

Luke 2: 1-20; “Glory to God in the Highest”, A Sermon for the Christmas Season
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on December 23rd, 2018,
In the Afternoon Worship Service.

I want to take this last opportunity before Christmas to preach to you about the glory of God in the birth of Christ. There has been no greater gift to a world of fallen men and women than this. What I have read to you from these verses is the Son of God’s entrance into the world, which was such a joy to the angels to behold, it was the announcement of such love for unworthy sinners as we all are, that a multitude of them, it says, praised God and said – “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, god will toward men!” When God the Father brought the firstborn, the first-begotten, the only-begotten, into the world, it says in Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 6, He said – “Let all the angels of God worship Him.” And this they did, on that night so long ago; they praised God and worshiped Him for this great sending of the 2nd Person of the Divine Trinity into the world to assume human nature. It was a great mystery to them, and it was something which they couldn’t fully fathom, how His entrance into the world would bring about redemption for fallen sinners. But they knew that it was something which would bring glory to God in every way.

They knew that God who was looking on from His highest place in heaven, was pleased. They knew that He was looking down upon this Babe in the manger with love and full approval, for He had much good will for lost and perishing sinners. God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. In this message I would like to mention 4 ways in which glory was brought to God through the events surrounding Christ’s birth. 1st – God’s being glorified in the fulfillment of prophecy. 2nd – God’s being glorified by Christ’s being born in a stable. 3rd – God’s being glorified in the angel’s visit and message. And 4th – God’s being glorified in the shepherds reaction to the angel’s message. I pray that in preaching to you this message that you will see more of how God is glorified in the lives of simple everyday people as they come to know more about His ways and His Son.

1st – Let’s think about how God was glorified in the fulfillment of prophecy.

(verses 1-5)

I want you to think with me for a few minutes about the very first prophecy that God gave to mankind. The angels were created at the beginning of the world, and yet some of them did not last long in their first glorious estate. Satan, or Lucifer as he was called then, was a very beautiful and powerful angel whose assigned task was to guard the garden of God. But he was not praising God as should have been that day when he instigated the fall of man. He did not like the idea of human kind, who were created in the image and likeness of God; that someday they would become greater than himself. He thought of himself as the king of angels. He had designs on being just as great as the only-begotten of God. He became proud and he rebelled against God’s good decrees and purposes which had been laid out before time began, and before he was created. He rebelled and he took a third of the angels with him. And because his pride and deceit were so great, God determined that neither he nor any of the other rebellious angels would receive any mercy, or any promise of salvation, from God because of their sin.

Those holy angels who stood the test of their original righteousness would be confirmed forever in their holiness. They would be those who would praise the Lord for His wonderful works; this one, one of God’s greatest works, and a unique one, they were able to witness. Those angels who rebelled would become evil spirits and demons, and they have attempted to undermine all of God’s good purposes in terms of His being glorified, and sinners among mankind, being saved. Satan still had access to the garden of Eden after his fall, and so he disguised himself in the form a beautiful serpent and he talked to Eve about how God was supposedly withholding wisdom and knowledge from her; knowledge which she could obtain for herself, independent of God, by eating

of the tree which God had commanded them not to eat from; the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Eve was deceived into thinking that she would become wise if she took her own initiative and acted on her own. Surely she would not die, Satan had told her, and she would supposedly become more like God, knowing the difference between good and evil. She saw that the fruit was good for food, and she thought that it would be good for her to have this wisdom, and so she ate and gave some to Adam and he ate, and our whole race has been affected from that time forward. We are all born into the world with the guilt of Adam's sin bringing condemnation, and sin coming into Adam's very nature; and so it is passed down to us, because we have all been created in Adam's image and likeness.

But God had better plans for Adam and Eve than their being cast down to hell. And He has better plans for everyone who will believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ His Son. When Adam and Eve fell from their original righteousness, and the Lord God came walking in the garden in the cool of the day to visit them. He knew that they had sinned, and asked Adam why they were hiding from Him. He said that he was afraid because he was naked. And when the Lord God asked who had told him that he was naked, He also asked him if he had eaten from the tree which he had commanded that he should not eat. They confessed their sin, and the Lord gave to them solemn words of the earthly judgments that they would experience, having sinned. But even though they had died, spiritually, the very moment that they had eaten the forbidden fruit; and even though they would eventually die, physically, some hundreds of years later, they would not die eternally.

