

Christmas Eve 2018

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[0 : 00] Bibles. If you want to read along, you can. If not, you can just listen. We're going to talk a little bit about Christmas and what it's all about. If you would, please pray with me before we start.

Lord, we thank you for this gathering and we thank you for this season and for the joy and the blessing it is to many of us. And Lord, we pray now that you would help us. Help us to hear this story afresh. Help us to see it with new eyes. Lord, help us to hear the good news of great joy for all people that we see in this story and in this holiday season and what Christmas is all about. Lord, I pray for your help. Lord, that I would speak your words and for all of us that we would hear your voice and your word. We pray this tonight in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, there's something special about Christmas, isn't there? Oh, some of us may be curmudgeons and sort of resent the demands and the expectations and the busyness that often comes along with it. But there is something special. The city is lighted up.

People greet one another on the street a little more happily. There is a lightness and a joy and a beauty of it. I wonder why that is. I wonder what it is about Christmas that allows our whole society even to take a deep breath and be caught up in something.

I wonder if it speaks to a longing in our hearts, to a desire that the world would be a place full of more light, more joy, more warmth. That in Christmas there is in fact a promise that the world could be something more than what it is.

[2 : 05] I propose to you tonight that there is. And that we see this in the story that we saw in the book of Luke. That in fact what Christmas points us to is glory. Now what do I mean by glory? Well, if you look it up in the dictionary in the OED, it has a number of different definitions. But something that has high renown and honor, something that has magnificence and great beauty.

So we think of, use it in terms of the glory of the Sistine Chapel with its architecture and its artwork. We would use it for glory as of a Hawaiian sunset. We'd use it of the glory of the one who wins the New York Marathon. It is a characteristic of something that is awesome, beautiful, and great. Something with transcendent worth and value that is on display. And I would propose to you tonight that we were made for glory and that we thirst for glory. And as we encounter these things and whatever it is for you, these things that tap into our hearts and make us feel this longing for something more. It is that thirst for glory that is being expressed.

And yet even as we feel that and hear that, we hear the words of the writer C.S. Lewis who warns us this, they are not the things themselves. They are only the scent of a flower we have not found. The echo of a tune we have not heard. News from a country that we have not yet visited.

These glimpses of glory that we have in life are meant to point us to something that is real and is eternal. And it is in fact at the very center of Christmas.

[4 : 05] The Christmas season, I believe, is so special to us because it points us to glory. In the passage we just read in the book of Luke, we actually see glory breaking in.

The word glory breaks through the narrative in three different places. And it teaches us a little bit about what this is and what we are made for. So as we look at it briefly together, I hope we'll be able to see that together.

First of all, we see starting in verse 8, the story of the shepherds out in the fields at night and the glory of God comes into the darkness. And that darkness is a literal darkness, isn't it?

For they're out in their fields at night watching over their sheep. But it is much more than that, isn't it? It is coming into the darkness of the plight of the nation of Israel under oppression from foreign rule, suffering under the Roman leadership.

It is the darkness of a nation disappointed with God. Could it be better than this? Is this all that you have for us? And it comes not to palaces or to places of great wealth or prosperity, but it comes to

shepherds.

[5 : 27] shepherds the dark margins of society. Shepherding was not a respected profession. And a shepherd would be more likely shunned than welcomed even in a gathering like this tonight.

And yet what we see in this story in verse 9 is that the angel appears and the glory of the Lord shone, literally bright light that lit up the darkness.

it turned what was dark into light. But more than that it came with a message of glory.

The angel came and said behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be for all the people. And the shepherds sitting there were reminded that God has not forgotten them or abandoned them and that the darkness does not win.

Maybe tonight you have come here bearing much darkness in your life. Maybe the darkness of grief and loss.

[6 : 40] Maybe the darkness of despair at our country and how broken our society and our world are. Maybe you have seen the darkness in your own life well up and spill out in destruction in your relationships and in your life and you hate it as much as you feel helpless to change it.

Maybe you feel like you're one of those on the margins of society like the shepherds and maybe like Israel you're here wondering about your life really God is this it?

Is this as good as it can get? Does it get any better than this? Into our darkness God has come in glory.

The angels show up and there's this bright display of glory with this pronouncement but then you see in verses 11 and following the story goes on because the glory isn't just nice platitudes be warm and well fed it's the most wonderful time of the year it's not a platitude the Christmas message comes with glory that is centered on a person you see glory in verse 14 as it's shown the heavenly host shows up and sings glory to God in the highest but what is it that they are singing about that causes them to say this?

