

Glory to God in the Highest

Luke 2:1-20

December 24th, 2017

Big idea: God's glory shines brightly in the Messiah's humble birth.

Intro –

Many families and groups have key events from their history that they tell over and over again because they establish their identity. Maybe it's the immigration of your great grandparents to America on a creaky boat.

The Jewish people recounted again and again God's deliverance of them from Egypt. God even established the Passover as a yearly reminder of their deliverance. Later they would also celebrate Purim, commemorating God's providential preservation of the people from the wicked Haman as recounted in the book of Esther.

What are the key events as Christians that we celebrate, telling them over and over again so that every generation will know the Lord?

The two most important are the events that bookend the earthly life of Jesus – His birth and His death and resurrection - Christmas and Easter.

There is a beautiful simplicity to Luke's account of the Messiah's birth. Only Luke records the events of Jesus' birth. Matthew has the angelic announcement to Joseph that resulted in him marrying Mary rather than separating from her quietly. The narrative picks up later with the wisemen coming to visit the boy Jesus some time after His birth. John records the theological underpinnings and then picks up with His beginning ministry 30 years after His birth. Mark jumps straight in to those events as well.

And Luke's account is brief. The brevity should cause us to focus on the details that are included for they must be significant.

The challenge is for those who have heard the account many times to not allow their familiarity to overshadow their significance.

1. The Messiah was born in a humble setting. (Luke 2:1-7)
 - a. World events compelled Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem, unintentionally fulfilling prophecy.
 - i. Caesar Augustus ruled the Roman empire for 41 years. He was the grandnephew of Julius Caesar, and received full power after his brother in law, Antony, became infatuated with Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen, leading to a famous naval battle in which Antony was defeated.
 - ii. His rule was known as a period of relative peace and order.
 - iii. Caesar Augustus issued an order that his governmental officials spread throughout the Roman empire (the inhabited earth) should take a census, probably for tax purposes.
 - iv. Far from center stage, in an insignificant region in an insignificant town, the most significant event in history unfolded.
 - v. The Jewish people would have likely hated this census as they hated the fact that their land was occupied and they were required to pay taxes to their despised occupiers.
 - vi. Mary and Joseph traveled to Joseph's ancestral home as was customary for the census.
 1. It was the City of David, because it was the city of David's birth. Jerusalem is also called the "City of David" but that's later after he captures the city and it gains new prominence.

- vii. Mary and Joseph are caught up in the flow of history that, from a human perspective, cares nothing about them. They are a taxable unit that needs to report. Inconvenient time? Not Rome's problem.
- viii. So many great novels focus on the experience of individuals in the middle of events much larger than themselves.
 - 1. Solzhenitsen's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*
 - 2. He was an insignificant figure caught up in vast political forces.
 - 3. Yet, in the case of the birth of Christ, it's ultimately the vast political forces that are insignificant.
 - 4. If all we had was this description in vv. 1-7 it would be difficult to see God's hand at work.
- ix. The end result though is they ended up right where they needed to be to fulfill Micah's prophecy.
 - 1. **Micah 5:2** "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Too* little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity."
- b. Because there was no room in the inn, he was born in a space that usually held animals.
 - i. Don't picture a motel 6 and a mean inn keeper. The place where travelers stayed was full. It may have been a room used by guests in his family's home, it may have been a common area that held animals on the ground level and travelers slept upstairs. The upstairs was full so they stayed in the area typically occupied by animals. It may have been a cave. The term is broad.
 - ii. What is clear is that it wasn't typically the place for people, let alone one born a king.
 - iii. Yet he was loved. His parents swaddled him in clothes.
 - 1. The details are sparse in this narrative, so we should notice those that are included.
 - 2. Babies were snugly wrapped in long strips of cloth for warmth, protection, and a sense of security.
 - 3. Common practice today to keep little ones warm and feeling safe. Skill I had to learn as a new dad to wrap up our kids tight in a blanket.
 - 4. He was treated like any other loved, newborn child. He looked like any other child. His needs were those of any other child.

The scene changes from the manger to the hillside.

- 2. His birth was declared to humble shepherds. (Luke 2:8-14)
 - a. Shepherding had a lowly place among occupations. The tasks were menial, the people were made ceremonially unclean by the conditions of the work. Unable to stop working for the Sabbath.
 - b. On the other hand, significant figures in the OT spent time as shepherds – Abraham kept livestock, Moses worked as a shepherd for his father in law, David was a shepherd.
 - c. However they were viewed, they would not have been the likely candidates to be visited by angels declaring the birth of the Messiah.

