

Luke 2:8-21

Glory to God in the Highest!

March 10, 2024

1. Intro

a. *¹In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ³And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

i. Genesis 1:1-5... a familiar passage for all of us, isn't it?

1. This is where OUR story begins

- a. The universe in which we live...
- b. The solar system where we reside...
- c. The planet on which we dwell...
- d. The race into which we were all created...

2. This is where it began, FOR US

a. But God's story ALREADY existed, didn't it?

b. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit had already dwelled together in perfect unity, perfect fellowship, perfect love, for all eternity past

i. And out of an overflow of that perfect love, God created the heavens and the earth... the trees and the mountains... the oceans and the rivers... the elephants and the ants...

1. And ultimately the pinnacle of all His creation...

- a. You. Me. Mankind, created in the very image of God!
- b. The creation account that we find in the book of Genesis is something that we Christians ought to revisit often

i. It is something we must never cease to marvel over

ii. But there's an interesting tidbit of information in these first few verses of our Bible... one that we might tend to overlook

1. Have you ever thought about the fact that, at the very beginning of creation, there was just darkness?

a. The earth was without form and void, and DARKNESS was over the face of the deep

b. The picture that this paints for us is that there is a great mysteriousness about God, isn't there?

i. The Scriptures tell us that "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all"

ii. They also tell us that "He alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light"

1. If this is the natural state of who God is, that God IS light, then how could creation begin with DARKNESS?

iii. Really the only way that we can explain this is to say that at the very beginning of the creation of the heavens and the earth, God veiled Himself from all that He was about to create

1. In order for the created world to come into existence, God first had to shield it all from His own unapproachable light
 - a. He had to shield His creation from the full weight of His own glory
 - i. And therefore, when the earth was without form and void, darkness covered the face of the deep
- iv. We find other examples in the Scriptures of God veiling His glory from His creation
 1. In Exodus 20, when God gives the Israelites the Ten Commandments, He thundered to the people from Mt. Sinai, and verse 21 says that *“The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the THICK DARKNESS where God was.”*
 - a. God veiled Himself from the people in thick darkness
 - i. And if you remember, each time Moses met with God, and got just a partial glimpse of the GLORY of God, he had to put a veil over his own face, because HE was glowing as a result of God’s glory!
 2. In Psalm 18, as David sang of God’s great deliverance He had given to David over his enemies, David sang in verses 7-12,
 - a. *⁷Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked, because he was angry. ⁸Smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him. ⁹He bowed the heavens and came down; thick darkness was under his feet. ¹⁰He rode on a cherub and flew; he came swiftly on the wings of the wind. ¹¹He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him, thick clouds dark with water. ¹²Out of the brightness before him hailstones and coals of fire broke through his clouds.*
 - i. In the poetic language of the Psalms, David says that God made darkness His covering, His canopy around Him
 1. As God scattered David’s enemies, He veiled His own glory in thick darkness
 3. And in 1 Kings chapter 8, as the great Temple of God is completed, and the Ark is brought in and placed in the Most Holy Place, the glory of the Lord filled the Temple
 - a. And Solomon’s first words of praise in this moment, in verse 12, were: *“The Lord has said that He would dwell in THICK DARKNESS”*
 - i. In the Holy Place of the Temple, there was a lampstand that brought continual light to this room
 - ii. But behind the great veil in the Temple, in the Holy of Holies, where God Himself dwelled, there was DARKNESS
 1. Not because God IS darkness, for God is LIGHT
 2. But rather, because God MUST veil Himself from His creation, or we would all perish in the presence of His great glory
 - b. Theophylact, a Greek scholar from the 11th century, said it in this way:
 - i. *“If one cannot gaze steadfastly at the sun, which is but a small part of creation, by reason of its exceeding heat and power, how much less can mortal man gaze at the inexpressible glory of God?”*
- b. From the very beginning of all creation, God has veiled Himself from His people
 - i. UNTIL the night that Christ was born into this world!
 1. We read last week of the significance of the City of David, and how, in the fullness of time, Christ came into this world, EXACTLY where the prophet Micah had said he would be born, seven hundred years before it happened!

2. If you were with us at Christmas, you'll remember that we looked at this passage from the perspective of the shepherds, and what it meant for the peace of Christ to come to this earth
3. Today, as we revisit this passage, we'll focus on the first part of the song of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest..."
 - a. Let's start at Luke 2, verse 8

2. Luke 2:8-14

a. ⁸And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹²And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

