

The Glory Of Christmas

Christmas Eve

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An Anglican bishop in the UK opened his Christmas Day sermon last year with, “Three cheers for the City Council!” That may sound a bit strange, until you hear the rest of the story. Three years earlier he had lamented that the city’s Christmas light displays included reindeer, snowmen and Santa Claus, but not Jesus.

It seems the City Council heard the bishop, because last year the reindeer, snowmen and Santa Claus were replaced with a lighted display of Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus in a manger. And the city placed it just outside the Cathedral gates for all to see.

To the bishop, I am sure, this was a wonderful, even *glorious* sight. So he shouted, “Three cheers for the City Council!” ... and also, “Praise the Lord!”¹

In a way, that lighted manger scene depicted God’s *glory*. Glory, the brilliant, sparkling light of God’s perfection. God’s glory is a key feature of Christmas. So, think with me for a few minutes about “*The Glory of Christmas.*” The magi were led by a glorious star as they traveled to find and worship the One born King of the Jews. And then when Jesus was born, the skies exploded with the light of God’s glory as a multitude of angels announced and celebrated Christ’s birth singing “*Glory to God in the highest!*” What a *glorious* sight! It would have been great to have been there, although I probably would have been terrified at first just as the shepherds were.

As great as that glory was, an even greater glory that night was lying in an outdoor feeding trough—Jesus Christ. Earlier this evening we sang “Veiled in flesh the God-head see. Hail the incarnate Deity. Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.” The real *Glory of Christmas* is Jesus Christ Himself, God the Son, the brilliant, perfect splendor, glory of God.

But Christ’s glory was not displayed as we might expect when He came to earth, if we did not know the Bible’s accounts. God gave advance notice of this. He spoke through the prophet Isaiah about 700 years before Jesus was born, telling us, “He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him” (Isaiah 53:2). Jesus was not born in the pomp of a palace, but in the cold of a corral. He did not have a regal or stunning physical appearance. His life here was simple, not even having His own house. The gospels record Him saying, “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Matthew 8:20; Luke 9:58).

But His glory is seen even more in His character which led Him to come to earth. The apostle Paul paints this picture,

“although He existed in the form of God, [He] did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself,

taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men.” (Philippians 2:6-7)

He always was and forever is God. In the opening chapter of his gospel, John tells us that Christ “became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14). The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus Christ is “the radiance of [God’s] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power” (1:3).

God the Son *humbled* Himself to come into the world as one of us, truly God and truly man.

By nature we are not really humble. A fictional story about Adam says that one day his guardian angel came to God and said, “Adam has become filled with pride. He struts and preens like a peacock. The dog you created for him has taught him that he is loved, and now he believes he is worthy of adoration.” God said, “I will create for him a companion who will be with him forever and who will see him as he is. The companion will remind him of his limitations, so he will know that he is not worthy of adoration.” And God created CAT to be a companion to Adam. And Cat would not obey Adam. And when Adam gazed into the cat’s eyes, he was reminded that he was not the Supreme Being. And Adam learned humility.²

Christ did not have to learn humility. The scope, the depth and breath of His humility is light years beyond our ability to comprehend.

But here we need to ask and answer a compelling question, “Why did God do this? Why did God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit plan this? Why did Jesus come into the world in this way?” The Bible tells us “God so *loved* the world, that He gave His only begotten Son...” (John 3:16). You see, Jesus did not come to fulfill or prove anything for Himself. He is eternally complete and perfect. He came to provide what we need and cannot provide for ourselves.

We do not need God to tell us we are not perfect, but He does tell us that clearly in the Bible. He says, “All have sinned and fall short of the *glory* of God” (Romans 3:23). Nor do we need God to tell us we are unable to make ourselves perfect but, again, God clearly tells us this in the Bible. “By the works of the Law [or, by doing good things God commands us to do] no [person] will be justified in [God’s] sight” (Romans 3:20).

In love for us Jesus humbly came to do what we cannot do—satisfy God’s righteous demand that all sin be punished. He was born in a corral in Bethlehem and gave His life on a cross outside of Jerusalem to pay for, to atone for our sin. Being truly God and truly man, He was the only perfect One, the only One who could accomplish this. And God the Father raised Him from the dead in victory over sin and death.

So the Bible tells us, “Being found in appearance as a man, He *humbled* Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8). And that “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16). God’s life now. Life with God forever.

This is *glory!* Glory far greater than the glory of the star leading the magi to Jesus. Glory infinitely greater than the glory displayed in the mass angel choir's appearance to the shepherds.

So, what does this mean to us here and now on Christmas Eve 2009? Some people say, "That's nice. It's okay for people who want to believe it. But all religions are basically the same. They all end up at the same destination." Others think, "There is no way of knowing what is really true. In fact, there may be nothing that is always true for everyone. It's not so much what you believe," they say, "but that you sincerely believe in something and follow it as best as you can."

Jesus ruled out these options. He has told us, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). All religions are not the same. There is only one way to know God now and forever, and that is through Jesus. There is truth that is always true for everyone everywhere. Sincerity is important, but never trumps truth. Some people have allergies. I don't have many, that I know of, but one I do have is serious. I am severely allergic to morphine. If I were not aware of this, ended up in a hospital in a lot of pain and they asked me if I had any allergies and I told them "No" and they then gave me morphine, I would die. I would have been sincere in what I told them, but I also would be dead.

You see, one of the objective, always-true, *glorious* things about Jesus is that He is the way to forgiveness, to life and peace with God. As C. S. Lewis wrote, "The Son of God became a man to enable us to become sons of God."³ In the gospel of John we read, "But as many as received Him [Jesus], to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (1:12). The apostle Paul tells us that although "the wages of sin is death, ... the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). We don't have to try to earn it because we can't earn it, because it is God's gift to us in and through Jesus. Jesus is the one gift everyone needs.

So, on this Christmas Eve, If you have never received God's glorious gift of Jesus, you can right now. Tell God you know that you need His forgiveness and life, that you recognize it comes only through Jesus Christ who came, died and was raised from the dead for you. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins and give you life with Him today and forever. If you do that, or have questions, talk with me or someone else about this before you leave here this evening.

If you have received the gift of Christ but you have put Him on the shelf because you are busy with many important things, or have gotten off track for some reason, bring Jesus back into the center of your life.

For all of us who know Jesus, something of who He is and what He has done for us, above all tonight and tomorrow, thank and worship Him. He is "*The Glory of God.*"

¹ <<http://www.thisisgloucestershire.co.uk/news/Bishop-Gloucester-Christmas-sermon/article-568027-detailarticle.html>> Accessed 18 December 2009.

²“Gayle E. Rhoads’ Favorite Humorous Stories.” <<http://www.workingpsychology.com/ger-folder/ger-stories-hu.html>>. Accessed 18 December 2009.

³ Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1980, p. 178.

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