

Text: Luke 2:8-20, John 1:14¹

Title: Seeing God's Glory in 2011

Date: January 2, 2010

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

I want to speak with you this morning about...

Seeing God's glory in 2011.

One of the great Christmas passages about God's glory is the story of the shepherds encounter with the angels on the night of Jesus' birth. As we come to the end of the Christmas season and prepare to face a New Year, let's read that familiar story from Luke's Gospel. I'm reading from Luke chapter two, verses eight to twenty. This is God's holy, inspired and authoritative Word. Let's hear it with reverence and respond to it with living faith. Luke wrote...

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

¹⁵ When 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." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The story of the encounter of the shepherds with the host of angels provides us with lessons about encountering God. What we learn from them is crucial. Although most of us will never encounter angels, **all of us MUST encounter God!** A few weeks ago as we thought about John's emphasis on the fact that he

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had seen Jesus' glory I said to you that all of us must come to the place where we see Jesus with the eyes of our spirit and it seems to me that the shepherds' encounter with the angels can teach us something of what it means to encounter the glory of God.

Can what happened to the shepherds happen to us? Not only can it – it must! No, it's not that we see angels, or hear heavenly choirs, but we must encounter the glory of God. But how? Can it happen to ordinary people like you and me?

God breaks into the lives of ordinary people

“And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.” Luke 2:8

1) “shepherds out in the field”

- simple, working people – not the religious leadership, not the highly educated, not even seekers after spiritual experiences
- not engaged in a religious activity – encountered God during their work

2) “keeping watch”

cf. night is the time when attacks on the sheep are most likely

- these men were busy, focused on work – but God broke into their schedule and met with them.

One thing that the presence of the shepherds tells us is that God values the things of day-to-day ordinary life and the people who do them.

One interesting scene in Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*, shows Jesus finishing a table. In it, Jesus is depicted as having a commitment to putting out an excellent product. As a carpenter, he spent many long hours and years doing manual work in a wood shop. His work had to be of the highest quality.

The Christian apologist Justin Martyr, who lived about 100 years after Jesus, made a revealing observation about Jesus' work. During his life in second century Galilee, he saw farmers still using ploughs which might well have been made by Jesus. Theologian Os Guinness writes: "How intriguing to think of Jesus' plough rather than his Cross—to wonder what it was that made his ploughs and yokes last and stand out."

As Christians we sometimes exalt "spiritual" work and downplay daily labour. However, any work, no matter how mundane, that is done for God is spiritual work.

Can God meet us in the day-to-day as we go about our ordinary lives?

Cf. Lynne Hybels – story of scene she witnessed years ago that still speaks to her of God.

- As a child she saw a man in a discount store struggling with the purchase of a small, inexpensive figurine.
- The lines of his face and the worn clothes on his back told of a hard and bittersweet life
- BUT everything about this man communicated the intensity of his love for the recipient of that gift.
- His gift was poor, compared with the countless others being purchased that day in the store, but somehow this gift seemed so much more significant than the others.
- Lynne Hybels remembers that moment to this day, over 30 years later – it's still that anonymous shopper that tugs at her heart each Christmas

She says, "Sometimes the most beautiful love stories are etched on the faces of the lowly and shared by the humble."

Can God meet you where you'll be this week? Of course He can – be on the look out for Him.

When God breaks in He initiates the encounter

"And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear." Luke 2:9

Remember: God is seeking to meet with us more than we are looking for him

Yes, Scripture calls us to...

**"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near;"
Isaiah 55:6**

Jesus said...

"And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." Luke 11:9

And...

"seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" Matthew 6:33

BUT remember that we come because **He** invites us to come to meet with him. **He** asks us to ask and knock, as well as seek.

Whenever we have the kind of insight that Lynne Hybels had it's not because we "figured something out" – it's because God opened our eyes by His Spirit.

There's an old chorus we sometimes sing: "Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus..." – it's a prayer for God to initiate an encounter.

Jonathan Edwards was one of the great American preachers of the 18th century. A man of great scholarship and intellect, he was also a passionate follower after Christ. It was his preaching that ignited and gave shape to the first great North American revival that came to be called the First Great Awakening.

At one point Edwards encountered God in an intensely experiential way while reading First Timothy 1:17...

"To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." 1 Timothy 1:17

He was overcome, he wrote, with "a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before."