- i. What an incredible sight that must have been!
- ii. You have to feel for these poor shepherds though
 1. They must have been absolutely terrified in this moment
 - a. Throughout the Scriptures, we get the impression that one angel is enough to strike fear and awe into the hearts of men
 - i. But along with this angel, Luke also says that the GLORY of the Lord shone all around the shepherds
 - ii. And then, after the angel makes his announcement, a MULTITUDE of angels show up, praising God, and singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!"
 - b. Initially, these shepherds were likely more frightened than they had ever been in their life
 - c. But as they heard the message from the angel, and the song from the multitude of angels, surely their hearts began to overflow with wonder and excitement!
 - b. This song that the angels sang is the third of Luke's Christmas hymns
 - i. The first hymn was Mary's *Magnificat*, as her soul magnified the Lord in Luke 1:46-55
 - ii. The second hymn was Zechariah's *Benedictus*, as he sang "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel!" in Luke 1:68-79
 - iii. This third hymn is known as The Angels' *Gloria*
 1. *Gloria in excelsis Deo*... Glory to God in the highest!
 - c. One of the things that we have to remember about angels is that they are not gods
 - i. Even though they dwell in the heavens with God, they are all still created beings
 1. They dwell with God, but they do not have the same attributes as God
 - a. Unlike God, the angels are not omniscient
 - i. They cannot see the end from the beginning
 - ii. They cannot declare from ancient times things not yet done
 - ii. If you were with us for our Wednesday night study in 1 Peter, you might remember what Peter said in chapter 1, verse 12
 1. After speaking of the salvation we have in Christ, and how the Old Testament prophets tried to figure out when the Messiah would come, Peter wrote these words,
 - a. ¹²It was revealed to them [the prophets] that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you

through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

- iii. It was not just the shepherds in the field who were overwhelmed with awe and wonder on that night... it was ALSO the angels!
 1. They were seeing the grand purposes of God unveiling upon the earth
 - a. The Son of God who had dwelled alongside the Father from all eternity
 - b. The Son of God who was the radiance of the Father
 - c. The Son of God, through whom and for whom the angels themselves were created
 - i. The Son of God emptied himself, took on the form of a servant, and was born in the likeness of men
 1. All according to the will of His Father
 2. All to the GLORY of God the Father
- d. And so the angels sang their joyful hymn, "Gloria in excelsis Deo!" ... Glory to God in the highest!!
 - i. We speak often in the church of the glory of God, but what exactly IS the glory of God?
 1. John Piper has a helpful illustration on this question, as he compares trying to define a basketball with trying to define beauty
 - a. A basketball is easy to define, right?
 - i. It's a round ball, made out of rubber or leather, that when you inflate it with air, you can bounce it on the ground
 - ii. It's used in a game where you try to throw this ball through a net, or a basket, which is why it is called a basketball
 - iii. Not very complicated, is it?
 - b. But how do you define beauty?
 - i. We can point to things in creation, or we can point to a piece of art, or we can point to a certain melody
 - ii. But what words would you use to define beauty?
 1. Our language falls short in trying to put it into words, doesn't it?
 - c. It's the same thing with the glory of God
 - i. We just don't have the words to adequately define God's glory
 2. We do get some help from the Scriptures though, specifically in Isaiah 6:3
 - a. Interestingly, in this passage we again find angels singing, but this time it is the seraphim in the throneroom of God
 - i. And the song they are singing in God's presence is:
 1. *³Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!*
 - ii. God is holy
 1. He is perfect in every way
 2. His greatness and worth cannot be measured
 - a. And so the angels around the throne sing of His great holiness
 - iii. But then they shift from His holiness, and sing that the whole earth is full of His GLORY
 1. This connection between God's holiness and His glory that is seen on the earth helps us to form somewhat of a definition of the glory of God
 - b. Piper defines it in this way:

- i. “The glory of God is the manifest beauty of His holiness. It is the going-public of His holiness. God’s glory is the way He puts His holiness on display for people to see!”
 - e. So if God veils Himself in thick darkness, as we saw at the beginning of the sermon, how are we to see His glory?
 - i. How has God “gone public” with His holiness in a way that we can see and yet not be incinerated in His unapproachable light?
 - 1. Well the first way in which he has shown us His glory is in all the things that He has created
 - a. The clouds in the sky
 - b. The fish in the oceans
 - c. That person sitting next to you in the pew
 - i. These are all things that point to the glory of God
 - ii. They are all things that manifest His holiness in ways that we can see with our eyes
 - d. Paul talks about this in Romans 1, although it is in an absolutely tragic context
 - i. In Romans 1:18-23, Paul writes
 - 1. *¹⁸For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, IN THE THINGS THAT HAVE BEEN MADE. So they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the GLORY of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*
 - ii. Friends, this is why the Bible would call us enemies of God
 - 1. God has revealed to us His glory, His eternal power, His divine nature... He has shown us His glory in the things that have been made
 - 2. And instead of glorifying the God who made all these things, we instead worship the things themselves
 - a. Like fools, we exchange the glory of the immortal God for all sorts of idols – from little electronic devices with apples on them to a piece of cloth with stars and stripes on it
 - iii. God has shown us His glory through His creation, and we have turned around and made idols of all of it
 - 1. It is no wonder that Paul writes that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against our ungodliness and unrighteousness
- e. But God is merciful, isn’t He?

