Text: Luke 2:8-20
Title: "Glory to God at Christmas" Pt.2

INTRODUCTION

My goal this Christmas season is for you to more deeply and intensely appreciate and applaud the glory of God. Let yourself be dazzled and amazed at the glory of God and of His Christ.

> The glory of God is the manifold excellence of God displayed for all creation. God's manifold excellence includes all of His virtues, attributes, qualities and perfections.

Now all of that could be true about God, and I could still not know it. So God puts His manifold excellence on display so that we would see Him and know Him and give glory to Him.

> **ILLUSTRATION** – A couple of summers ago Nan and went to England. And while we were there we toured Windsor Palace, which is the second home of British royal family. Now the royal family, Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, like other earthly royals, have a certain "glory." In fact the Bible speaks of the glory of earthly kings. They have power, and wealth and dignity that in some ways are unimaginable. Now that could be true, but I could still not know it, and thus not appreciate it. So the royal family puts their power, their wealth, their beauty and dignity on display. And people like us walk through their palaces and see their "glory."

And yet God's glory is infinitely more magnificent.

We're looking at some of the sightings of God's glory in the Christmas story. We find another sighting in Luke 2:8-20. Turn there with me to this familiar story. I want to start by reading just the first two verses.

Luke 2:8-9 (NIV) - And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. [9] An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

The glory of God was visible. And it was also audible. The shepherds saw something and they heard something. Jump down to vv.13-14.

Luke 2:13-14 (NIV) - Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, [14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

Now would you just fix your eyes on those words "glory to God in the highest." That's the first thing the angels came to proclaim … the glory of God in the highest.

1. GLORY TO GOD IN THE <u>HIGHEST</u> (Luke 2:8-14)

Let's just look at what happens here.

Luke 2:9 (NIV) - An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

You never know where God will open the window and allow His glory, His manifold excellence and perfection, to shine in on the earth. There was a glow to the glory.

> The appearance of the angel and of the radiant glory of the Lord terrified them. The word in the original language for "terrified" is an intense word. It means literally "they feared a great fear."

You would be terrified too if you were suddenly met with this kind of glory glow. But they are reassured…

Luke 2:10-12 (NIV) - But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. [12] This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

The glory is actually good news. This was good news of great joy that would come through salvation available to all people.

The angel was then joined by a great army of other angels engaged in praising God.

Luke 2:13-14 (NIV) - Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, [14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

> We're not told how many angels there were, but the wording indicates there was a tremendous number of angels. And what were they doing? They were praising God saying, "Glory to God in the highest."

God displays His glory in the highest. It's as if God, from time to time, opens the windows of heaven and allows the sights and sounds of heaven to spill out onto the earthly scene.

> On the heavenly scene, in the highest heavens, the glory of God is magnificent. Just now, if we could be transported onto the heavenly scene, our senses would go into overload … fried … like plugging your hair dryer into a 220 outlet. We couldn't handle the voltage.

So there's something visible and there's something audible.

How did the glory shine?

Now God lights up the natural order at times with His glory. And in Scripture we see different ways that this happens:

- **Cloud**

  Exodus 24:16 (NIV) - and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud.

  Numbers 16:42 (NIV) - But when the assembly gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron and turned toward the Tent of Meeting, suddenly the cloud covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared.

  1 Kings 8:11 (NIV) - And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple.

- **Fire**

  Exodus 24:17 (NIV) - To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.

  Leviticus 9:23-24 (NIV) - Moses and Aaron then went into the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. [24] Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown.

  2 Chronicles 7:1 (NIV) - When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

But back to the Christmas story, the glory of the Lord shone in two distinct ways that night.

- **Angels**

  There is often a radiance to the angels' appearance. Angels dwell in glory and they have the glow of glory upon them.

  And the angels were just doing what they always do … worship and praising Him.

  Luke 2:13-14 (NIV) - Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, [14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

- **Radiant light**

  Luke 2:9 (NIV) - An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

"Shone around" is the same word that is used when Luke describes the conversion of Paul in Acts 26:13. Paul in his testimony says that …

Acts 26:13 (NIV) - About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions.

