

The Glory of Christ Incarnate
Revelation 1:8 et al

There are two words I would like to bring to your attention this morning, this first Sunday of the Advent season. The words are “advent” and “incarnation.” Advent means “to arrive.” “Incarnation” means to arrive in the flesh from the world of the spirit, to take on human flesh and form, to have been spirit and become human. Advent is the season of preparation for the incarnation. Advent is the season we prepare our hearts, minds, spirits, bodies, and wills for the arrival of the word of God in the flesh.

The season of Advent, as a part of Christian worship, appears to have developed from about the 4th century, where it was an occasion for education and reflection and repentance for those preparing for baptism. Later Advent became more focused on the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus, but even then, it continued to have the character of repentance, seeing to ask the question, “If Jesus came into the world to remove sin and guilt from us, then what sin and guilt would you have Him remove in the world of your heart?”

In the ancient city of Rome, Advent focused on the arrival of the Son of God in the city of David, the beginning of God’s saving work through Christ in the flesh. In the farther reaches of the Empire and beyond, Advent focused on the second coming of Christ. Both historical observations in church history focused on one all important person: the Savior, Jesus Christ, who, in the working and will of God, arrived once and took on flesh and will arrive again at the appointed hour.

Advent is ultimately about hope, something we could all use a bit of today. There is hope that the promised Deliverer, the Savior, will come. There is hope that the promises of God will prove true for us as they have for those who believed in faith in seasons past, There is hope that the world spins not out of control, but under the sovereignty of God to its expected end along a course wisely set and lovingly controlled.

Advent gives voice to the hope that sins can be forgiven and guilt removed, that new life is possible through faith in Him who comes. Advent nurtures the hope in eternal life, the hope that death is not final, that death dies and that we may live, fearless and faith-filled.

Advent secures the hope that God knows us, comes among us, loves us, saves us, redeems us, forgives us, empowers us, leads us, blesses us, cares for us, gathers us. Advent discourages any sense of abandonment or rejection for those whose hope is in Christ. Advent discounts separation and isolation at the arrival of Immanuel, God with us.

And how is Advent able to foster such hope? Because of the Incarnation. Because John testifies to the spiritual and historical truth when he writes

John 1:14-18 (ESV) ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ . . . ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

The Incarnation of the Word of God as the man Jesus Christ, the reality of God become man establishes the hope that marks Advent. The Incarnation makes Advent matter, assuring that the promise of His coming once fulfilled will be fulfilled once again.

The apostle Paul points us to the wonder and certainty of the Incarnation Advent prepares for and celebrates. He writes in the letter to the Philippians

Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV) ⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

I'm not sure, but I think you could think of those words as an early church Christmas carol. It is a hymn that exalts the Incarnate Christ. It is the song of the One who was God surrendering Himself to the will of God and taking on human form gave Himself in love for God for the plan of God to redeem for Himself a people of God whose personal delight would forever be the glory of God in the Son of God. Advent celebrates the Incarnation.

There is a third word I want to remind you of this morning. It is a word you have heard often, and probably, rightly, each time you hear it you struggle to grasp the fullness of all it means. It is a divine word, a holy word, a word that when applied to God takes on the very nature and essence of God Himself, infinite, eternal, wise, just, compassionate. That's why this word is sometimes so hard to get our head around. It is as big as God is. It is a God-sized word. It is the word "glory."

Trying to define the word "glory" in any way that defines God is a quest doomed to failure. God, by nature, cannot and will not be defined by man. God alone can adequately define God. That's why we need Him to reveal Himself to us. That is why He does reveal Himself to us and allow us glimpses of Himself that allow us a taste of understanding.

Perhaps the best definition I have ever heard of God's glory is this: "God's glory is the sum total of all His perfections." God is perfect in all that He is, and all that He is perfect, and His attributes taken together, which they must be because God is not fragmented, taken all together, the sum total of all God's perfections is His glory.

And here's the beauty of this: God's established purpose for creation is to manifest, to reveal in knowable ways, the immensity and character and depth and wonder and magnificence of His

glory. God works in the world He created so that humanity can know Him as He is. He works in creation in such a way as to empower all creation to delight in His glory as He delights in His glory. He works so you and I, and all those who believe, can enjoy the joy God has in being God.

Our quest in this world is to know and love God as He reveals Himself to be, in all His glory, now and forever, for His praise and our eternal joy. Jesus, as He begins the prayer recorded in John 17:3 offers these words to His Father,

And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

That “knowing” that Jesus calls eternal life is the same kind of “knowing” that the prophet Habakkuk declares is the purpose of God in creation:

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

God ordains that we will know Him experientially, personally, intimately. We will be no strangers to the glory of God, and His glory will be to us familiar and right and good and desirable, the source of our deepest and greatest delight. This is why we were created. This is why there was an Advent and an Incarnation, that through faith in Jesus Christ we might come to the know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, and in that knowledge have eternal life.

The glory of God, and the knowledge of His glory, is why God sent His Son, to take on human form, to suffer death and the cross. The glory of God, the whole complete Person God is in all His perfections, that glory is our God-prescribed and provided joy, anticipated by Advent and assured by the Incarnation to all who believe.

But, today there is a problem. It is not a problem with the intent of Advent or the fact of the Incarnation or the glory of the Glory. There is a problem with us and with the world and culture in which we live. Christmas as we know it– what should be the celebration of the Incarnation of Christ, when God became man– rather than nurturing joy and delight in the glory of God, our Christmas celebrations threaten to disguise the glory of God, exchanging the glory of the Creator for created things. Our current cultural Christmas celebrations threaten to steal our joy and ultimately leave us destitute, guilty, and hellbound.

