

The Gift of Glory

The text (show bulletin): The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

Ever meet a famous person? We have a thing about famous people. We want to know all about them. We hang on their every word. We tune into their every action. No wonder companies hire celebrities to pitch everything from automobiles to ziplock bags. And speaking of ziplock bags, did you know that in 2015 people were selling ziplock bags of air from a Kanye West concert on eBay? The going price? \$65,000 when eBay shut down the auction! Hey, honey, guess what I got you for Christmas!?

When someone tells us that he's met a celebrity personally, our first question is usually, "Wow! What's she like in person?" I can remember when my boss back in my Cleveland Clinic days did an interview with Joan Lunden for Good Morning America. When he got back from New York, I had to ask, "So, what's Joan Lunden like when the cameras are off?" Let's just say she wasn't America's Sweetheart!

That being said, many famous people don't want to be known—or they don't want to be known in the way that we want to know them. Go see their movies—attend their concerts—read their books—watch their TV shows—but let them eat in peace—let them shop without a crowd around them—let them live their private lives in private. The tabloid press probably wouldn't exist if not for our celebrity worship—but inquiring minds want to know.

It's true, many celebrities don't want you to know them personally, but God wants you to know Him. Beginning with creation, the Psalmist says that the heavens and the earth tell you a lot about God—but not the really important stuff. To really know God as our gracious and loving Creator takes a special revelation from Him. We call that revelation, the Word of God—the Holy Scriptures. The Word of God tells us everything that God wants us to know about Him. So, it's no wonder the devil attacks the Bible whenever and wherever he can—to keep us from knowing who God really is.

Now, when John says in our Christmas Gospel, “The Word became flesh,” he's describing Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Calling Jesus, “the WORD or LOGOS made flesh,” means that Jesus is ultimate self-revelation of God in human form.

In other words, if you want to know who God is, then you must look at Christ. To see God the Son in human form is to see God the Father. “Whoever has seen me,” Jesus said to Philip, “has seen the Father” (John 14:9). In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus said, “All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” As the LOGOS made flesh, to know Jesus is to know God the Father.

God's making Himself known to humanity is called GLORY. In the Old Testament God revealed Himself in the glory of creation—the heavens declared His glory. When His people were grumbling in the wilderness, God revealed His glory in a cloud from which He announced that He would give them quail and manna to eat—“Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God” (Ex. 16:12). As He led His people through the wilderness, God's presence was revealed in the glory of the Pillar of Fire and the Pillar of Smoke. And when God was in the Tabernacle or

the Temple, you knew because His glory was there—the cloud that filled that sacred space announced God’s glorious presence with His people. Throughout the Old Testament, God revealed His glory in the preservation of His people.

And in the New Testament God reveals His glory in Christ Jesus: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Now, none of us here can wrap our mortal, sinful minds around God—it would be like trying to wrap the Empire State Building with dental floss. He’s an immortal Spirit—we are mortal beings. He is infinite in power, presence and majesty—we are finite, weak, and limited. God is holy, righteous, and perfectly good—we are sinners. For us to meet God—in all His glory—would mean certain death. God must veil His glory for our sakes.

So, God makes Himself known by coming to us as a human being—the unapproachable glory of Almighty God approachable in the person and human flesh of Jesus Christ.

And it’s important that God revealed His glory in a baby born in a stable—His first resting place a manger. You see, Jesus wasn’t born to a queen in a palace or a first lady in a mansion. He came not as royalty for royalty, or the rich for the rich—but as as a common person for all people. As John puts it, He “dwelt among us.” More literally, He “pitched His tent with us.” Remember where the wise men went first in their search for the child Jesus? The palace in Jerusalem—that’s where you’d expect a king to be born. But Jesus was born in a stable—He was born to be God with ALL of us!

Look at the incarnation this way. In that baby born to Mary is where you find God as God wants to be known—in Jesus, walking among us—living with us—crying and laughing with us,

eating and sleeping as one of us. Here is God, revealed in all of His glory!

Now, there are some people who are famous just for being famous. They haven't done anything great—they haven't created anything of value—they haven't lived an exceptional life—they're just famous for being famous. But most celebrities are celebrities because they've accomplished something great. They've made great movies, had a great career in athletics, wrote a great novel, had a hit show on TV. Because they've done something great, we celebrate them. When a ball player strikes out with the bases loaded, that isn't very glorious—but when he smashes the ball for a grand slam—that's glorious—that's something to be celebrated!

We expect the same thing from God—that He reveal His glory in greatness. That's how we define glory—God doing something we can celebrate! So, we go back to the manger and what we see isn't all that great or glorious. There we find an ordinary little baby in swaddling cloths, born to a common woman, resting of all places in a cattle trough—there doesn't seem to be a whole lot to celebrate, here!

But here in Jesus is God's glory revealed to sinners. He might not look like much—an ordinary child, an ordinary Jewish man, an ordinary Rabbi—but this Jesus is the glory of God because He has come to accomplish the greatest feat in history—our salvation through His perfect life and sacrificial death on the cross.

Now, while we might see dying on the battlefield as a glorious way to die, dying on a cross was not! Only criminals died on a cross. In fact, for the first 300 years of the Church's history, the cross was never used as a symbol for the Christian faith—there was too much stigma attached to this instrument of Roman capital punishment. Yet, the cross is where the glory of God is revealed in its fullness. The cross is where Jesus took on sin, death and the devil—and

won! The cross is where the God grace and love for His creation is ultimately revealed. In First Corinthians, the apostle Paul said the cross—Christ crucified—is an offense and a stumbling block. But to all who are being saved—it is Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

The world doesn't see much glory in Christ's birth or His death, but you do—you know the manger and the cross are places of God's glory because God has revealed His glory to you!

Talking about the gift of glory, John's Christmas Gospel is about you, too! I want you to know that God glories in you, His people—warts, sins, imperfections and all! John writes: "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, the gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

This birth that John talks about is your baptism. You know how parents and grandparents glory at the birth of a child—well, God glories at your birth into His kingdom. In your baptism, you join with Jesus as sons of God, meaning co-heirs of eternal life.

Being baptized into Jesus' glorious name, and trusting Jesus' glorious work for your salvation also means that you're be ready for the final Day when Jesus returns in visible glory to judge the living and the dead—the kind of glory we call glory—awesome, knee-bending, earth shattering glory. On that day, your glory as God's holy and redeemed people—hidden now under the cross—will be revealed for all the world to see!

On judgment day, God's glory will be revealed in power and might. But now, today is the time when God's glory is revealed in His grace. God's glory comes to you today in that Newborn Baby in the manger—in the cross on which He died, and in the empty tomb from which He rose again. Today, God's glory comes to you in Word and Sacrament, in faith, and in the forgiveness

of sins. Now—in this time of grace—is the time to hear and believe! As the apostle Paul says in 2nd Corinthians: “‘In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:1-2). Now is the time to believe in Jesus and be saved—to the glory of God!

In these Advent/Christmas sermons, we’ve opened many gifts that come to us in Jesus. We can pray today with the five-year-old who on Christmas night almost quoted Psalm 51:11 accurately—well, almost! He prayed, “O Lord, cast me not away from my presents.” Among the cherished presents we have in Christ are hope, love, peace, life, joy and today, glory. “We have seen His glory.” Glory is the gift of knowing God up close and personal in Jesus Christ.

Merry Christmas everyone!

In Jesus’ Name. Amen.