December 24, 2017 (8 PM) The Gift of Glory Patricia Weatherwax

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.* [*John 1:14*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage?search=John%201:14&version=NRSV) [(key verse)](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%201:13-15&version=NRSV)

**INTRODUCTION**

We’ve been considering the gifts of Christmas this year during advent. Not the toys or clothes or things to use (I’m getting new pans). We’ve been opening the gifts God gives for our spirit: hope, peace, joy and love. These gifts are lasting and wonderful, and although they’re abstract, hard to put a bow on, they’re easily describable. We know these gifts when we feel and experience them. We know: yes, we want them all.

But do we understand and accept and receive the gift of glory? Would we know glory if we saw it? Have you ever seen or experienced true glory? Sarah Young, in the well-loved devotional *Jesus Calling,* writes: “Living by faith rather than sight, enables” us to see God’s glory (Dec 21).

"**Glory**" is one of the most common root words in scripture and in our churches. In our core values here, we call out for “Glorious Worship”, but what is it? In the Old Testament, the word is used to translate Hebrew words for awe and splendor. In the New Testament it is used to translate the Greek word doxa- which forms our word doxology: words of praise. It’s definition includes brightness and light and power. One of the Hebrew words also originally meant "weight" or "heaviness." Glory is beautiful serious business.

One of the first descriptions of glory in the Bible comes with the presentation of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 24:17:  **“**The sight of the glory of the Lord *was* like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel.” Wow.

God’s people get it. God is wow and more. God gives great gifts and asks for our response of living helpful and thankful lives. In the Old Testament times, Jesus’ ancestors David and then David’s son Solomon built a beautiful temple in which to worship God. The people worked together to build it --and listen to the response:

Therefore David blessed the Lord before all the assembly; and David said:

“Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel,

our Father, forever and ever.

Yours, O Lord, *is* the greatness,

The power and the glory,

The victory and the majesty;

For all *that is* in heaven and in earth *is Yours;*

Yours *is* the kingdom, O Lord,

And You are exalted as head over all.

Both riches and honor *come* from You,

And You reign over all.

In Your hand *is* power and might;

In Your hand *it is* to make great

And to give strength to all.

Now therefore, our God,

We thank You

And praise Your glorious name.”

(David’s prayer from I Chronicles 29:10-13)

Glory is awesomeness, majesty, splendor, brightness, brilliance, magnificence. It’s something you just don’t see everyday. In the Christmas story from Luke 2:10, we know the line so well, about the angels and the shepherds, that we almost yawn when we read it: “The glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.” Put yourself on that hill with some sheep. Feel the adrenaline! Glory is bold not boring!

One translator used the phrase “infinite significance” to define glory. Whatever you are describing, if it’s about God, it is infinite, it’s more than you can ask or imagine (Eph 3:20). And with all that power and the wow factor, compared to our everyday lives, it’s no surprise that we rarely see true glory.

**THE CONTRAST**

Part of the difficulty with the gift of glory is the contrast, in the story, and in our lives. Sometimes the theologians describe God’s glory and fullness as the “already and not yet”. The birth announcement is amazing, the sky and angels show splendor and glory, but not everything is accomplished, *yet*. And there’s so much contrast between Bethlehem’s humble surroundings and the great splendor of heaven and God’s reign.

The celebration of Christmas tries to describe and explain and present us with glory in scenes that were stark and hard and humble. The shepherds up on the hillside saw a sky filled with angels giving glory to God in the highest and went “with haste” down to Bethlehem to find a baby wrapped in rags and in a barn. What a contrast.

It’s like the carol we sang, “Angels We Have Heard on High”. English words aren’t enough- sing some Latin, add some splendor. It’s like our worship- we want it to be really special today and it has been, but somehow, at the end of it all, singing Silent Night with our own little candle is the most glorious of all. The contrast highlights the glory.

And the glory shines within us.

**WE SEE and SHINE i**n the gifts we receive with the coming of the Christ. And yes, God’s gifts are always:*more than*. Superlative splendor. Greatest, out of this world. With God, yes. It’s not what we do, but what God gives. Precious gifts.

The apostle Paul sees **hope** as a universal gift, writing: “The creation waits with eager longing” (Rom 8:19). Hope can happen in the midst of great pain. We sense that somewhere in time or beyond it, there has to be more, and it has to be better. It is not surprising to read Paul's observation: “That the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us” (8:18). We live in hope.

We are grateful for the gift of **peace.** John 14:27 Jesus said: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.” A unique peace, knowing God is with *you*, as evidenced in the perfect balance of grace and truth.

Even on the hardest days, Dr. Carlson said, about **Joy** : “Christ is born to pierce through all the darkness of our lives, bringing the heavenly light of joy that will never end. Jesus Christ is our eternal joy and you can experience him at any time.”

All because of **Love** that never fails or ends (1 Cor 13:8). The love is a gift, given to us from God; it’s forever, and nothing can separate us from it (Romans 8:38). Christmas says “you are loved by God”.

The gift of **glory** is the gift we receive when we accept the hope, peace, joy and love of God. In God, we see the supreme, superlative, greatest gift of glory. It comes; *HE* comes simply it seems. But the heavens can’t keep still, the angels shout, the stars align, the simple and the great are pulled toward the glory of God, found in love lying in a manger, but full of grace and truth. Whenever we describe God we use the highest word form we have, but with God there is always a glorious more.

Eugene Peterson’s Message translation of John 1 describes Christmas glory this way:

The Word became flesh and blood,

and moved into the neighborhood.

We saw the glory with our own eyes,

the one-of-a-kind glory,

like Father, like Son,

Generous inside and out,

true from start to finish….

We all live off his generous bounty,

gift after gift after gift.

We got the basics from Moses,

and then this exuberant giving and receiving,

This endless knowing and understanding—

all this came through Jesus, the Messiah.

No one has ever seen God,

not so much as a glimpse.

This one-of-a-kind God-Expression,

who exists at the very heart of the Father,

has made him plain as day.

“Heaven and earth are filled with God’s glory” Do we see it? Do we know it’s there for us? Are we looking? Are we reflecting the glory that we receive as our greatest gift this night?

For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord ... **i**t is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ

(2 Corinthians 4:5-6).

**CONCLUSION**

We’ve been unwrapping the gifts that we receive: hope, peace, joy, love. Tonight, with Christ’s coming to be “God with us”, we see and experience and are promised glory “forever”. Rev. Dr. Dean Nadasdy summed it up this way:

When John finally gets to answering the question, “From what you saw in Jesus, what is God really like?” he says that Jesus is “full of grace and truth.” John is overwhelmed by the generous love of God he sees in Christ. In verse 16 he writes, “For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.” Grace is what John sees in Christ, “grace upon grace.” In other words, Jesus embodies the relentless, extravagant, limitless, and constant love of God.

 (Dean Nadasdy, *The Gift of Glory)*

God wants to give you the gift of “grace upon grace” as demonstrated by the glory of the angels singing and the glory of Jesus’ miraculous birth happening and the baby changing everything- the glory of God, revealed to us. God **calls** to each of us tonight: “Here’s my hope and peace and joy and love, wrapped up in my grace, and presented in all my glory, as a gift for you,”

“No thank you!” would be a rather ridiculous answer.

So tonight, when all is calm and bright, that’s all you need to say, to receive the greatest gift from God. “Thank You”.

God, full of loving kindness and truth, comes to us. To God be the glory. Merry Christmas.

 Pray with me:
Thank You, holy God, for the glory of Christmas; for the hope, peace, joy and love that is given to us by the presence of Jesus in our world. Thank you. Amen.