

GLORY CAME DOWN (SO WE COULD GO UP!)

(Luke 2:1-20)

I. WELCOME / TEXT / OPENING PRAYER

A. Welcome

B. Text:

2 Now in those days it came to pass that a decree went forth from Caesar Augustus, *requiring* the entire *Roman* empire¹ to be registered for taxation. ² (This first registration began while Quirinius was governing Syria.) ³ So everyone set out to be registered, each person to his own *home* town. ⁴ And Joseph too went up from the Galilean town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David (which is called Bethlehem), because he belonged to the house and lineage of David. ⁵ *He did this* in order to be registered with his betrothed wife Mary, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, it came to pass that the days were completed for her to give birth. ⁷ So she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, for there was no room for them at the inn. / ⁸ Now in that same region there were shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ ***And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone all around them; and they were terribly afraid.*** ¹⁰ ***But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid; for behold, I am bringing you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people.*** ¹¹ ***For this very day, in the city of David, there is born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*** ¹² ***And this is the sign appointed for you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”*** ¹³ ***Then there suddenly appeared with the angel a vast assembly of the army of heaven, praising God, and saying,*** ¹⁴ ***“Glory to God in the highest place, and on earth, peace towards those on whom his favor rests.”*** / ¹⁵ Now when the angels had departed from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go at once to Bethlehem and see *for ourselves* this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ So they hurried off and located both Mary and Joseph, and *found* the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ Then, when they had seen *the child*, they began to spread the news about what they were told concerning this little boy; ¹⁸ and all who heard *it* were amazed at the things the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But as for Mary, she hid these things deep within, and continually pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ So the shepherds returned *to their flock*, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen, *all of which took place* exactly as they had been told.

C. Opening (pastoral) Prayer

I. INTRO

- The notable thing: Angels, Heaven, but ESPECIALLY Glory!
- GLORY: We have difficulty defining this word, but “it sets the hearts of Christian’s soaring!” – Sproul
- A Hunger: Man has a natural hunger for the glory of God (Q: Russell, Lewis)
- Today’s Big Idea: At Christmas, glory came down to us, so that—in more ways than one—we could be drawn up to it!

II. THE GLORY ABOVE (and the Darkness Below) (Isaiah 6:1-6) (HSL/C)

A. Glory (holiness, justice) Above, Danger Below!

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of his robe filling the temple. Seraphim stood above him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

Glory Defined: The nature, character, attributes, or perfections of the infinite God, as seen in relation to his finite creatures. Relative to us he is HEAVY!

- Dangerous to sinful, ignorant, and indifferent man (Rev. 4)

The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts. His (the wicked's) ways are always grievous; *thy judgments are far above out of his sight*: as for all his enemies, he puffs at them. – Psalm 10, KJV

Then Jesus spoke to them again: "I am going away; and you will look for me, but you will die in your sin; where I am going you cannot come." So the Jewish leaders began to say, "Is he going to kill himself, since he is saying, 'Where I am going you cannot come'?" So he went on to tell them, "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. For this reason I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you don't believe I am *who I say I am*, you will die in your sins."

B. Glory (Redeeming Love) Above, Hope Below

Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. He touched my mouth *with it* and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven." (cf. the weeping of John in Rev. 5)

- Note: The Angel Came Down! And that points to . . .

III. THE GLORY ABOVE SLIPS DOWN INTO DARKNESS (Luke 1:26-38) (Read)

Now in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man of the house of David, whose name was Joseph. The virgin's name was Mary. And when he had entered the house, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was troubled by his words, and began to ponder in her heart what such a greeting might mean. Then the angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive a child in your womb and give birth to a Son; and you are to call his name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have never had relations with a man?" So the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child, when he is born, will be called the Son of God." And behold, Elizabeth your blood relative—she also has conceived a son in her old age, and this is now the sixth month of pregnancy for her who was called barren. For nothing shall be impossible with God. Then Mary said, "Behold the bondservant of the Lord. May it happen to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

- What a mystery! The glory of God, “veiled in human flesh!”
- Question: WHY did he come down?
- Answer #1: Operation Thunderbolt! (Slides)
- Answer #2: To lead captivity captive! (HSL: Last Adam, Redemption)

⁷ But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ⁸ For this reason he² says, “When he ascended on high he led³ captivity captive, *and* he gave gifts to men.”⁴ ⁹ (Now this *expression*, “He ascended”—what does it mean, if not that he also *first*⁵ descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ *But* he who descended is the very One who also ascended far above all the heavens, so as to fill all things!)

IV. THE GLORY VEILED AND HIDDEN IN OBSCURITY (Luke 2:1-7) (Read)

² Now in those days it came to pass that a decree went forth from Caesar Augustus, *requiring* the entire *Roman* empire¹ to be registered for taxation. ² (This first registration began while Quirinius was governing Syria.) / ³ So everyone set out to be registered, each person to his own *home* town. ⁴ And Joseph too went up from the Galilean town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David (which is called Bethlehem), because he belonged to the house and lineage of David. / ⁵ *He did this* in order to be registered with his betrothed wife Mary, who was with child. / ⁶ And while they were there, it came about that the days were completed for her to give birth. ⁷ So she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, for there was no room for them at the inn (or guest room).

