

“Glory Around Us”

A reflection for our Christmas Eve Communion Service
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Luke 2:1-20

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Glory

In that account of Jesus' arrival, and all that happened around his birth . . . in many of the carols we sign . . . we keep hearing about “glory.”

Particularly with the shepherds.

*“The angel of the Lord appeared to them,
and the glory of the Lord shone around them,
and they were terrified.”*

The army of angels praised,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven.”

And later, after see for themselves all that they had been told,

“The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God. . . .”

So I've been wondering what this “glory” means. It's become one of those words we easily speak in church circles. It flies by our ears . . . but what is it? And how can meditating on God's glory help us rest with God?

Reputation

The first thing I found was that “glory” can mean something like “reputation.” Someone who comes out on top, who accomplishes something, has glory.

An athlete wins the race.
A commander wins the battle.
A scientist wins the Nobel prize.
An actor wins an Oscar.

The cheers of the crowd. The recognition of your peers. The respect of your competitors. Glory.

This idea of “glory” comes from the classical civilizations of Greece and Rome. The Greek word *doxa* means what you seem like to others, the common belief or opinion. Reputation meant everything. You strove to gain and keep yours, and that of your family.

Of course, we realize that can have a light, fleeting, emptiness to it. One slip, or even a rumour, and your reputation is destroyed. The measure of who you are must be more than the number of "likes" you get. Get through the shell of celebrity, and it can be an illusion.

If it's all about your reputation, can you ever rest? I mean, really rest with yourself.

When it comes to God's glory, though, it's a whole different thing. God is the Creator, so God's glory is seen in all God has made. The heavens, and everything, declare the glory of God, God's greatness. God is the Deliverer. God rescued God's People, Israel, from slavery in Egypt. God in Jesus delivered us from sin's bondage and death's destruction. God who is the upholder. Moment by moment, thought by thought, heartbeat by heartbeat, God keeps everything going. God is love.

We rejoice in who God is! God's glory!

But can we rest in God's glory?

Who God is. . . . Who I am. . . . Can I rest with God?

Weight

I said this idea glory as reputation is classically Greek and Roman. It's certainly in the Hebrew-Jewish tradition too, that's held in our Bibles. But there we find another sense of "glory," especially God's glory.

The Hebrew word is *kavod*. It means heavy, weighty.

Your reputation-glory can be light. It can fly off easily. And it doesn't get necessarily to the heart of who you are. But weighty-glory, it's thick. It's full. It's grounded. It's significant.

We talk about having a "heavy conversation" with someone. We're saying it was about something important, something that matters. Something that's weighty, it doesn't blow away easily. It lasts.

I don't experience the presence of God very often, not physically. The handful of times I have, when God has given me a physical sensation of God's Spirit filling me, I'd say it was "weighty." Like I was being pressed, not from outside but within.

For me, this was God's encouragement. God's assurance. A taste of God's glory.

But I can't say it was restful. No, it felt wonderfully uncomfortable.

God's glory is absolutely weight, perfectly heavy, wonderfully full, astonishingly significant, and delightfully grounded.

But can we rest in God's weighty glory? Can I rest with God?

Let's hear Ben Caplan sing *O Holy Night!* His voice, and the way he arranges this song, is weighty.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PdZGY_JDnQ

Light

One more sense of "glory." Light.

It's this idea that glory, God's glory infuses the space around.

God is everywhere. So God's glory is everywhere. Yet, when God wants to manifest God's Presence in a particularly powerful, meaningful way . . . or when people try to describe their experience of God, "light" is the language used.

Think of the carol, *Silent Night*.

All is calm, all is bright (even though it's the middle of the night)

Glories stream (like streams of light) from heaven after.

Son of God, love's pure light.

Radiant beams from thy holy face . . .

Light: purity, nothing-hidden, energy, beauty. Light draws us toward it. We want to be in the light. Covered with it.

Light also overpowers us. If God's glory is like light, can we rest within it, without being blinded or burned?

Before I finish, let's sing another carol.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHGGcc4HHTU

Rest

If Glory is reputation, then how can someone like me, or anyone, find rest before God who is Almighty and All-Good?

If Glory is weighty, how can I find rest with God, without being crushed?

If Glory is like light, how can I find rest beholding God, without being blinded and burned?

This is a sign for you. . . . You will find the Babe — Your Saviour, Your God, Your Glory — wrapped snugly in infant clothes, and lying in a manger.

God, in all of God's Glory, comes to you, me, and all of us . . .

What becomes of God's reputation, then . . . this One who summons quaking shepherds to the baby shower?

What becomes of God's weightiness, then . . . this One who can be carried in human arms?

What becomes of God's light, then . . . this One who draws us closer, who gives us sight, and by whom we can see everything else?

This is God's Glory . . . Jesus.

So you can rest.

Amen.