This was because He also gave them words of Promise of what He Himself would do for them, and for all believers through the seed of the woman; the Seed of the Virgin Mary, through His sending our Lord Jesus Christ. He would put enmity between Satan and the woman, and between Satan's seed and her seed, the Lord Jesus, whom God would send into the world. The promise was that, in coming into the world, that through His ministry of righteousness, He would crush Satan's head, and Satan would bruise His (that is Christ's) heel. This promise would come to fruition when our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross. But the power for any believing sinner, in any generation of the world's history, would be there for them to lay hold of the promise of salvation, if they heard of it, and they believed in it for themselves; the Holy Spirit working to convince them. But God's love and mercy were promised in Christ for everyone who would believe, from that point of the fall in the garden forward, until the end of the world. Christ would be sent in His Incarnation in the fullness of time; at just the right time, in human history.

I do not know whether you understand how inconvenient this decree must have been to the virgin Mary and Joseph; the decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census, it is called in verse 2; a census which first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. Everybody had to comply by "going to their own city". It was about a hundred miles from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem, and they made the journey by donkey I would assume. Sometimes the providence of God, the way that He orders things in our lives, seems too difficult, even for those who are true believers. But we must understand that this was Mary's opportunity to live by faith. We must understand that God's providence, His ordering and bringing to pass all these things, according to His will and by His Spirit, had a tremendous purpose behind it. Mary was told by an angel before, that she would become the mother of the Savior of the World, and that her conception would be miraculous, for she was still a virgin. And she had said – "Be it done to me according to your word."

But she went to Bethlehem by faith; having the promise of God that she would bear a Son and they would call His name Jesus. She knew that all that God ordered was wise and good. This, her going to Bethlehem, was glorifying to God because His word would be fulfilled by her going. All of this that happened to her; it all took place in order that prophecy might be fulfilled; and so, Mary's true humility and obedience to God would be established, and God would be glorified. The census took place because Caesar Augustus wanted to know how much he could tax the people, but this event took place in God's good hand, to bring Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem where prophecy

would be fulfilled. Micah chapter 5, verse 2 – “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose going forth are from old, from everlasting.” The one who had been begotten of God from all eternity was now to be joined to human nature and this little Babe would become the servant of God to fulfill all righteousness and show forth the love of God.

2nd – God would be glorified by our Lord’s being born in a stable. (verses 6 and 7)

“So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.” “And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” What a welcome for the Son of God in His entrance into the world; to be born in a stable, and laid in a manger; an animal’s feeding trough! But this too was glorifying to God. It was glorifying to God because Christ had come into the world to save sinners of all kinds; people from every tribe and tongue and people and language. People who were cultured and people who were uncouth and barbarians in the sins that they committed; people who act much like animals. The picture brought to our minds of Jesus’ birth is that if we are like animals in our sin, brute beasts who need to be saved, then let us feed on Jesus; the babe lying in the manger.

You may remember, if you have read much of the Bible, that the Apostle Peter was the apostle who opened the door of the gospel to the Gentiles according to the purpose of God, in the days of the early Church. Anyone who was not a Jew in the time of Christ, was called a Gentile. They were considered outsiders, strangers and aliens to the covenants of God. And the Jews did not usually have a very good opinion of those who were outside. They called them dogs. Well, what Jesus came to do by His death, was to bring down the wall which had made the Jews a separate and distinct people from all other peoples, by fulfilling the law. He would, by His grace, make all those whom God would call to Himself, to be one new man in the Church. After Jesus rose from the dead, and ascended to heaven, Peter began to preach Christ, after he was clothed with power from on high. He preached first to the Jews and then to the Samaritans, and then in Acts chapter 10, it is recorded that he had a very unusual vision which showed him that he should preach to the Gentiles.

