon # 6 in the series – “The Prophecies of Christ’s Birth”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 18th, 2022, in the Morning Worship Service.

The birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Father’s only-begotten Son, coming into this world in His Incarnation, was I believe, one of greatest events in all of human history. I think that all Christians ought to give Christ’s Incarnation the highest place in their worshipful regard, alongside all the great actions of His earthly ministry, and the culmination of it, in His death and His resurrection from the dead, and His ascension to sit at the Father’s right hand. All of these events have been crowned with glory by His Father. But in this particular incident of the angel coming to the shepherds, we find that the glory which was revealed also excelled. It shone all around the angels and the shepherds.

The glory of God was revealed here at this time, in certain particular ways which are nowhere else found in the Scriptures, except in the transfiguration of our Lord. The Shining of God’s glory excelled, in that more of God the Father’s infinite and eternal purposes concerning our salvation are revealed to us, by the angel and the other angels with him. And so, here in these verses God shines forth in His glory in some very amazing ways, so that all men will understand His goodwill towards them in the giving of His Son. There are, I believe, 3 particular ways that the glory of the Lord shone forth at this time of the birth of our Savior.

1st of all – God’s glory was shining forth in the obscurity of His Son’s Birth. (vs. 1-7)

The decree was that the whole world should be taxed or registered. The whole world, here, means the whole land or the whole region of Palestine. Not Judea only, but also Galilee where Joseph and Mary lived. You will notice that God accomplished His will concerning where our Lord would be born, through this decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered or taxed. His purpose in having the whole world be registered, may have been pride, if it was numbering the people. Or it may have been covetousness and greed if it was taxing the people. These were probably some of his sins in his heart and his actions.

But we learn from the free actions of this man, that God uses the thoughts and actions of men like Augustus Caesar to accomplish His purposes. None of God’s purposes shall ever be thwarted. Christ would be born at Bethlehem. I hope that you can see the glory of this, even though Christ was born in obscurity. Let’s think of this in terms of how God thinks of it. He is sovereign over men, without at all violating their own decision making processes. And God’s motives in everything that He ordains have the best of motives for all of His elect people’s welfare.

He would overrule and oversee every political action of this earthly ruler so that the prophecy of Micah chapter 5, verse 2 would be fulfilled. “But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.” This was a census where everyone had to be registered. Everyone had to go to their own city. And so Joseph and Mary also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, and into Judea. They had to go to Bethlehem, because Joseph was of the house and lineage of David.

And so, even though Mary was great with child, they still had to personally go to Bethlehem. God’s timing we should understand, is always perfect. Even though it was very inconvenient for Mary, yet it would bring glory to God to have his Son born in these difficult circumstances and conditions. God’s ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts. Joseph and Mary may have not even thought about this prophecy when they were forced to go to Bethlehem at this very inconvenient time. This decree of Caesar showed that the scepter was just at this point in time departing from Judah. And because of this, the time for the Advent of the heavenly “Shiloh” was come. Genesis 49: 10 is where this

prophecy is found. “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”

So here we find the beginnings of the glory of the Lord Jesus’ birth. The earthly glory of the house of David’s political right to rule in Israel, symbolized by the scepter, it was departing. But the only reason that this was so was because Shiloh was coming. The greater King had arrived. The glory of Christ is what makes Him our Shiloh. The word “Shiloh” means – He that is sent, or, the Seed, or, The Peaceable and Prosperous One. It is the Messiah Jesus who is intended. And His glory excels all earthly kings by an infinite magnitude.

He would be sent by God into this world to redeem men back from their darkness and the bondage of their sin. And so, since this was so, His glory being shown to a world of sinful people would not be seen in His being born in the palace of an earthly Jewish King, but in a stable where He would be placed in the manger, which is the feeding trough for cattle. All of Christ’s glory is first of all an infinite spiritual glory of His being God, and becoming a Man. No one but believers who realize themselves to be sinners, can receive this and worship Him as Lord.

The glory of the Lord was displayed by means of the Father’s choosing the place and the time of His Son’s birth, and having the prophecies in the Old Testament Scriptures be specifically fulfilled in relation to it. The place would be Bethlehem which means the house of bread. Christ would be the bread of life to a fallen world of sinners. Sinners would feed upon Him and be saved and satisfied. They would feed on His faithfulness. The time for the entrance of God’s Son into this dark world, to become a Man who would be the Light of the World, had come. And nothing of human greatness or even of God’s glory would be perceived in His being born at that stable at the Inn where there was no room.

