

“GLORY STREAMS FROM HEAV’N AFAR” 12/13/15
CHRISTMAS... To be continued

Introduction:

A. Illus.: The other day a friend of mine plopped down in front of me and Einsteins. “*I got a question for you,*” he said. “*Just give me the short answer.*” “OK, what is it?” I said. “*So when Jesus was born the story says there were angels and wise men and everything. All this attention. And then it seems like you don’t hear any more about him for many years. How can that be?*” It was a good question, especially from a Jewish friend. I think his point was that if it all really happened as the story says there would’ve been no doubt about it.

“Actually,” I said, “not that many people knew about Jesus’ birth. The angels were only seen by a band of shepherds. They told people what they’d seen and heard, but how many people could they have known? At the temple, eight days after his birth, two elderly people recognized him as the Messiah, but how many believed them? When the magi came to Jerusalem asking where the King of the Jews had been born, no one in the city, including King Herod, knew what they were talking about. Once the magi saw the baby Jesus they returned home another way, so they didn’t tell many people. And that same night Joseph and Mary took the baby and fled to Egypt. So all in all, not many people knew about Jesus’ birth.” **But that raises a good question: why the obscurity?**

- B. It is astonishing, really, that the birth of this child went so unnoticed. He was the only human being ever born whose mother was a woman and whose father was God himself—he was the *Son of God*. He was named *God with us* and *God saves*—Immanuel and Jesus. And he was the heir by direct descent to the throne of David—the Messiah, the anointed King of the Jews. *And almost no one knew that he’d been born??* Seems pretty incredible. Fishy even.
- C. Glory is usually pretty hard to hide. As I was working on this sermon I thought about how Jesus’ glory was disguised

or camouflaged. I wrote down that in his birth he laid aside his glory. Then I realized that wasn't right. Sometimes the someone's glory lies in their very anonymity, their humility, in some unseen service. **Jesus' birth wasn't glory disguised. It was his glory displayed.** But the bright glory of Jesus' birth was only evident to those with eyes to see.

I. THE GLORY OF JESUS' FIRST COMING WAS HARD TO SEE

A. There's no doubt, of course, that glorious things happened.

- Old Testament prophecies of all kinds were literally and specifically fulfilled.
- Despite almost 600 years without a king, Jesus was born in "the house and line of David."
- A virgin conceived by the Holy Spirit of God and gave birth to a son, just as a great angel told her.
- Joseph, the step-father-to-be, was told the child's name and the name's meaning.
- A Roman decree drove Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, just as she was to give birth, so that Jesus was born in the birthplace of King David.
- Angels, filling the sky, announced Jesus' birth—to shepherds watching over their flocks *by night*. Darkness all around and then the people walking in darkness saw a great light. Angels! But only to those shepherds.
- The seemingly timeless, mute, impersonal stars—the constellations with their figures and geography humanly superimposed —somehow signaled the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy and the birth of the Jewish king—to pagan stargazers and magicians.
- Old Simeon and Anna, waiting for decades in Jerusalem's temple, saw the eight-day-old infant and *knew* he was God's promised Messiah.

All of these are wonders—glories. All went almost unnoticed. **And yet the most glorious was something more.**

B. Through the prophet Isaiah, God put these words in the mouth of the promised Messiah, “*And now the LORD says—he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring back Jacob to himself...--he says: ‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob..., I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.’*” [Is 49:5-6]. The glory of Jesus was that he was born in obscurity to be God’s servant to save Jews and Gentiles alike. In fact, God said in **Is. 53**, “*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.*” In fact, Israel would despise and reject him even while he was “*pierced for our transgressions,*” even when “*the punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed.*”

As I said, I realized that in coming to earth, Jesus did not lay aside his glory. But he *did* lay aside his divine rights and position. **Phil 2:6-8** says of Jesus,

*Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be
used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!*

That is the glory of Jesus Christ—having the very nature of God and then taking the very nature of a servant, appearing as a man (he was a man), humble enough to die in service of sinners, and not only to die, but to die on a cross. We didn’t really need a mighty Savior so much as we needed one who was utterly weak and completely rejected, even to the point of a criminal’s death.

The whole business is utter foolishness to the thinking of mankind, but it reveals the glorious wisdom of God in

loving and saving the hopelessly condemned. **This great salvation is the glory of God in Christ.**

- C. At the heart of Christmas worship is our love and gratitude, not that Jesus laid aside his glory for us, but that he displayed the glory of God's love so selflessly; that Jesus served us by saving us.

Illus.: On Christmas Day, 2007, the *Chicago Tribune* ran a front page story entitled, "At Christmas, a rebirth."

