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Gloria in Excelsis Deo

Luke 2.1-20

Series: Songs of the Incarnation

December 12, 2021

The Village Church at Shell Point

I. Introduction

- A. One of my bosses – Senior Pastor – at the Morgantown WV Church was David Goodin
 - 1. David grew up in a Pentecostal church
 - a. Father and his grandfather were Pentecostal preachers
 - b. Don't really know how David ended up in the C&MA
 - c. After Law School he went to a Presbyterian seminary
 - d. I guess the C&MA is probably what's left to you with that kind of background
- B. But David grew up Pentecostal
 - 1. With a rich Pentecostal heritage
 - a. And actually, even as teenager, he was preaching in his father's church
- C. He used to tell me stories about his experiences
 - 1. As you know, our dear Pentecostal friends can be quite demonstrative in their worship expressions
 - a. Especially during the preaching
- D. You know, I like to teach in settings when there is interaction between the teacher and students
 - 1. We've done that from time to time here
 - a. But when we've done that we've had kind of set it up, give some instruction about how it would be done, that kind of thing
 - 2. But you don't have to tell the Pentecostals how to interact with their preacher
 - a. Whatever the preacher said – sometimes every sentence or two – somebody in the congregation would respond
 - 3. Obvious one – “Amen!”
 - a. But that is hardly the only thing that could be said
 - b. “Preach it, brother!”
 - c. “That's right!”
 - d. “Bless you, brother!”
 - e. “Hallelujah!”
 - 4. David told me about one woman in particular in his father's church
 - a. She would say all those kinds of things
 - b. “Amen!”
 - c. “Hallelujah!”

- d. “Preach it, brother!”
 - e. But then every now and then, after the preacher would say something, she’d say, “Well?”
 - 5. At least she was discriminating in her exclamations
- E. One of the things that our Pentecostal friends would say during the preaching was this statement:
 - 1. “Glory!”
 - 2. Not “Glory Hallelujah!” – they’d say that too
 - 3. But just “Glory!”
- F. If there’s ever a time to just exclaim, “Glory!” – it’s as we unpack today’s text
- G. The Songs of the Incarnation
 - 1. **The Magnificat – Mary’s Song**
 - a. Sung in response to the Angel Gabriel’s message that she would be with child by the Holy Spirit
 - b. And that the child would be the Son of God
 - c. To which Mary would exclaim in song: “My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.”
 - 2. **The Benedictus – Zacharias’ Song**
 - a. Once Elizabeth, his aging wife, had delivered their promised child
 - b. Zacharias having spent the entirety of her pregnancy – 9 months – as a deaf-mute because he hadn’t believed the angel’s announcement
 - c. And it was time for the baby to be named
 - d. Zacharias wrote down, in obedience to the instruction of the angel, that the baby’s name was John
 - e. His tongue was loosed, and he sang:
 - f. “Blessed by the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people...”
 - 3. Now we have the third of the Songs of the Incarnation
 - a. It is sung, not by the human characters in this narrative – but by the angels
 - b. **Gloria in Excelsis Deo – The Angels’ Song**
 - c. “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”
- H. The essence of this entire narrative is “Glory!”
 - 1. “Glory to God in the highest!”
 - a. But simply abbreviated by saying, “Glory!”
 - 2. There is glory everywhere
 - a. Everywhere an occasion for which we not only praise God
 - b. But are stunned and awestruck by His magnificent sovereign orchestration of loving redemption for His people
- I. As we begin to unpack this narrative, we set it in context
 - 1. The context of the machinations of the world’s power players
 - a. One in particular – Caesar Augustus
 - b. A great man, by all accounts

- c. One of the greatest political leaders in human history
- 2. But just as the beauty of a diamond is displayed best against the backdrop of black velvet
 - a. So the glory of God shines ever more brightly against the human pretensions of power