In our day, the myths of Christmas mask the truth of Christmas, hiding from plain view the glory of the Incarnate Christ. Just as Halloween has developed a playful disguise for the horror of spiritual evil, Christmas for many has become a sham, a shadow obstructing the incredible miracle of God became man for the sake of rescuing sinful man from the eternal consequences of His sin.

Just as the Resurrection of Jesus has become lost in chocolate bunnies and Easter eggs, the glory of the Incarnation is lost in “Happy Holidays,” decorated trees, and songs about winter snows and

evergreens devoid of Christ. The meaning of Christmas, the glory of the Incarnate Christ is lost in the modern myths surrounding Christmas. Christmas has become an emotional desert with its human-centered “feel-food-family-fuzzies” rather than the God-centered reality of human sin, God’s impending judgment, and the requirement of a Savior adequate to the need. Advent is the hopeful anticipation of the Incarnation of the glory through Whom we are saved from our sins. That’s the true message of Christmas!

The truth of Christmas abounds in the angel’s song two thousand years ago:

For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord!

“Unto you,” the angel sang. Unto sinful man, lost, separated from God. Unto those whom Paul inspired by the Spirit of God Himself noted were “dead in their trespasses and sins.” Unto us! Rebellious, proud creatures intent on making our lives and our world our own as if we and our world do not belong to the One Who created us! Our lives are often the epitome of defiance, indifference, ignorance, and in way, way too many instances, outright rejection of God’s great grace embodied in the words, “unto you.”

Unto you is born! Jesus has come into the world. What Advent anticipates arrives in the Incarnation! He came into the world the way you do. Unto you is born! He is like you in every way, but without sin. He has the nature and character of His Father. He is unique among all the people ever born on this world. He is the God man, fully God and fully man, fully capable of revealing God to man and fully equipped to represent man before God.

John tells us, as we’ve already seen, that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Hebrews tells us Jesus is “the radiance of [God’s] glory and the exact imprint of His nature.” Jesus said, “I and the Father are one.”

That was not just another Jewish baby born to impoverished, conquered parents in far away Palestine long, long ago, surrounded by lowly animals and even lower shepherds. That was God come from heaven to earth to take up a cross and destroy death by his death in order to manifest the infinite wonder of His glory to finite human minds and hearts. That was Advent yielding to the Incarnation. That was waiting yielding to wonder. That was the promise delivering the glory!

We mourn that there was no room for Him in the inn when we ought to marvel that God, instead of destroying the world as would have been His right, made room for Himself in a world full of people who want nothing to do with His mission to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory through the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Return of His Son. We cringe that the One Who sits upon the throne of heaven relegated Himself to a meager manger, yet we resist His full entrance and rule in our own hearts. Do you see the hypocrisy of our position?

For unto you is born . . . a Savior! A Savior is one who saves. One who does for you what you cannot do for yourself. Jesus, the Incarnate Christ, is the one who satisfies the justice of God in our place on our behalf. He is the one God sent to remove the wrath of God from all who believe.

He fulfils the Law of God. He reveals the heart and mind and will and glory of God. He advances the mission of God. He meets the measure of God. He completes the plan of God, represents us before God, and is exalted by God. Jesus loves God, lives God. He is God. To Him belong the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

We need a Savior who is one of us. Jesus, Christ Incarnate, is that Savior. We need a Savior who is all of God. Jesus, Christ Incarnate, is that Savior. No Christmas tree with all its ornaments and tinsel and lights can do for us what Jesus the Christ Incarnate has done for us. No Santa Claus has won our forgiveness through his sinless life, obedient death, and victorious resurrection! No reindeer with flying hooves and glowing nose has offered himself in our behalf to God to rescue us from well-deserved eternal wrath. No elf on a shelf, no elf period has crafted our salvation to God's glory in eternity past. No snowman in a magic hat has turned the tide of God's justice from us.

No Christmas myth has rescued us. No, a real Savior, Jesus Christ Incarnate, is born to us! He is the glory of God in human form. He is the point of Advent. He is the Incarnation of the glory. He is God Himself in human flesh come to fulfill the eternal plan of redemption.

It is my hope and intent in this Advent season to focus on the glory of Christ Incarnate. It is my hope and my intent that we will each of us and all of us embrace and act upon Paul's admonition to the Colossian Christians:

See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. (Col. 2:8. ESV)

God has set His personal glory as the delight and goal of our joy. Advent anticipates it. The Incarnation delivers it. That glory for which we were created and to which we are chosen and called by God is Jesus Christ, the glory of God Incarnate. It is my prayer in this Advent season that the Spirit of God will enable us to see beyond all the trappings and ruses the world offers to disguise the true message of Christmas. It is my prayer that each of us will see and know and embrace Christ as He reveals Himself to be.

It matters that Jesus Christ is God. It matters for the glory of God and it matters for the eternal joy of those who put their faith in Him. It matters that Jesus is eternal, immanent, returning, and Almighty, themes we will consider in the coming weeks of Advent.

My prayer is that this Advent season, as we come to see Jesus for Who He really is, we will more securely put our faith in Him, that we will more ardently worship Him, and that we will all the more redouble our commitment to love and serve Him in the power of the Spirit.

Let's pray.