Peter had this vision of a sheet being lowered down from heaven, and in it were all of these four footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.” “And a voice came to him saying, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” He was to preach the gospel to Cornelius and his household; Gentiles who he normally would not associate with. But he preached and they were saved by hearing the word of God concerning faith in Jesus Christ. God was glorified in Christ’s being born in a stable where sheep and cattle were being housed and fed. The Lord of Glory was born there to show forth the fact that there is no one who is so sinful that they cannot be saved and brought to know the Lord if they will but partake of Christ. Come as you are. Come as a sinner. You may see yourself as a beast in your sins but it is glorifying to God to stoop and save those who believe in His Son. There was no room in the inn for Mary and Joseph and the Baby Jesus. There is no room in the hearts of men and women who are too proud to think that they are sinners or that it is by simple faith that they can have eternal life. But for those who know that they are sinful, for those who are poor in spirit, and know that they cannot save themselves by the best of their works, it is not such a great stretch for them to humble themselves as a little child and come to Jesus for light and life.

3rd – God was being glorified in the angel’s visit and message. (verses 8-14)

Here we read of shepherds in the fields somewhere near Bethlehem, keeping watch over their flock by night. And suddenly an angel of the Lord stood before them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Well, they should have been afraid, for how often is an angel seen by any man? These men were not ultra-religious men as the scribes and Pharisees and rulers of Israel. They were simple shepherds doing their job. But their job represented what the Lord Jesus would do with His life; He would become the Great Shepherd of all of God’s people;

His sheep, and one day lay down His life for them. The angel said – “Do not be afraid for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.” “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” I hope that you see that Jesus, as a Savior, was born that night so long ago, for all people; even for you. This should bring you great joy, because if you believe in Him you will come to know the reality of all of your sins being forgiven because He was righteous in His life and He suffered for sinners; those who will believe in Him. Will you believe in Him? Will you receive what He has accomplished, to redeem your soul to God? What joy, what everlasting joy will be yours if you do!

4th – God was being glorified in the way that the shepherds and Mary reacted to the angel’s message.

Verse 15 – “So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.’” “And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.” “Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child.” “And all who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.” “But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” I would close with this – If you would know Christ as your personal Savior from sin, then you must come and see for yourself. This is what the shepherds did. They received the good tidings concerning the Christ Child, and they did not put it off to some other time; they went in haste to see Him. They sought Him and they found Him. Such will be the case with you, if you will immediately come and see; you will find Him. Today, He is not in a manger, but seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High. He is there to hear your prayers and be your Mediator and Advocate with the Father. Will you not rejoice in this? It is the greatest of blessings, to know that you can come to God through Christ at any time.

And notice too, the reaction of Mary to the shepherds coming for their visit. She pondered all the things which they told her, and it was confirmed for her, all the things which had been told her by the angel himself when Jesus was about to be conceived in her womb. “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name Jesus.” “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.” “And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” What great words, and she had pondered them then, and she pondered them once again now that Jesus was born. She knew that now that God had begun this good work of having her bring His Son into the world, and that these simple shepherds had had this best of news conveyed to them by angels, that He would most certainly raise Jesus up to be great, and the promises concerning His having the throne of His father David, and reigning over the house of Jacob, would eventually come to pass. How? She did not yet know. But she pondered it.

She would receive another prophetic message from God through a godly older man named Simeon, a few days later, when he came into the temple, being led by the Spirit, and he saw the Lord’s Christ, the little Lord Jesus, and held Him in his arms. He said – Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” The Lord Jesus was going to be very great and yet she would experience sorrow like a sword piercing her own soul. But her faith in God, and in her own Son would sustain her. He who was already her Savior, was to become her Savior and Lord and King in a sense in which she would come to understand more fully, and even to rejoice in, when His ministry was completed and when He would rise from the dead, and ascend to heaven. She now held this Babe in her arms. But His good Spirit was in her heart, and He would not fail to communicate one of the blessings of salvation to her. He would fulfill them all to her, and this night was the earnest of it.

