

The Glory of God Forever
Sermon preached by Rev. Gary R. Ulrich
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Grace, Mercy and Peace to you from God our Father Almighty and our Lord Jesus Christ!

So close to the end of the joy of Christmas and the beginning of a new year, I am not sure we are totally consumed with Christmas joy and “sugar plums, dancing in our heads.” We live in a world of so many distractions. We may still be confounded, cautious, and even fearful of what is to come next in our lives. We are suffering through a pandemic that has produced great suffering in life and in death. We are struggling through political turmoil in our country that may misguide our trust in a life of safety and the pursuit of happiness. We are devastated by the disruptions of violence, illness and death itself. Seeing nature swell up in flooding, drought, and climate dramatics can produce feelings of suffering and death. Finances and food shortages have encumbered so many. And all of this suffering has fractured, hurt, and complicated our journey to be at peace, and to love one another as our Lord Jesus Christ has loved us. And then, on the eve of a New Year someone always wants to make a New Year’s resolution to improve the quality of their life. The cry today may be “I don’t need a resolution, I need a SAVIOR. I need a trusting guide to show me the way to give me comfort, peace and a future, someone to “stop the music” and give me that peace.

This morning we sang “As with Gladness Men of Old.” As I read our Gospel lesson for this morning from the Gospel of John, I felt a wonderful awakening that stirred my heart and brought peace to my worldly thoughts. Listen closely to the words we sang.

As with gladness, Men of Old
Did the guiding star behold!
Holy Jesus, every day
Keep us in the narrow Way.
In the heavenly country bright

Need they no created light;
Thou its Light, its Joy, its Crown
Thou its Sun which goes not down,
There forever may we sing,
Alleluias to our King.

This was an Epiphany hymn written by William Chatterton Dix on January 6, 1859. The song is a prayer comparing the journey of the Magi to our earthly journey. Seeking our Lord is a spirit driven excitement and a journey of light, peace and joy that leads us to eternity... “And we forever may sing alleluias to our Lord and King.”

St. John the Apostle, wrote a Gospel message to people who already knew Jesus as Lord. He identifies the purpose of his writing to strengthen and witness the events in Jesus life. John writes towards the end of his Gospel: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30-31).

John begins by writing a unique prologue to his Gospel, emphasizing the identity of Jesus Christ. The prologue proclaims that the Word, the Logos, is a separate being but the same essence as God. He emphasizes that the “logos” is eternal and is God. Scripture shows in St. Paul’s writings (Ephesians 3:9-11; Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:2) that the Son, or Word of God is the source of all creation, and was with God from the beginning. Scripture shows that the Son of God is the Word, and that God has spoken through Him, whom he appointed the heir of all things. This plurality of God (3 persons in one -- God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost) is a divine mystery beyond our understanding. John writes more about the Logos as how in a being he was life, life’s self and the light of men. He writes: “In him (the Logos/Word) was life and the life was the light of men. The light was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.” (John 1:4-5)

John explains that God gave his holy presence to people through his word, wisdom and law, and now the “incarnate Word.” Jesus the light of the world has come to penetrate the darkness of the world and to give eternal life to God’s people. The world is estranged from God, spiritually ignorant and blind. Humans do not know God, or they ignore him; they are spiritually blind. The light, Jesus the Christ, shines through the darkness. This dark plague overshadows the world and tries to block out God’s love and presence in our lives. It tries to capture us in our own egos; self righteous walks of worldly gluttony. A walk of blindness, away from a love that shines forth to show God’s mercy, wisdom and power that penetrates all the darkness of sin and evil; a light that penetrates our very soul and enlightens us to know that we are the children of this light. And we know, live with and accept God’s grace and truth as one of God’s own. We walk with God’s care, as his children, his elect, his chosen generation.

John’s Gospel tells the beautiful story about the Son of God assuming a human nature in the womb of Mary; Jesus, the Son of God now with a divine and human nature born into one being. The Messiah, the Christ, to rescue and save God’s people, God’s creation. This Jesus had one mission only: to redeem humankind into a renewed righteous relationship with God, to rescue and save them from God’s eternal judgment from sin, death and the power of Satan. God is with us from the beginning, now and into the future. “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” (John 1:14)

The light of life, the true light, the Word, the Logos, God’s wisdom, mercy, power and love, embodied in a human existence lived among us for a time to show God’s Glory. John witnessed to the people to get ready for this miraculous presence of God in our lives. His call is now to us, each day and hour, each week and year to awaken us to see God’s glory.

In the history of the Old Testament, God revealed His glory to his people in the Tabernacle. Moses introduced the expression of God’s glory during the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt. God’s glory was God’s majesty, His visible presence in the cloud and fire that guided his people. God’s presence witnessed the splendor of God’s power and might in caring for His people in the most devastating times of their lives.

God continues to reveal his glory to all believers in the Word and promises he had made. When Christ took on the flesh of humanity, God manifested his glory in the full ministry of Jesus’ time on earth; a glory of unrenowned, holy and righteous mercy. A love that was given and demonstrated in Christ’s work of redemption.

Jesus the Christ became flesh and lived among us, to suffer and die in the darkness of our lives. And, as John proclaimed, Jesus the Christ showed the glory of the Father as only the Son of God could, “And from his fullness, we receive grace upon grace.” (John 1:16) We receive a full measure of God’s glory through the sacrifice Jesus made for us. Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God to the human race, showing grace -- God’s unmerited favor for us. Jesus holds us righteous before God, in the truth of God’s promises and the security of God’s love and care. And the Holy Spirit discerns to us the divine way of our words, deeds and thought. We are encompassed in the divine light of Jesus our entire life on this earth and into eternity.

We can now stand and shout, “This is most certainly true!” With God’s presence in, with, and through Jesus Christ, we are seeing the light. We have a lifetime of resolutions, without end and into eternity. God, through the Holy Spirit, continues to “tabernacle” in our hearts, in our souls, to eternal Glory. Let us continue to pray and sing,

In the heavenly country bright
Need they no created light;
Thou its Light, its Joy, its Crown,
Thou its Sun which goes not down.
There forever may we sing
Alleluias to our King! Amen!