

Glory to God in the Highest

Luke 2:13-14

When God wants to get someone's attention, He has lots of options. One thing he does is show them His glory. When people see God's glory, they are immediately impressed - convinced that He is magnificent, weighty. Nobody who sees and understands the glory of God yawns and says, "Pass the potatoes." No, they are always impressed. They often respond with fear initially, but eventually with praise.

That was the case with the shepherds outside of Bethlehem on the night that Jesus was born. A few minutes ago we heard Luke's account of the shepherds' response to the glory of God. We are going to work our way through the birth narrative in Luke 2 rather quickly, and then we'll survey some of the ways that God **has** revealed and **will** reveal His glory in Jesus. We will see how people responded to the glory of God in Christ.

Just to let you know, I am going to urge you to respond here today/tonight to the glory of God we see in Jesus. Other messages in this sermon series have suggested ongoing responses to the glory of God - such as glorifying God in the details of life. But I'm going to urge you to respond here and now to the glory of God as the shepherds did.

As we consider these passages, what impresses you, amazes you, fascinates you? When you can answer that question you will be able to respond to the glory of God as the shepherds did.

The Glory of God at the Birth of Christ (Luke 2:8-20) In verses 8 and 9 we are told that God displayed His glory to "some shepherds" near the town of Bethlehem where Jesus had been born.

8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

In Scripture, the common response to angels was fear. Drawings and paintings of angels often make them look like chubby little Caucasian babies, but the Bible depicts angels as fierce and glorious. Angels are spiritual beings sent out by God to do His will (see Hebrews 2:14). In addition to the angel of the Lord, we are told that "the glory of the Lord shone around them." Here the glory of the Lord was His radiance, magnificence, brilliance, etc. "And they were terribly frightened."

Characteristically the angel tries to quell their fears.

10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

They had nothing to fear because the angel hadn't appeared to harm them but to bring them "good news of great joy." This news wouldn't merely be for a select few; it would be "for all the people." Specifically, the angel announced that "today in the city of David [Bethlehem, not Jerusalem] there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Jesus would be the One who saved the people from their sins. The shepherds would later report to Mary and Joseph this good news.

12 "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

All newborn babies were "wrapped in cloths" much like newborns are wrapped up tightly today; this keeps them warm and keeps their arms from flailing around. What would identify the Christ child was that he would be lying in a manger (or feeding trough).

In verses 13 and 14 we read that God pulled back the curtain of heaven just a bit more.

13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."

"Host" was a military term, sometimes translated "army." In addition to the angel who had spoken, there "suddenly appeared" a vast army of angels. In the Old Testament YHWH is sometimes called "the Lord of Hosts"; we sometimes sing about "The God of angel armies is always on my side." Here an angel army appeared and began praising God.

The angels declare that the birth of Christ affects both heaven and earth. The first element of praise was, "Glory to God in the highest." In the highest reaches of heaven, God deserved glory for the birth of this Child. As heavenly beings looked down, they acknowledged that nothing quite as impressive as Jesus humbling Himself by taking on flesh and blood, laying aside the prerogatives of heaven to come to earth. If possible, God's reputation grew and swelled in the highest heaven at the birth of the Child.

The second element of this praise was a declaration of peace on earth "among men with whom He is pleased." Because of Jesus' eventual death and resurrection there would be peace on earth among men. If your relationship with God is whole, your relationships with others can be whole (because you are secure, you have nothing to prove, it is well with your soul). Shalom with God and with others would come through this Child.

Verses 15 through 20 explain how the shepherds responded to the glory of God they had seen and heard.

15 When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." 16 So they came in a hurry

and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. 17 When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.

When you “treasure” something, you hang onto it as valuable, as something you don’t want to lose. Mary treasured this message that her Child was the promised Messiah and a Savior. And she “ponder[ed] them in her heart.” Mary was a very contemplative young woman who payed attention to God’s voice. Twelve years later when Jesus stayed behind at the temple in Jerusalem and explained, “Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?” We read again that “His mother treasured all these things in her heart” (Luke 2:51).

Having experienced the glory of God, having heard the declaration, “Glory to God in the highest,” and having seen for themselves the Child wrapped in cloths and lying in a feeding trough, the shepherds naturally glorified God themselves:

20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

They were so impressed with God that they gave Him glory (acknowledged His glory) and joined in praising Him. Their praise/glory were an echo of the praise/glory of the angels; when they added their praise/glory the glory was magnified. That was their natural response.