- i. The high priest was the religious leader
 - ii. The scribes were the teachers
 - iii. The Pharisees were the rule keepers and enforcers
 - iv. The Sanhedrin was the governing body of 70 elders
 - v. Why not appear to them? Surely they could spread the word more effectively? They were more powerful, influential.
- d. Perhaps in line with 1 Corinthians 1:26-29
- i. **1 Corinthians 1:26-29** For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God.
- e. An angel appeared and the glory of the Lord shone around them.
- i. What do you picture as I read this? A petite feminine angel? Something that looks like a chubby baby? However the angel appeared, it caused the shepherds to be terribly frightened.
 - ii. The glory of God is a prominent theme in this account of Jesus' birth.
 - 1. The glory of the Lord shone around them (v. 9)
 - 2. The angels praise God and say, "Glory to God in the highest" (v. 14)
 - 3. The shepherds return to their fields glorifying God (v. 20)
 - iii. What does the glory of God refer to? How it is used in these various ways?
 - 1. Dave Harvey – "What is glory? The New Testament word – *doxa* – speaks of worth and dignity and weight... Glory is about radiance and splendor. But glory isn't just an attribute; it exists to be seen and recognized. It's about reputation, esteem, standing, honor. At its core, glory is about inherent value that's recognizable to others. . . In a profound sense, this glorious God created the cosmos to display his glory, his worth, his value."
 - 2. "To whom [is God's glory displayed]? To a special creature who could take it in, make some sense of it, and rejoice over the worth of his Creator – to us! That's what the Bible means when it calls us to glorify God. We can't make him something that he already is – glorious. But we can recognize the glory that radiates from him, value it properly, and give God his due."
 - iv. We see instances in scripture where God's glory was made visible in some way
 - 1. **Exodus 33:20-23** But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" ²¹ Then the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand *there* on the rock; ²² and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. ²³ "Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."

2. **Exodus 40:34-35** Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.
- f. The angel brought good news of great joy!
- i. Is there a more deeply loaded and significant sentence in scripture?!
 - ii. This good news and great joy are wrapped up in the three terms the angel used
 - iii. Savior – Christ – the Lord
 1. Savior
 - a. **Matthew 1:21** "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."
 2. Christ
 - a. The messiah you have been waiting for!
 - b. Anointed one – anointing was a symbolic way of recognizing kings
 3. The Lord
 - a. **Matthew 2:2** "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."
 - b. **John 18:37** Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."
 - iv. Why is it good news?
 1. The good news hinged on the identity and mission of this child.
 2. **1 Timothy 2:5** For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus,
 3. At that moment, Jesus had not yet lived a life of perfect obedience and died for sin. But the mission had begun and it would surely be carried out.
 4. Analogy – someone who has been chronically sick for decades, several times close to death, know what they have is terminal, and suddenly it's announced that a cure has been found. They go to the doctor and are prescribed a pill to take and in 3 months they will start to feel better. As soon as they get this news and take the pill, they rejoice, but they still feel exactly the same. Now there is hope though.
 5. How much more so for us as we look back not just on the promise but the completion of the earthly life of Christ?
 6. Yet we still also live in a period between promise and full fulfillment.
 - a. Sin is forgiven but still present
 - b. Death is conquered but still an enemy
 - c. Pain will eventually be no more but it is still gnawing at all of us
 - v. They are given instructions for how to locate and recognize this child.

- vi. A multitude of angels appears and praises God
 - 1. From one angel that terrified them now there are a multitude –a great number, term could refer to more than 10,000.
 - 2. Surely this is not how these shepherds thought there night would go!
 - 3. Again the attention is directed to God’s glory on display.
 - a. His worth, radiance, esteem, reputation is on highest display.
 - 4. The angels long to look into the gospel
 - a. **1 Peter 1:12** It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look.
 - 5. Peace – as discussed in Matthew 10, the result of Jesus’ coming was often conflict between people, but the purpose was peace. Peace between God and man!
- 3. People responded to His birth with **amazement**, thoughtful **consideration**, and **worship**. (Luke 2:15-20)
 - a. The shepherds proceeded in a hurry to find this baby; and they did find him just as the angel directed them.
 - b. After seeing, they made known to others what they had seen and heard.
 - i. That’s what we do with momentous events – we look closely and tell others
 - 1. The eclipse
 - 2. Car accidents
 - c. All who head wondered in amazement
 - d. Mary treasured these things, pondering them in her heart
 - i. She had already had her own angelic encounter 9 months earlier.
 - ii. Luke 1:28-35
 - iii. Now this news was verified by another source.
 - iv. Treasure – hold close, ponder - consider
 - v. Surely she still wondered how all of this was going to come to pass. What would the future hold for her little one? How would God save people from their sins through Him?
 - e. The shepherds worshiped – they glorified and praised God
 - i. Recognize His glory, value it, celebrate it

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Like the angels and shepherds, we should perceive His glory and glorify Him.

Don’t leave the most important gift unwrapped – forgiveness.

Man has a problem, God has a solution, we have a responsibility.

Man’s problem is sin that has separated us from a holy God. God’s creatures made of dirt rose up in rebellion against Him.

God's solution is to come Himself, come as a man, obey in our place, and die in our place.

But we have a responsibility. Repent and believe. Turn from the sin that brings His anger, receive His forgiveness.



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