"Blazing" is the same word as "shone around" in Luke 2:9.

Heaven is filled with the radiant light of the glory of God.

Revelation 21:23 (NIV) - The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.

God is the same yesterday, today and forever. If He is radiantly glorious then, that is the way He has always been.

1 Timothy 6:15-16 (NIV) - God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, [16] who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Glory to God in the highest. God's glory is displayed in the highest heavens through the angels. But I want you to see that God's glory is also displayed in the lowest … and to the lowest … the sheherds.

2. GLORY TO GOD IN THE <u>LOWEST</u> (Luke 2:8-9,15-20)

Now let's go back to the beginning. Look more closely at the people to whom God chose to display His glory … shepherds.

Luke 2:8-9 (NIV) - And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. [9] An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

You need to know this about the shepherds … they were at the lowest rung of the social ladder in Israel. In NT times they shared the same despicable status as tax collectors and dung sweepers.

Now in the OT shepherds were not so despised. The wealthy sons of Isaac and Jacob tended flocks (Genesis 30:29; 37:12). Jethro, the priest of Midian, employed his daughters as shepherdesses (Exodus 2:16). King David got his start as a shepherd.

But over time shepherding became a menial vocation of the laboring class. In general, they were considered second-class and untrustworthy.

Shepherds were officially labeled "sinners." This was a technical term for a class of despised people. Smug religious leaders maintained a strict caste system at the expense of shepherds and other common folk.

Into this social context of religious snobbery and class prejudice, God's Son stepped forth. How surprising and significant that Father God handpicked lowly, unpretentious shepherds to first hear the joyous news: "It's a boy, and He's Messiah!"

What an affront to the religious leaders who were so conspicuously absent from the divine mailing list. Even from birth, Christ moved among the lowly. It was sinners, not the self-righteous, He came to save (Mark 2:17).

Shepherds! Who were they that they should be eyewitnesses of the glory of God?

ILLUSTRATION – Laura Bush's Christmas card delivered to our house by mistake. Somebody very important in our neighborhood got a Christmas card from the president. But it got delivered to our house.

God didn't do this for the religious leaders. He didn't do it for the king and his royal court. He did it for the lowest rung of society's ladder.

POINT – Do you see that the glory of God is not only on display in the highest … it is on display in the lowest, to the lowest, and in the darkest times?

Sometimes the glory of God is seen more radiantly against the backdrop of the darkness of our suffering.

Now look at the response of the shepherds. It's amazing how these people respond to the display of God's glory. And it's a great pattern for how you and I should.

OUR RESPONSE TO GLORY

- **WE <u>SEEK</u> JESUS**

Luke 2:15-16 (NIV) - When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." [16] So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

The shepherds had been confronted with something much bigger than themselves. What did they do? They set their work aside (caring for sheep) and they hurried off to check it out … to see if it was really true … to see for themselves.

Nothing is as important as this … to seek Jesus. To learn everything you can about Him … to listen carefully to the things He said … and to come to Him. That's the great invitation of Jesus … "come to Me."

There's something else we do when we respond to the glory of God.

- **WE <u>SHARE</u> JESUS**

  That's what the shepherds did.

  Luke 2:17-18 (NIV) - When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, [18] and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

  These guys were just gossiping about Jesus. What the shepherds saw changed their lives. They could not keep it to themselves; they had to tell others. It seems they forgot all about the sheep. They went throughout the neighborhood telling everybody about this marvelous gift.

  Luke 2:20 (NIV) - The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

CONCLUSION

Church, that's what I want us to get to … to a life that is filled with glorifying and praising God for the things that we hear and see about God and about His Christ.

The glory of God in the highest can become the glory of God in the lowest … in us.

God created each of us with a "glory place" inside. The Bible says that God has set eternity in our hearts … there is a longing for something that is more glorious than anything in this world. And we're constantly trying to fill that glory place with stuff, people and things that don't belong there.

There is no peace on earth … no joy to the world … until the glory of God in the highest becomes the glory of God in the lowest.