When you and I experience and understand the glory of God in Christ we will also be impressed (because **God is impressive/glorious**), and we will also naturally response by giving Him glory and praise. The Scriptures don’t advocate manufacturing some type of spiritual fervor; rather, spiritual passion and zeal are the response to seeing God as He is. If He really is as impressive as the Scriptures reveal, then we will be like the shepherds (and many others) who saw His glory.

Let’s take a quick survey of the ways that the glory of God **was** revealed and **will be** revealed in Jesus. These events are recorded so that we too will be impressed with God (in the very best sense possible) and so that we will respond by “glorifying and praising God” as the shepherds did.

The Glory of God in Jesus’ Life (John 1:14) We’ve mentioned this verse a couple of times in this series. In the very first chapter of his gospel, John mentioned that the glory of our heavenly Father was on display in Jesus’ life in a unique way. We read this in John 1:14.

14 And the Word 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.

Jesus repeatedly told His disciples, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father" (John 14:8). People were routinely impressed with Jesus - His teaching with authority, His miracles, the way He suffered. They saw the "glory as of the only begotten from the Father."

The Glory of God at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-13) Matthew 17 records that one one occasion Jesus allowed Peter, James, and John to get a glimpse of the glory that Jesus possessed from eternity past and that He will possess for all eternity future. We read this in Matthew 17:

1 Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. 2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, I will make three tabernacles here, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell face down to the ground and were terrified.

This was one of the many ways that God impressed upon these three that Jesus was indeed the Glorious One from the Father.

The Glory of God at the Triumphal Entry (Luke 19:28-40) When Jesus entered Jerusalem the week of His crucifixion, the crowds made a declaration very similar to that of the angels on the night of Jesus' birth. Luke 19 records this:

37 As soon as He was approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, 38 shouting: "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

When the Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke His disciples for referring to Him in this way, Jesus said, "I tell you, if they keep quiet the stones will cry out." Ultimately Jesus will receive the glory due His name.

The Glory of God at the Crucifixion (John 12:20-43) When Jesus thought about His impending crucifixion, He thought in terms of God's glory. In John 12 we read:

27 "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28 "Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."

The "name" of God signifies His character - who He really is. Through Jesus God ***had already*** shown the magnificence of His name; He had demonstrated His compassion and grace and lovingkindness. At the cross, God ***would*** "glorify [His name] again. There He would show in a uniquely magnificent way who He was. He would show that He so

loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but will have eternal life. How can we not be impressed with God when we look at the cross?!?!

The Glory of God at Jesus' Return (Luke 9:19-27) Finally, we are told that Jesus' return will be "in glory"; in other words, God's impressiveness will be on full display. We read this in Luke 9:

23 And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. 24 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. 25 "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? 26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

At His first coming, only those who believed "beheld His glory." At the transfiguration, only Peter, James, and John saw His glory. But when He returns, He will come "in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels." On that day they "will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:27). The response will be that "every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, ***to the glory of God the Father***" (Philippians 2:10-11).

We've seen in Scripture that the glory of God was revealed at Jesus' birth, through His life (teachings, miracles, the way He related to people), at the Transfiguration, at the Triumphal Entry, and through the crucifixion (when God glorified His name). All will see God's glory when Jesus returns.

My question today/tonight is, "What do ***you*** find impressive about Jesus?"

- Jesus' humility
- That God, knowing that we couldn't save ourselves, sent a Savior. Paul wrote (1 Timothy 1:15), "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all.*"
- Jesus' suffering

Will you respond by giving glory and praise to God?

- As we discussed last week, we can be like the leprous man who gave glory to God by giving thanks to Jesus. You can glorify God by simple saying "thank You."
- You might "bow the knee" and confess (perhaps for the first time) that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. There might be an area of your life or a circumstance that you want to submit to Jesus and His Lordship.

It was one thing for the angel of the Lord to appear and for the glory of God to shine on the shepherds; but then the army of angels suddenly appeared and gave glory to God in the highest; finally the shepherds responded and glorified and praised God. In the same way we can magnify the name of God here today. Take some time to give glory to God individually. Then we will glorify Him together in song.