II. Potentate as Pawn

- A. Luke 2:1–3 (NASB95) —
 - 1. 1 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.
 - 2. 2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.
 - 3. 3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.
- B. What an audacious decree!
 - 1. From the most powerful human on the planet
 - a. A decree to register every human being in all of the inhabited earth!
- C. Why? Why would Augustus want to register every human?
 - 1. Because one of the greatest gifts the Romans ever bequeathed to us is taxation
 - a. (That’s sarcasm, by the way, for you who are prone to take things literally)
- D. Now if you live in Washington, D.C., and if you own a car, your license plate has the statement: “Taxation without representation”
 - 1. It’s a reminder that Washington, D.C., because it’s not a state, does not have a voting representative in Congress
 - 2. Now if you were in Rome, back in the days of Augustus, and you had a license plate on your chariot, it would read “No Taxation Without Registration”
 - a. So you had to be registered
- E. So Augustus issues his decree that all must be registered, and the result was a massive movement of people to go to their home city
 - 1. Mail-in registration wasn’t acceptable
 - a. You had to go in person
 - 2. So Joseph and Mary, like hundreds, even thousands, of others did that
 - 3. Augustus had flexed his imperial muscle
 - a. And all the world responded
 - b. You and I might try to avoid the IRS
 - c. But no one was avoiding the Romans
- F. But little did Augustus know – in fact, I’m sure he never knew – that he was just a pawn on the cosmic chessboard
 - 1. A mere servant of the Almighty God
 - a. Who in His grand plan of redemption, was the real people mover – the One who puts people in just the right places at just the right times
 - b. All to fulfill His loving and redemptive purposes

- G. And the potentate as pawn is the first demonstration of the glory of God
 - 1. And as we consider what God did in maneuvering the most powerful human on the planet for His own redemptive purposes
 - a. We simply cry out, “Glory!”

III. **Prophetic Glory**

- A. Why did God use Augustus this way?
 - 1. Why did He use this audacious, prideful, self-serving decree of the Emperor in the way that He did
 - a. Moving people all over the globe
 - 2. Well, in a word, it was to fulfill prophecy
- B. In a sense, it was to fulfill the prophecy that was issued by Mary in the Magnificat
 - 1. **Luke 1:51–52** (NASB95) —
 - a. 51 “He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart.
 - b. 52 “He has brought down rulers from their thrones, And has exalted those who were humble.”
- C. But even more importantly, God acted this way to fulfill OT prophecy
 - 1. The child to be born to Mary – this Son of God – had to have credentials
 - 2. I went to Bill Harrod’s birthday party yesterday – his 100th birthday party
 - a. He was sitting next to a table filled with all kinds of memorabilia of his life
 - b. And when I greeted him he pointed to the table and said, “these are my credentials”
 - c. I said, “No Bill, the only credentials you need is the badge you are wearing which says 100”
 - 3. But the incarnate Son of God did have to have credentials
 - a. All so the world would know undeniably the He is who He said He was
 - b. And what the Bible declares him to be
 - c. The incarnate Son of God
 - 4. And much of His credentials revolve around His human descent from King David
 - a. And here we have a double mention of his Davidic credentials
- D. **Luke 2:4–5** (NASB95) —
 - 1. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David,
 - 2. 5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.
- E. We’ve already seen prophecies in Luke which establish His Davidic credentials
 - 1. The angel tells Mary,
 - a. **Luke 1:32** (NASB95) — 32 “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David...”