It's in verse 11 and 12 the announcement for unto you is born this day in the city of David a savior who is Christ the Lord and this will be a sign for you you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger you see when God displays his glory he doesn't do it simply with platitudes but he does it with a person and what a person it is for this person has been given grand titles he is the savior the one to come to deliver his people from their plight he is the Christ which is Greek for Messiah the anointed one of God the long hoped for one who will make things right he is called the Lord the one who comes with authority and sovereign power who will not bow to any other and who comes to reign the announcement of the angels was that there is one who would come to do all these things and yet he is a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger not a crib not a home not a maternity ward but an animal stall and a feeding trough the way that God shows his glory in the world is so unlike the way we seek glory in our own lives isn't it for when we seek glory when I seek glory it is by me performing and producing and then calling everyone else to say look how great I am and so often on the pursuit of my own glory

[10 : 10] I find that I use people I find that I discard them when they are unhelpful in my pursuit of glory I find that all of my life becomes warped about me being seen as great but when this baby comes he comes with this incredible juxtaposition for he is labeled to be great he will be the great one who will do all these great things and yet he comes in humility and in meekness and in weakness imagine what the shepherds must have thought could it be true could it be true that God has come for one like me is it possible that the deepest longings of my heart could be met tonight in this baby could it be the things that

I barely hope to dream or hope for because they seem impossible might actually be true that God might have heard me in my crying out for help and that he has done something about it the glory of God in this baby continues in the glory of this one Jesus as he grows and as he lives his life you read the rest of the gospel of Luke which the author Luke called an orderly account so that his readers might have certainty concerning these things regarding Jesus that is he's trying to lay out a faithful rendition of who this man was that he would come with both this greatness and this humility and that in that would be his glory for he would come and as an adult man he would come and he would do amazing things he would heal the blind he would raise the dead he would feed the hungry he would set the captives free from oppression he would come and do all of these wonderful things transforming the lives of those that he came in touch with and yet he would do so as an outsider not in the halls of power but wandering in the fields not as one revered but as one reviled by those in power culminating his life and ministry at the cross where he the lord of life the god of the universe

come to earth become a human being humbled himself and laid down his life taking on the darkness of this world so that he might rescue us from it he laid down his glory in order to pick up a different kind of glory he muted his glory in his divinity for a season so that he might take it up as a savior forever in his death he died to rescue us from the darkness and in his resurrection he proved his power that death and darkness would not have the last word but that he the giver and the author of life would give to all who received him to all who believed in his name this is the glory of this baby this is the trajectory of the story of what

Christmas is all about friends God has come to this world he has come to us in our darkness and he has met us in the person of Jesus and that's why we celebrate Christmas but it's not just a historical looking back to 2000 so or so years ago to historical event that happened back then but it's meant as it did for the shepherds then is meant for us now for the story continues in verses 15 through 20 the shepherds having heard this great announcement abandon their livelihoods abandon their field and they go to Bethlehem they go to find this one who has been announced and when they find him in the manger as they were told they tell Mary and Joseph what they had seen and heard and all there marveled at the account and as they leave we see the third breakthrough of glory in this for they went away glorifying

God you see what that means is that they were so caught up in the glory that had been announced and the glory that they saw as they were able to see this baby they realized that this was the hope of all their hearts longings and desires and that in this baby they would find all that they were looking for that they would be caught up in his glory by believing in him that they would be glorified and then would in turn glorify God that is they would by believing in this son they would find their own glory given not by their own effort but bestowed upon them by being connected with this Jesus in the coming of

Jesus glory has come it's come with an invitation for us come follow me come believe in me come trust in me Jesus says to us let all your lesser aspirations your lesser successes your lesser moments of beauty and wonder your lesser glories point you to the author of all glory the glory that you were made for being God's being God's person and knowing him and when we abandon ourselves to the glory of Jesus we find that we are caught up into a glory that fills us with a glory that is inexpressible and filled with great joy the invitation is to come and worship come and worship come find the glory of this baby

[17 : 25] Jesus fall on your knees and worship him tonight Jesus Christ the newborn king let's pray together Lord we come to you tonight recognizing that you have broken into this world Lord with glory for us Lord we confess that we often seek glory on our own apart from you Lord I pray tonight that Lord you would help us to know that the glory that we long for is found ultimately and only in you Lord that you would turn our hearts towards you tonight in faith and in hope in joy and in worship we pray these things in Jesus name Amen Amen

Well friends as we come to near the end of our service tonight