

Sermon for Fourth Sunday Advent, December 24, 2006: Glory to God!

Based on Luke 2: 1-20

Glory to God. We are so used to these words that we can lose the emotions, the intense joy and love that praising God is all about. When the angels said, “Glory to God in the highest heaven,” well, the English doesn’t really give an adequate translation of what those angels were talking about. There are times when it feels as if our hearts will burst out of our bodies, times when we are filled with joy and happiness and peace and excitement. When we see those emotions in the faces of others, we say that they “glow.” Glowing is a reflection of the glory that is God. The kids’ embodiment of that encounter between angel and shepherds, and the joy we could see on their faces, gets the idea of glory across a lot better. Δοξα has aspects of radiance and splendor, brightness and majesty. My Greek dictionary explains that everything in heaven has this radiance, the radiance that comes from encounters with the living God. When Gabriel appeared to Zechariah and to Mary, his radiance alone told them that they were having an encounter with a being who stood in the presence of God. Even the human being Moses physically changed from his contact with the Lord; in Exodus 34: 29-35, we find out when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, after his talks with God, he face shone. The Israelites were afraid of him because of this radiance, so he wore a veil when he was with them. δοξα also means praise. Praise, glory, splendor, majesty – lots of English words to get at the heart of this one Greek word. δοξα – our English word doxology comes from it. When we sing the doxology, we are really singing, “Glory to God!”

That is what the angel was urging the shepherds to do – to sing glory to God! A baby was born that night so long ago. The birth of any baby is a cause for praise and thanksgiving. People who have struggled with fertility issues, both now and people in the past, people like Sarah, Leah, Rachel, Samson’s mother, Hannah, and Elizabeth, Zechariah’s wife, all knew how miraculous the birth of their babies was. But this particular birth the angels are singing about was the fulfillment of a different kind of yearning for a pregnancy, the sort of yearning that grows upon a people who have been waiting centuries for their Redeemer to be born. In today’s call to worship, from Psalm 80:7, we said together, **Restore us, O God of Hosts; let Your face shine, that we may be saved.** That hope was realized in this birth; we WERE restored, God’s face did indeed shine, and we were saved. Together this morning we also said these words from the Gospel of John, **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... From His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made Him known.**

Today our children’s faces reflected a little of the glory of God. That glory will change them, just as it changes us, if we take the time to stay in the presence of the Lord. As we do, we too will start to take on this glory – not because we are so good, but because God is so good. Unlike Moses, we should not veil our faces; this glory needs to be made visible in our words and deeds, as a testimony to the glory of the Lord. As we approach the celebration of our Savior’s birth, let us remember, and rejoice, and witness to, the glory of God, until Jesus comes again. Even so, come soon, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Call to Worship – *senior high class?*

Psalm 80: 1-7

Leader: Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up Your might, and come to save us!

People: Restore us, O God; let Your face shine, that we may be saved.

Leader: O LORD God of hosts, how long will You be angry with Your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure.

People: You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.

ALL: Restore us, O God of Hosts; let Your face shine, that we may be saved.

Unison Response by the Congregation, John 1: 14-18:

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 testified to Him and cried out, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because He was before me.'") From His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made Him known.