2. Zacharias, filled with the Holy Spirit, sings:
 - a. **Luke 1:69** (NASB95) — 69 “And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant—”
3. The NT is clear that the Messiah, the Son of God, must be a direct descendant of David
 - a. **Romans 1:1–3** (NASB95) — 1 Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, 2 which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, 3 concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh...
 - b. **2 Timothy 2:8** (NASB95) — 8 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel...
4. Bethlehem was the city of David – the hometown of the great king
 - a. Which was why Joseph and Mary had to go to Bethlehem
5. **Micah 5:2** (NASB95) —
 - a. 2 “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.”
6. For Jesus to be recognized as the incarnate Son of God, the Messiah, He had to have credentials
 - a. Being a descendant of David
 - b. And being born in David’s home town
 - c. Were his credentials
 - d. His birth certificate said, “Bethlehem” for “place of birth”
 - e. And it said “David” for “family”
- F. And Jesus was the only One to do all the amazing things He did, fulfill these prophecies and more
 1. And be born in Bethlehem
 - a. And be a direct descendant of David
 2. If you know of anyone else who would qualify throughout human history – let us know
 - a. Because we would have to follow them
 3. But no!
 - a. Only Jesus fulfills these qualifications
 - b. Only Jesus has those credentials
 - c. Only Jesus is a card-carrying Son of God, Messiah
 - d. He is *the* card-carrying Son of God, Messiah
- G. And all the people said, “Glory!”

IV. **Insignificant Glory**

- A. One of the things God does to display His glory is use insignificant people and insignificant things
 1. Things that the world values very little

- a. Things that the world wouldn't pay the slightest bit of attention about
 - 2. And that's the next demonstration of His glory
- B. **Luke 2:6-7** (NASB95) —
 - 1. 6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth.
 - 2. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.
- C. There was no one less important, less significant, in the eyes of the world
 - 1. Indeed, in the eyes of Caesar Augustus who would never even know their names!
 - a. Than Joseph and Mary
 - b. And the baby Mary would birth
- D. But think of the true identity of this Baby!
 - 1. Yes, He was Mary's firstborn son
 - a. But He was so much more!
 - 2. He was "the firstborn of all creation" (Colossians 1.15)
 - 3. He was the one and only Son of God (John 1.34)
 - 4. He was the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end (Revelation 21.6,13)
 - 5. He was the maker of all things (John 1.10)
 - 6. He was the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19.16)
 - 7. He is the radiance of the Father's glory, the exact representation of His nature (Hebrews 1.3)
 - 8. In Him all the fullness of Deity dwells bodily (Colossians 2.9)
 - 9. Every attribute of Deity applies to this child
 - a. He is all knowing
 - b. All seeing
 - c. All powerful
 - d. All glorious
- E. So what kind of reception did this child deserve? How should this world have received Him?
 - 1. Every Jew in Israel-Palestine should have come and worshiped Him
 - 2. Every Gentile, for that matter, should have come as well
 - 3. Indeed – every creature from ants to alligators should have come to worship Him
 - 4. Philip Ryken: He deserved to have the creation itself offer him worship, with the rocks crying "Glory!" and the galaxies dancing for joy. He is God the Son, and anything less than absolute acknowledgment of his royal person is an insult to his divine dignity.
 - 5. That's what He deserved
- F. But what kind of reception did He receive?
 - 1. **Luke 2:7** (NASB95) — 7 ... she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.
 - 2. He got the reception of the most insignificant human being imaginable
 - a. Wrapped in whatever cloths Mary could scrounge

- b. And laid in a manger – stuck in a pile of hay in a feeding trough for cattle
 - 3. Ryken: ... when the Son of God came to earth – the Maker of the universe in all its vast immensity – he couldn't even get a room!
 - G. But that's how God glorifies Himself
 - 1. He uses the most insignificant to accomplish the greatest in human history – the redemption of the human race
 - 2. And that was God's pattern throughout the life and ministry of Jesus
 - a. The sufferings of the incarnation would be reprised and culminated in the crucifixion
 - b. His swaddling clothes would become a burial shroud
 - c. The manger would become a tomb
 - 3. We are saved by the abject humility of our Savior
 - a. And all the glory goes to God
 - H. And we all cry, "Glory!"