The story said, in part:

Su Zhu Yuan thought Americans celebrated Christmas as part of their patriotic duty. Relatives gave gifts. Neighbors prepared feasts. Storefronts in Chinatown advertised sales. But during her eight years in the United States, no one told her the biblical story behind Christmas - until this year. On Sunday, Yuan celebrated the birth of Jesus for the first time by immersing herself in the baptismal waters at Chinese Christian Union Church. She emerged a newborn Christian. "I have peace in my heart and joy," the 41-year-old seamstress said through a translator. "I'm giving the heavy burdens to Jesus." ...

On Sunday, Yuan donned a white gown and with bare feet ascended a narrow staircase to the church's baptismal pool. Gripping the pastor's arm with both hands, she let him plunge her into the water. As she resurfaced, she wiped the water from her face and smiled. "Today is a like a holiday," she said moments later, dripping from head to toe. "It's like having two Christmases." [12/25/07, by Manya A. Brachear and Andrew L. Wang]

There's the glory of Christ!

But that's not the end of the story. Whereas **the glory of Jesus' first coming was hard to see...**

II. THE GLORY OF JESUS' SECOND COMING WILL BE IMPOSSIBLE TO MISS

- A. One of the last times Jesus taught his disciples he told them of the distressing days that would come and then, in **Mark 13:26-27**, he said, "*At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the*

heavens.” There is Jesus Christ in glory! And no one will miss him!

- B. When Jesus comes again his glory will be displayed in judgment. At our core, despite our own sinfulness, human beings ache for a day of reckoning. *Illus.:* In Dostoevsky’s famous novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, one brother wrestles with the idea of a world where nothing is ever made right. He cries out, “*I must have justice, or I will destroy myself. And not justice in some remote infinite time and space, but here on earth. Justice that I can see myself. I have believed in it. I want to see it. And if I am dead by then, let me rise again, for if it all happens without me, it will be too unfair.*”

The NT says Jesus Christ “is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.” Jesus will be the Judge of all (1) because he lived a sinless life, (2) because he is the everlasting King whom God has placed over all things, even death and the afterlife, and (3) because every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Here is the sobering glory of the Judge of all the earth. He has a **fierce glory—like the glory of fire, of holiness, of the One who will make all things right.**

- C. Jesus’ Second Coming brings another, sweeter glory. In **1 Thess 4** Paul describes what will happen, “*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.*” The glories of the Christ in his second coming!

- We will be given new, immortal bodies, as different from these as a seed is from golden wheat.
- All that we have done by faith in Christ will be shown for the treasures they are, and every treasure we have invested in the kingdom of God will be awaiting us.

- We will be complete people, freed from all sins and memories of sins; from failings and frailties and fears.
 - We will be united with our brothers and sisters in Christ, all together for the very first time.
 - Jesus will shelter us, our good shepherd forever.
 - We will see the Lord!
 - We will inhabit and work a new kind of Eden—the new heavens and new earth—the New Jerusalem, the people of peace in the place where there is no more death and never darkness again.
- D. One of the glories of heaven that you may not have considered is that then we will all be servant-hearted and selfless like Jesus. We will all be like our Master, men and women ennobled by *“being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind, in humility valuing others above ourselves.”* We will be a society of servants, under the Servant of the Lord
- E. For all his might over all, Jesus never relinquishes his nature as a servant. He is serving us right now as our high priest. And incredibly he will serve us in love forever. **Jesus will serve us forever as a bridegroom serves the bride he loves.** He will dote on us as a lover does. He will delight in us. And nothing will delight *us* more than serving him in love.

Conclusion

The appropriate response to the glory of Christ displayed in his first coming and anticipated in his second coming is **to add to his glory with our praise and love.**

When we love Jesus, when we become servant-hearted and self-giving for Jesus’ sake, we add to the reputation of Jesus Christ. In other words, we glorify him. We enhance his glory.

Illus.: Remember what Babe Johnson told Pastor Michael the last time they visited. Babe was a man who lived large and who was incredible intent on living a life that mattered. He quoted one of his favorite verses: *“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

And there's one other wonderful thing we can do: **we can sing.** I love something **Bruce Thielemann** said years ago: *“There is one thing that is part of our worship that is not part of the worship of any other major faith on earth. That is singing. Christianity is the one faith that puts a song in your heart. Confucianism has no chorales. Shintoism has no songs. Islam has no glorias. And atheism has no anthems.”* So let us sing now of Jesus who came to earth in humble glory and will come again for every eye to see.