- f. Even as we rejected His glory that He has put on full display in His creation, God has “gone public” with a second display of His glory
 - i. And this second display far outshines the first display, for God has shown us His glory IN CHRIST!
- 3. Look again in your worship guide at the passage Ella read for us... In 2 Corinthians 4:1-6, Paul writes,
 - a. *¹Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ²But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. ³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. ⁶For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*
 - i. In the beginning, the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep
 - 1. God had veiled the full extent of His glory from His creation
 - a. But, in His gracious design and creativity, God provided for us a secondary source of light, that big ball of fiery gases we call the sun
 - i. The sun is a wonderful thing, isn’t it?
 - 1. Its light not only gives us the ability to see, but it also gives plants the ability to grow, which helps cleanse our air from carbon dioxide, which basically helps us stay alive!
 - 2. Its warmth keeps us from freezing to death
 - 3. It’s mass keeps us in a perfect gravitational orbit, giving us the seasons we need for our crops to grow
 - ii. The sun is AMAZING
 - 1. But it does NOTHING for the darkness that exists in our hearts, does it?
 - 2. The god of this world, Satan, blinds our minds
 - a. He keeps us from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ
 - ii. But God, in His grace and compassion and mercy, opens our eyes to see
 - 1. He who said at creation, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to illuminate the darkness
 - a. He has given us the light of the knowledge of His glory
 - b. And it is found in the face of Jesus Christ
 - iii. THIS is why the multitude of angels sang out, “GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST!”
 - 1. In Christ was the light of men
 - 2. As John wrote in his Gospel, “The TRUE light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world!”
 - a. But it wasn’t enough for the shepherds to just hear this great news, was it?
 - i. They needed to see for themselves
 - ii. They needed to see the glory of God in the face of this baby that would be in the manger
 - b. And so Luke writes starting in verse 15,
 - i. *¹⁵When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in*

a manger. ¹⁷And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

1. When the shepherds heard the good news, they went WITH HASTE to see the Savior, Christ the Lord
2. Apparently others had gathered around this baby as well
 - a. For Luke says that after the shepherds shared the story of the angel and what had been told to them, ALL who heard wondered at what they said
 - i. They marveled at the shepherds' words
 - ii. They were amazed by the proclamation of the angels
3. But Luke tells us in verse 19 that Mary "treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart"
 - a. Can you imagine?
 - i. The glory of God, veiled since the beginning of creation, was now staring back up at her in the face of her tiny newborn son
 1. The writer of the book of Hebrews says that Jesus is "*the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.*" (Hebrews 1:3)
 - ii. The radiance of God's glory was now in Mary's arms
 - iii. The one who upholds the universe by the word of his power was now being upheld by his young mother from the village of Nazareth
 - b. She certainly had a LOT to ponder, didn't she?!
- c. But eventually the shepherds left, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had all been told to them by the angel
 - i. And Luke concludes this passage by writing in verse 21, "*And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.*"
 1. Jesus...
 - a. This was the name Gabriel told Mary to give to the baby in Luke 1:31
 - b. And this was the name told to Joseph in Matthew 1:20-21, as the angel, presumably Gabriel, said to him in a dream, "*Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*"
 2. This was the peace that the angels sang about in their hymn
 - a. This would not be a peace brought about by political power or a strong army
 - i. This would be a peace brought about by the sacrifice of the Son of God upon the cross
 - ii. Jesus didn't come to save his people from Rome
 1. He came to save them from THEIR SINS
 2. He came to save US from OUR sins
 3. ¹⁵"He is the image of the invisible God," Paul writes in Colossians 1, ¹⁶"the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

- a. Glory to God in the highest!
- b. And on earth, PEACE among those with whom He is pleased to give it!
- d. My friends, do you know this glory of God in your own heart?
 - i. Have you seen the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ?
 - 1. If you have not, then learn from the example of the shepherds on that glorious night
 - a. Make haste to see these things for yourself
 - b. Make haste to flee from the god of this age who has kept you blinded in darkness
 - c. Make haste to run to Jesus
 - i. For it is only in Him that you will find peace with your Heavenly Father
 - 2. But if you HAVE seen the glory of God in Christ... if you HAVE been saved from your sins... if you HAVE been reconciled to your Father...
 - a. Then learn as well from the example of the shepherds
 - i. After they saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus, they returned back to their fields, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen
 - b. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have been given the grace to be able to see Christ
 - i. We see him now as in a mirror dimly... so we see him by faith
 - ii. But there will come a day when we will see him face to face
 - 1. Nothing can ever take that away from you
 - a. It matters not if you get cancer
 - b. It matters not who sits in the oval office in DC
 - c. It matters not how much money is in our bank accounts
 - 3. God, in His gracious mercy, has opened your eyes to behold His glory
 - a. He has brought you to the top of Mt. Sinai
 - b. He has brought you into the Holy of Holies
 - 4. He who said "Let light shine out of darkness" has shone in YOUR hearts to give you the light of the knowledge of His glory, in the face of Jesus Christ
 - a. So live out the rest of your days glorifying HIM!
 - b. Live out the rest of your days praising HIS name!
 - i. For one day, we will see our Savior face to face
 - ii. And on that day, Revelation 21 tells us that there will be ²²*"no temple in the New Jerusalem, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life."*
- c. How amazing is that?!
 - i. Glory to God in the highest indeed!!