V. **Angelic Glory**

- A. Yes, we humans cry "Glory!"
 - 1. But heaven can't keep silent about what God has done either
 - a. The angels show up!
- B. **Luke 2:8-9** (NASB95) —
 - 1. 8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.
 - 2. 9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.
- C. Now there are angels, and there are angels
 - 1. A lot of times, the angels God sends look pretty much like us
 - a. That was the case in the episode with Abraham and Lot
 - b. They appeared as men – but were actually angels
 - c. That's why the Bible says we might be entertaining angels unawares when he help the poor (Hebrews 13.2)
 - 2. But then, at other times, angels are extraordinary creatures
 - a. Like the Seraphim – with six wings, singing "Holy, holy, holy" in the presence of God
 - b. Or like the Cherubim of Ezekiel
- D. This was the latter kind – the kind that by his very appearance evokes shock and terror in the lives of the shepherds
 - 1. And whatever he looked like, he was surrounded by the glory of the Lord shining!
- E. And eventually, the was joined by others – a whole bunch of others!
 - 1. **Luke 2:13** (NASB95) — 13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God...
- F. We might get the impression that angels are all over the Bible
 - 1. But that is really not the case
 - a. The presence of angels is really rather rare

2. But they do show up when it counts
 - a. And when the incarnate Son of God shows up to redeem a lost humanity
 - b. The incarnate Son of God prophesied for thousands of years by the OT prophets
 - c. The angels show up in spades
3. And they visibly display the glory of God
- G. This is angelic glory
 1. And they sing, “Glory to God in the highest!”
 2. And we would do well to join them
 - a. And ourselves cry out, “Glory!”

VI. **Gospel Glory**

- A. And then there is gospel glory
 1. **Luke 2:10–12** (NASB95) —
 - a. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;
 - b. 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.
 - c. 12 “This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”
- B. This is gospel glory
 1. **Gospel = good news**
 - a. Evangel
 - b. **Euangelizo (Gk) – good news**
 - c. Root of our word evangelist, evangelism, evangelical
 2. And the good news is delivered to shepherds!
- C. Why shepherds?
 1. Fulfill prophecy
 - a. **Jeremiah 33:13** (NASB95) — 13 ‘In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the lowland, in the cities of the Negev, in the land of Benjamin, in the environs of Jerusalem and in the cities of Judah, the flocks will again pass under the hands of the one who numbers them,’ says the LORD.
 - b. **Jeremiah 33:15–16** (NASB95) — 15 ‘In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth. 16 ‘In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she will be called: the LORD is our righteousness.’
 - c. In other words, God would send the Messiah when shepherds were watching their flocks in the environs of Jerusalem – and that’s the outskirts of Bethlehem!
 2. But shepherds were also chosen because of God’s delight to use the insignificant to accomplish his purposes

- a. Because they lived out in the fields they could not observe the ceremonial law
 - b. So they were considered unclean
 - c. They were also thought to be liars and thieves – their testimony was inadmissible in a court
 - d. With the exception of lepers, shepherds were the lowest class of people
 - e. They were blue-collar, working class sinners
 - f. But that’s why God chose them!
3. Remember Mary’s Magnificat
- a. He “has exalted those who were humble”
 - b. Good news for the shepherds is one of the ways that prophecy is fulfilled!
- D. So God’s first declaration of the good news was to these insignificant shepherds!
- 1. In fact, there is an interesting twist in the angel’s declaration
 - 2. “... for today in the city of David there has been born to you a Savior...”
 - 3. Usually we would say that to parents: “today there has been born to you, Mary, to you, Joseph, a baby”
 - a. But no!
 - b. The angel says it to shepherds!
 - c. “... today there has been born to *you!*”
 - 4. The baby is for you!
- E. In fact, that’s the really good news part of all this
- 1. If the baby born is for the shepherds
 - a. He is born to you too!
 - 2. “... today in the city of David there has been born *to you!* a Savior, who is Christ the Lord!”
 - 3. Do you need a Savior?
 - a. Anybody who has an ounce of self-awareness and an ounce of world-awareness knows that we need a Savior
 - b. And that Savior is Christ the Lord
 - 4. And that’s good news
 - a. That’s gospel glory
- F. And we, once again, cry out “Glory!”