What was there of glory in a very tired woman in labor, having ridden 90 miles on a donkey, finally arriving at Bethlehem, and realizing that there was no room for them in the inn? What glory is there in this, that she would have to give birth to the Savior of the world in such a place? It was the glory of God’s love for fallen Mankind, which is seen by eyes of faith. The Lord of glory was in Mary’s womb! But men do not by nature see His glory of the Virgin Birth. They do not by nature like to believe that they must have a Savior. And by nature they do not like to think that God has a purpose for their life. And to see that purpose fulfilled, they must understand their need to be saved.

And so, in the case of every person being saved, God must take the initiative. In the fullness of time God sent forth His only begotten Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that He might redeem those who were born under the law. Now, the Lord Jesus will come forth into the world to do this great and glorious work of redemption! He was born to raise the sons of earth. He was born to give them second birth. Hark, the herald angels, we sing. Glory to the newborn King! Let us never think that God’s glory is not really there; when we look, and when we cannot see it visibly with our physical eyes.

It is the glory of God to conceal a matter. It is the glory of kings (it is the honor of kings) to search it out. (Proverbs 25: 2) The glory of Christ’s birth in a stable at Bethlehem is the glory of the joy of discovering the greatness of the Father’s love in His gift of Christ. To know Christ, you must personally search for Him. You hear the gospel and you actually go and seek, and find Him for yourself; even as the wise men did, and the shepherds did. And in finding Him by faith you come to realize that you will indeed receive all that He came to bring to you as a sinner; all that He would live and die for, to bring to you. You will have found the meaning of life. And you will have entered into eternal life in this life.

It is a life of the greatest possible reality, of experiencing God’s love, the Purity of His thoughts and His intentions towards you. When you behold His glory by faith, you come to understand better your continual need of His grace, and you begin to pursue peace with all men, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. And so, God concealed His glory in Christ when He had Him to be born in the stable at Bethlehem. He did it so that His glory in the giving of His Son would be searched out and

honored by every person who would know Him and understand His ways with themselves and with all men.

What is the joy of your giving presents to your children, your relatives, your friends, and loved ones at Christmas? Is it not to see the delight of their wondering what it is; that it is concealed from them for a time, so that they have to think about it, and wonder about it? And when the present is opened, there is great delight that comes to you, watching them open it, just as much as their having that same delight. The same is true of God. He would have you to experience the delight of His glory in Christ.

2nd – God was shining forth in His glory that night to bring joy to these shepherds and to the whole world.

Verses 8-12 say – “Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.” “And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.” “Then the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.’ “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” “And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”

This visitation of angels which is described for us here, is of immense significance to every believer in Christ. Here these men were; just some ordinary men, who were shepherding sheep. Their names are not even mentioned. There seems to be nothing outstanding about them. But it seems evident to me that they were men who knew the Lord. The Lord had set His love upon them, and He would give them this tremendous privilege of beholding the immediate presence of His glory. They were not so much baffled by the appearance of the angel or his words. But they were astounded and amazed by the glory of the Lord that shone around them and the angel who was speaking to them such kind words, and such good words.

It appears that they were pious men. They were probably men of prayer and faith before this visit of the angel. They probably had the expectation that someday God would send His promised Messiah. Perhaps they may have even had had conversation together about the possibility that someday they might even get to see Him. But out of the complete darkness, glorious light suddenly shone all around them. And then this angel was suddenly there, standing before them. And it says that they were greatly afraid. This reaction of fear, we should understand, is something that all men naturally feel when an angel makes his appearance.

It is a natural reaction to feel fear when the glory of God suddenly invades your space; when you are suddenly surrounded by the awesome feelings of the Divine Perfections. For this is what Divine glory is. It is the emanation of the Divine perfections. And it is something that the angels live in, continually. The angels live continually beholding the glory of God in His immediate presence. They are continually beholding the infinite power of God, and the infinite wisdom of God, and the all-pervading feeling of the holiness of God. They are continually beholding the very real and tangible impress and effects of God’s presence; that is, the excellence of His infinitely perfect Being.

