

GLORY TO GOD, PEACE TO MEN

Luke 2:1-20

Key Verse: 2:14

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

Merry Christmas! Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus which happened some 2,000 years ago. Peoples around the world are celebrating Jesus’ birth extravagantly. I heard of a Christmas drama in Florida that included camels and sand imported from the Middle East; it cost a million dollars to produce! Yet on the night Jesus was born, there was no Christmas celebration: no television news report, no concert, and no drama. Jesus was born quietly and laid in a manger. Perhaps more animals witnessed his birth than people. On earth it was a silent night. However, heaven was not silent. At that moment, a great company of the heavenly host burst forth in praise: **“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”** Why is Jesus’ birth glory to God and peace to men? We tend to associate glory with something that looks great and spectacular. But God’s glory is not revealed as we expect. God’s glory is revealed in mysterious ways beyond imagination; it is often hidden from man’s sight. Yet God’s glory has been revealed constantly and steadily over thousands of years; it reached a high point at Jesus’ birth. Let’s see how God’s glory is revealed in Jesus.

First, God’s glory is revealed in Jesus’ birth (1-7). In those days Rome ruled the world and Caesar Augustus ruled Rome. To loyal subjects Rome offered a comfortable life: in two words, bread and circuses. Caesar used the phrase “Pax Romana,” and even borrowed the Greek word “*evangelion*” (good news or gospel) to describe his reign. In order to sustain his government, he needed money and soldiers. For the purpose of taxation and conscription, he issued a decree for a census to be taken of the entire Roman world (1-2). At Caesar’s one word of command, people throughout the entire Roman world had to move (3). Joseph and Mary had to travel from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea—the town of David—because Joseph belonged to the house and line of David (4-5). Thus Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, as God foretold (Mic 5:2). In fact, God used Caesar’s decree to send the Messiah into the world at the right time and place (Gal 4:4). The

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distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem was about 80 miles. Conditions were primitive. Joseph and Mary traveled on foot or by donkey and had to carry their food and water. For a woman in the full term of pregnancy, without nurse or midwife, without insurance or medical care, it was a difficult journey indeed. While they were in Bethlehem, Mary's birth pains began; it was time for the baby to be born. They must have searched for a favorable place. But due to the census, all of the guest rooms were occupied. At last, desperate Joseph secured the stable of an animal. Mary's cries in labor pierced the night air, but no one responded. At last, Jesus was born and laid in a manger. In Christmas cards this scene looks romantic and peaceful; it evokes wonder. But in reality it was dirty, lowly, sorrowful and fatalistic. Why was Jesus born in such poor circumstances?

Jesus was laid in a manger to be the friend of lowly sinners. When our President visits another country, he travels in Air Force One with a huge entourage at great cost. He is surrounded by Secret Service agents, and only a few people are allowed to meet him. But God, who created heaven and earth, came into the world as a baby in a manger without any entourage. He was tiny, helpless, vulnerable and poor. No one feels intimidated by this little baby. So anyone can approach him freely. Jesus is not only approachable; he also understands those who come to him. Each person has their own wounds and sorrows that no one else understands. We try to find someone who can understand and comfort us, but there is no one. Only Jesus can really understand us. Have you been rejected? So has Jesus. Have you been mistreated? So has Jesus. Have you been lonely, poor or sad? So has Jesus. So he really understands us.

Not only does Jesus understand us, he also comforts and heals us, no matter how deep the wound, or serious the trouble (Heb 2:17). It is because Jesus bore all our wounds in his body to bring us healing, and Jesus is the source of all wisdom (1 Pe 2:24; 1 Cor 1:30). To come into this world as our friend, Jesus left behind his heavenly glory. 2 Corinthians 8:9 says, **“For 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 was laid in a manger to reveal the glory of God in his humility. God is holy and man is sinful. There is a great chasm between us and God

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that we could never cross. But this great God humbled himself and became a man. The Almighty Creator of all things made himself smaller and smaller and smaller, until he became an ovum—a single fertilized egg, barely visible to the eye. Paul said, **“He made himself nothing”** (Php 2:7). This humility is beyond our understanding. In order to become a man, Jesus gave up his glory, authority and privileges as God. He gave up the praises of angels, in order to receive man’s insults. The Almighty wore the body of a weak man. The Eternal Being entered into time and space. We call it “incarnation.” As a man, Jesus was not rich or privileged, but a lowly servant. So Isaiah said, “He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him” (Isa 53:2b). We tend to look for glory among the rich and powerful. But God’s glory was revealed through his humility. We can see God’s glory in the baby in a manger. When we see God’s glory, we find life, peace, and joy everlasting.

I attended my first Christmas worship service in Chicago UBF in 1980. At that time, there were a handful of Korean missionaries and several young American students who met together in a small building on North Clark Street. We mainly had one-to-one Bible studies and prayed together. On the outside, it looked rather strange. One often heard unusual sounding Korean words and smelled the strong odor of Korean food. Korean men all looked like soldiers, and the Korean women were generally shy, except for one who often laughed out loud during prayer meetings: “Hee, hee, hee.” Sometimes I wondered, “What am I doing here?” It was really like a manger. But I saw God’s glory in this manger ministry. The life of God was there in people’s hearts. As I studied the Bible, prayed and had fellowship with them, Jesus came into my heart and gave me a joy and peace I had never known before. I began to perceive the true glory that is in Jesus. In the past, I pursued fame and money. I wanted to be a professional athlete or CEO of a Fortune 500 company. But I realized that the glory of the world is empty and meaningless, while the glory of God in Jesus is life-giving and everlasting. God moved me to be a one-to-one Bible teacher for college students. Since then I have pursued the glory of God through Jesus and have great joy with no regrets. Let’s all see God’s glory in the baby in a manger.