VII. **Heavenly Glory**

- A. And then there is heavenly glory
 - 1. The actual content of the heavenly message
 - 2. **Luke 2:13–14** (NASB95) —
 - a. 13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,
 - b. 14 “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”
- B. **Glory to God**
 - 1. “Glory to God in the highest...”

2. That's what this has all been about
 - a. From beginning to end
3. God was, from eternity past
 - a. Throughout human history
 - b. Preserving a line of redemption
 - c. Through the ancestry of King David
 - d. So that through the birth of an insignificant child
 - e. To the household of a blue collar construction worker
 - f. Through the womb of a poor teenager
4. God would provide the Savior of all those who would ever believe in Him
 - a. So that only God would get the glory
 - b. Because only God could orchestrate and execute such an incredible plan of redemption

C. **Peace on Earth**

1. And the result of it all – peace on earth
 - a. “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”
2. Peace!
 - a. Oh, do we ever need peace
3. We need peace with God – for we are by nature His enemies
 - a. We have transgressed His law
 - b. We have violated His character
 - c. And only Jesus can bring us the peace we need
4. And need peace with one another
 - a. Only because we have been extended forgiveness of our sins by Christ, can we extend forgiveness to others
 - b. Only in Christ can there be peace in relationships
 - c. Only in Christ can there be genuine reconciliation
5. Whether it's in your household, your family, your community, your nation – the world
 - a. Our only hope is Jesus Christ
6. And that peace is available – not to just anybody
 - a. “Peace among men with whom He is pleased”
 - b. With whom is He pleased?
7. He is pleased with those who surrender self, cast oneself on the mercy of Christ, and believe in Christ – trust in Christ; faith in Christ
 - a. **Hebrews 11:6** (NASB95) — 6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.
8. Do you want peace?
 - a. Cast yourself on His mercy
9. And you too will be able to sing with the angelic host, saying “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

VIII. **Experiential Glory**

- A. There is experiential glory in this passage
 - 1. **Luke 2:15–16** (NASB95) —
 - a. 15 When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.”
 - b. 16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.
- B. They didn’t just sit out there all night after the angel’s message
 - 1. And say, “Thanks for such good news”
 - 2. No!
 - a. They said, “Let’s go! Let’s see this thing!”
 - b. “Let’s experience this for ourselves!”
- C. All genuine Christians seek to experience the good news for themselves
 - 1. To have a relationship with Jesus
 - 2. To walk in faith with Jesus
 - 3. To trust Jesus’ superintending all of our details – some of which can be quite perplexing
 - 4. To obey Jesus’s commands
 - 5. And so experience His grace and provisions
- D. And the more we experience Jesus the more we cry out, “Glory!”

IX. **Treasured Glory**

- A. And then there is treasured glory
 - 1. We don’t just receive the good news
 - a. We don’t even just experience the good news
 - 2. We treasure it
- B. **Luke 2:17–19** (NASB95) —
 - 1. 17 When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child.
 - 2. 18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds.
 - 3. 19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.
 - 4. Wondering... treasuring... pondering
- C. The shepherds wondered about all this
 - 1. The people the shepherds told wondered about all this
 - 2. And Mary herself treasured all these things
- D. For the true believer, a day doesn’t go by when we don’t wonder at the great salvation provided for us in the birth of this baby, the Son of God incarnate
 - 1. And every time we wonder, every time we treasure, we cry “Glory!”

X. **Worshipful Glory**

- A. Finally, we have worshipful glory

1. **Luke 2:20** (NASB95) — 20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.
- B. The whole experience, from beginning to end, evokes worship
1. The angels sing, “Glory to God in the highest!”
 2. And the shepherds learn the song!
 - a. Yes, you can learn the new song
 3. These shepherds hadn’t cared anything about God before
 - a. But now!
 - b. Now they adopt the chorus of the angels and make it their own
 4. And they worship
 - a. They cry “Glory!”
- C. Have you learned the Angels’ Song?
1. Can you sing, “Gloria in Excelsis Deo?”
 - a. Glory to God in the highest?