A. A strange way for God (the Son) to be born!

- (1-2) Far from the seats of human power
- (3-4) To a humble tradesman, and life in a despised backwater town
- (5) To a mother who patiently bore unmerited shame
- (6-7) Having simple strips of cloths for a blanket, a manger for a bed

B. Question: Why this birth *incognito*, under the radar?

- Danger (Mt. 2, Rev. 12)

² Now the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was drawing near, ³ so Jesus’ brothers said to him, “Leave here and go *down* to Judea so that your disciples *in Judea* may also see the works you are doing. ⁴ For no one does anything in secret when he is trying to make himself *known* to the public. If you are doing these things, show yourself to the *whole* world.” ⁵ (For not even his *own* brothers believed in him.) ⁶ So Jesus said to them, “The right time for me has not yet come; but for you, any time is right. ⁷ The world cannot hate you; but it does hate me, for I testify about it, that its works are evil. ⁸ You *men* go up to the feast; I am not¹ going up to this feast, for the right time for me has not yet fully come.” – John 7

- Testing (Glory not hidden, but veiled: flashing forth from time to time)

The example of Nicodemus (John 3)

- Sovereignty:

²⁵ At that time Jesus responded and said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from *the* wise and learned, and have revealed them to little children.
²⁶ Yes, Father, for so it was well pleasing in your sight. (Cf. 1 Cor. 1; not many wise men, lots of shepherds!)

- Pattern: Rejection, marginalization, shame

¹¹ For the bodies of those animals, whose blood the high priest brings into the sanctuary *as an offering* for sin, are burned *outside the camp*. ¹² For this reason Jesus also suffered *outside the gate*, in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. ¹³ So then, let us go out to him—outside the camp—bearing the reproach he bore. ¹⁴ For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the *city* that is *yet* to come. – Heb. 13

V. THE GLORY GLIMPSED, THE TEST BEGUN! (Luke 2:8-14) (Slide) (HSL/C)

⁸ Now in that same region there were shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. / ⁹ And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone all around them; and they were terribly afraid. / ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Don’t be afraid; for behold, I am bringing you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For this very day, in the city of David, there is born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. / ¹² And this *is* the sign *appointed* for you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” / ¹³ Then there suddenly appeared with the angel a vast assembly of the army of heaven, praising God, and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest *place*, and on earth, peace towards those on whom his favor rests.”

- (8) The shepherd Moses at the burning bush
- (9) Gabriel? Shekinah
- (10-11) Good News: The glory of his Person and the glory of his Work!
- **(12) The test! Follow that sign!**
- (13-14) The glory above: Heaven, angels, joy, praise to God for his infallible plan of salvation that unites heaven and earth once again!

MP: No less than the shepherds, all men are called hear the good news, follow the signs, and pass the test of life! (John 2 and the testimony of Scripture and the Church)

VI. THE GLORY SOUGHT AND SEEN, THE TEST PASSED! (Luke 2:15-16) (R/C)

¹⁵ Now when the angels had departed from them *and returned* to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem at once, and *see for ourselves* this thing that has taken place, and which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ So they hurried off and located both Mary and Joseph, and *found* the baby lying in a manger.

- Comparison: the Wise Men, who also sought him, following a sign
- Pattern: All catch a glimpse, all called to seek and follow the signs
- Promise: “Ask, seek, knock . . .”
- Promise: “If anyone is willing to do his will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or *whether* I speak from myself.” – John 7

- Promise: “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.” – John 6:40

VII. THE GLORY PROCLAIMED (LUKE 2:17-20)

¹⁷ Then, when they had seen *the child*, they began spreading the news about what they had been told concerning this little boy; ¹⁸ and all who heard *it* were amazed at the things the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But as for Mary, she hid these things deep within, and continually pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ So the shepherds returned *to their flock*, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen, *all of which took place* exactly as they had been told.

- The call of the Church: SEE the glory!

Christ, by highest heav'n adored, Christ, the everlasting Lord; late in time behold him come, offspring of the favored one. Veil'd in flesh, the Godhead see; hail, th'incarnate deity: Pleased, as man, with men to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel! Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King!" – Charles Wesley

IX. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION: SHEPHERDING THE GLORY

- Like the shepherds of old, we are a highly privileged people!
- We know: (1) Glory came down; (2) glory (therefore) came in; (3) glory is waiting up above; and (4) glory is waiting up ahead!

If then you were raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, *and* not the things that are on *the* earth. ³ For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God; ⁴ *and* when Christ *who is* our life appears, *then you too will appear in glory with him.* – Col. 3:1f

- So, let us gratefully and gladly spread the news about what we have seen!
- Like Christ, Joseph, Mary, and all the saints, let us be well content with our lowly station in this world
- But above all, let us rejoice!

⁸ Now when he took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each *of them* having a harp and golden bowls filled with incense (which are the prayers of the saints). ⁹ And they were singing a new song, saying, “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to unfasten its seals, for you were slain, and with your blood you *have* purchased for God *men* from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation; ¹⁰ and you have made them to be a kingdom and priests for our God; and they will reign upon the earth.” ¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and in number the angels were ⁵ myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, ¹² *all of them* saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” ¹³ And every created being in heaven, upon the earth, beneath the earth, and upon the sea—and everything that is in them—I heard, saying, “To the One who is seated upon the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* praise, honor, glory, and dominion, forever and ever!” ¹⁴ And the four living creatures kept on saying, “Amen!” And the elders fell down and worshiped. – Revelation 5 (big view!)