They know of greatness of His wrath against sinners, and sometimes they are sent on missions of judgment against them. But just as much, they also know the warmth and blessedness of the glory of God’s infinite love and goodness and kindness; His tender mercies and His continual favor shown towards those whom He is pleased to bless. This was the case with these shepherds. Suddenly the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid, the King James says. But the angel immediately said to them – Do not be afraid, for I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” This angel meant to bring joyous news and thus allay their fears. Ευαγγελίζομαι υμιν χαρην μεγαλην (I evangelize unto you great joy)

Did you know that sometimes the things which you are afraid of, God has providentially ordered them in such a way that the glory of His love in Christ and care for you can be better seen, later on, if you will follow His lead? You are afraid, but He can deliver you from all your fears. Even as a believer you may fear the Lord's disciplinary judgment over some aspect of your life, but you do not realize that He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found. You sometimes forget that He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness, and wonders of His love. If he can do that, then cannot He help you to understand the depths of His love and grace? This is why we sing Joy to the World, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her King.

Christ is born for you this day. Not only in the city of David, so long ago, but for you right here today in the gospel. I believe that the angel was evangelizing these shepherds, not as unsaved men, but as saved men, as believers. They were afraid of him, and the glory of the Lord came upon them suddenly. But he would take away their fears by speaking to them of the good tidings of great joy which are for all people. Not just for the shepherds and the people of Bethlehem Ephrathah of that day, but for all people everywhere. The gospel is to be preached to every creature. All the world is to hear of the good tidings that their sins can be forgiven, and that they can be given a new heart which will love to serve God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. That is good tidings of great joy!

3rd – God was shining forth in His glory that night to let us know better from the angels, how to preach the gospel.

Verses 12-14 say – “And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, 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, goodwill toward men!’” The sign to given to these shepherds by the angel was, that if they went to see Christ for themselves, they would find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. Surely this was the greatest of signs, that the King of glory would be found, not in a palace, but in a stable, and lying in a manger!

There was a great humbling of Himself that the Lord Jesus did in His Incarnation. As it says in Philippians 2: 8 – “And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.” Here is the Son of Highest who became Mary's son also, as a little Babe. He would humble Himself and become obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Surely the Lord Jesus did nothing from pride, and everything out of love for His Father God, and for all the sinners which the Father would give Him. In His earthly ministry He would even love His enemies and prayed that they would be forgiven.

How do we respond to the Father's goodwill in the gift of Christ to sinners everywhere? Well, first of all, we should receive Him as our personal Savior and Lord. And then let us learn from the multitude of angels who praised Him at His birth, to praise Him ourselves, now. May we learn to be those who at all times bless and praise Him who has given us Christ forever! Let us put Him in the Highest place in our lives, and let us live our lives to the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Let us always be ready to share the good tidings of great joy which we have found in knowing the One who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Let us have our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. 1st Timothy 3: 16 – “For without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, and received up to glory.” It all began this night so long ago.

Footnote on the word “Glory”.

Jonathan Edwards says – “The word Kavod, which is commonly translated “glory”, is used in such a manner as might be expected from this signification of the words from whence it comes.” “Sometimes it is used to signify what is internal, what is within the being or person, inherent in the subject, or what

is in the possession of a person: and sometimes for emanation, exhibition or communication of this internal glory: and sometimes for the knowledge or sense, or effect of these, in those who behold it, to whom the exhibition or communication is made; or an expression of this knowledge or sense or effect.”

“And here I would note that agreeable to the use of the word Kavod in the Old Testament, is that of the word Doxa in the New.” “1st – As to internal glory. When the word is used to signify what is within, inherent or in the possession of the subject, it very commonly signifies excellency, or great valuableness, dignity, or worthiness of regard.” “This according to the Hebrew idiom is as it were the weight of a thing, as that by which it is heavy; as to be light is to be worthless, without value, or contemptible.” Numbers 21: 5 – “This light bread”. 1st Samuel 18: 23, David says – “Does it seem to you a light thing to be a king’s son-in-law, seeing I am a poor and lightly esteemed man?” (Vol. 8, Ethical Writings, P. 513, 514.)

He goes on to say – “The word “glory is used in Scripture often to express the exhibition, emanation or communication of the internal glory.” “Hence it often signifies a visible exhibition of glory; as in a effulgence or shining brightness, by an emanation of beams of light.” “Thus the brightness of the sun and moon and stars is called their glory in 1st Corinthians 15: 41. But in particular, the word is very often thus used when applied to God and Christ.”