Second, God’s glory is revealed progressively through Jesus’ life (8-11). Jesus’ birth was a great event; it divided history between B.C. and A.D. To witness this event, God did not choose famous and powerful people, but

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shepherds, who were like blue collar workers. God's glory was revealed to the most humble and unassuming people. These shepherds were living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night (8). An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified (9). But the angel said to them, **“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord”** (10-11).

Why was Jesus' birth good news that caused great joy to all the people? It is because he is the Savior and the Messiah, the Lord. At that moment he was a helpless baby. How could this baby be a Savior? It is because he is God. The life in him was God's indestructible life. Though he began small, like a mustard seed, his life grew and grew until it became like a giant tree in which all kinds of weary people could find salvation and peace. Just as a tree grows slowly and constantly, so God's glory was revealed steadily and progressively throughout Jesus' life. Let's see how.

Though Jesus is God the Creator, he was born into a poor family in the despised territory of Galilee (Lk 2:24). His childhood and youth were pretty ordinary. He had to obey his parents and he learned carpentry from his father. His public ministry did not look glamorous. His financial support came from a handful of sacrificial women (Lk 8:3). While most rabbis chose top students to be their disciples, Jesus chose coarse, uneducated fishermen and a tax collector, a public sinner. Jesus spent so much time with sinners that he was branded the “friend of sinners,” and “a glutton and a drunkard” (Lk 7:34). Jesus was with such people to demonstrate God's love, mercy and compassion upon us all. Jesus taught the word of God to open our eyes to the kingdom of God. Jesus cared for many sick people: He gave sight to the blind, healed the lame, cleansed leprosy, and drove out evil spirits. In this way Jesus revealed God's glory.

In raising disciples, Jesus did not exercise authority like a boss. Rather, he humbled himself and served them. He said, **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”** (Mk 10:45). **At the Last Supper, knowing that the Father had put all things under his power, he got up from the table, put a towel around his waist, filled a basin with water, and washed his disciples' feet**

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(Jn 13:3-5). How could the Creator God wash the dirty feet of sinful people? It was to reveal God's glory of humility and his great love.

Most importantly, God's glory was revealed through Jesus' death on the cross. Throughout history, many great people have tried to solve the problems of mankind. Many have made great contributions which have improved the quality of life. We can admire their achievements and great points, but each one also had a dark side that caused harm and brought shame. No one can solve the problem of sin and death. All great people have bowed down before sin and death. But Jesus' death broke the chains of sin and set mankind free from its power. To human eyes, Jesus' death on the cross was not glorious, but painful and shameful; it looked like a failure and defeat and foolish. But to those who are being saved, it is the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:18,24). On the cross, Jesus prayed, **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"** (Lk 23:34). Jesus obtained for us the forgiveness of sins and broke the endless cycle of revenge. Jesus reconciled us with God. Now we are God's children through faith in Jesus. Jesus revealed God's undying love and marvelous saving grace upon terrible sinners. When Jesus died in obedience to God's will, God did not leave him in the tomb. God raised Jesus from the dead and made him Lord and Messiah (Ac 2:36). God exalted him to the highest place, so that every knee should bow before him, acknowledging that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Php 2:9-11). Thus God proved himself to be the mighty God who won everlasting victory over sin, death and the devil. When Jesus comes again, he will come with great power and glory as King of kings and the Judge of all mankind (Mk 13:26; Jude 1:14-15). Verse 11 says, "Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." Today let's welcome the Savior Jesus into our hearts. As we do, God's peace overflows within us.

Third, God's glory is revealed to the humble (12-20). As we have seen, God's glory was revealed in Jesus' birth in a specific way, at a specific time, and in a specific place, according to God's plan. God's glory was revealed to those whom he favored, not everyone saw it. God's glory was mysterious; it was hidden. How can we see God's glory? Verse 12 says, **"This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."** How can a baby in diapers in a manger be the sign of a Savior? Those who are proud ignore and despise baby Jesus in a manger. Jesus was

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also despised in his Galilean ministry, and in his death. Who can recognize him? Only humble people can recognize God's glory in baby Jesus and accept him. This is God's inscrutable wisdom and will. Once, Jesus said, **"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do"** (Mt 11:25-26). Paul said, **"God chose the lowly things of this world...so that no one may boast before him"** (1 Cor 1:28-29).

In verses 13-20 we learn how the shepherds saw God's glory. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, **"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests"** (13-14). The shepherds heard this magnificent angel chorus. Afterward, they did not sit down in reverie. They went to Bethlehem and found the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they saw him they realized that the angel's message was true; God had come to earth in the little baby Jesus in the manger. The Messiah had come! So they spread the word concerning him. They glorified and praised God for all the things they had heard and seen. They became the first witnesses of the birth of Jesus. They were not complicated and argumentative, but very simple and humble. This may be why God chose them to see his glory.

God has revealed his glory to us through the baby Jesus in a manger. Let's humble ourselves like the shepherds and accept the coming of our Savior. May the peace of God fill your heart in this Christmas season and throughout the new year to come.