The only language that seemed adequate, as he later recorded in his *Personal Narrative* (c. 1739), was that of ecstasy: "I thought with myself, how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be wrapped up to God in heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in him." Deeply moved, Edwards retreated to "a solitary place" outdoors where, under a broad sky, he was again transfixed by "a sweet sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, **that I know not how to express.**" *Citation: David W. Kling, "Language of Ecstasy," Christian History (Issue 77), p. 34*

Edwards had been reading God's Word, and it was God's Spirit that gave him a vision of the glory of God described there – it was that Scripture-saturated, Spirit-illuminated vision that swept his soul. Edwards was seeking God, but it was God who transported his heart to that place of inexpressible joy.

PLEASE HEAR ME: That's the kind of inbreaking of God that I'm talking about! It's that moment when we break through to perceive with our heart what our mind knows. It's a union of spirit and mind that occurs when God leads us to himself. It is Scripture-saturated, Spirit-illuminated communion with the living God!

Now that we're standing on the threshold of a New Year, let's lift up our eyes and look to God to break into our lives during the coming year. Let's invite Him to open our eyes this year so that we can see a glimpse of His glory!

When God breaks in it can unsettle us, but God says, "Don't be afraid."

"And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Luke 2:10

I don't know if you've noticed but fear is a major party of the Christmas stories in Luke's Gospel.

Luke 2 -- The shepherds were "filled with fear" (2:9) by the appearance of the angels.

Luke 1 -- "Fear fell upon" Zechariah (Luke 1:12) when an angel appeared to him in the temple to foretell the birth of his son, John the Baptist.

Luke 1 -- Mary was "greatly troubled" (Luke 1:29) by the appearance of the angel to her to announce the birth of Jesus.

In all three cases, the angel speaks a word of comfort to them: "**Do not be afraid.**"

Throughout the Bible, God speaks that little phrase, "Do not be afraid," over and over again.

When God visited Abram, Hagar, Isaac, Jacob – Each time, He said: "Do not be afraid." (Gen 15:1; 21:17; 26:24; 46:3)

God visited Gideon – fears for his life because his eyes have seen Sovereign holy Lord -- "Do not be afraid." (Judges 6:23)

When God visited Daniel – falls to his knees in holy reverence & fear – "Do not be afraid." (Dan 10:11-12)

The angel who appeared to the women at Jesus' tomb said: "Do not be afraid" (Matt 28:5)

When the resurrected Jesus appeared to John he falls at his feet as one dead, but Jesus said: "Do not be afraid." (Rev 1:17)

Instinctively, human beings respond to encounters with God with fear:

- 1) His otherness – like standing close to the railway tracks as a train pounds by – shaking and fear
- 2) His holiness – his purity and our sinfulness

H. G. Wells, the English science fiction writer, was not a professing Christian. Years ago in the *New Yorker* magazine, he told a story about an Episcopalian clergyman. (He could have told it about a preacher from any denomination.) This Episcopalian bishop was the kind of man who always said pious things to people. When troubled folks came to him, he found that a particularly helpful thing to say, if said in a right tone of voice, was, "Have you prayed about it?" If said in just the right way, it seemed to settle things.

The bishop himself didn't pray much; he had life wrapped up in a neat package. But one day life tumbled in on him, and he found himself overwhelmed. It occurred to the bishop that maybe he should take some of his own advice. So, one Saturday afternoon he entered the cathedral, went to the front, and knelt on the crimson rug. Then he folded his hands before the altar and began to pray. He said, "**O God--**" and suddenly there was a voice. It was crisp, businesslike. The voice said, "**Well, what is it?**"

Next day when the worshipers came to Sunday services, they found the bishop sprawled face down on the crimson carpet. When they turned him over, they discovered he was dead. Lines of horror were etched upon his face. What H. G. Wells was saying in that story is simply this: there are folks who talk a lot about God who would be scared to death if they saw him face to face. *Citation: Haddon Robinson, "Good Guys, Bad Guys, and Us Guys," Preaching Today, Tape No. 80.*

H.G. Wells pictured the common human fear of encountering God. But I don't think God's first words to this man would not have been, "what is it?" They would have been "do not be afraid."

Do you fear meeting God because you know your life doesn't measure up? He wants to be merciful and forgiving to you – seek HIM!

When God breaks in He brings us to an encounter with Jesus, not just with the supernatural

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." Luke 2:11-12

We live in an "angel soaked" society –

- Internet sites devoted to angels
- TV shows & movies
- Arts & crafts, popular novels

Angels are very popular. They fit the spirituality of the age in which we live. They are kind. They make no demands. They only want to help everyone. They have no dogma to which we are expected to subscribe. At least, that's the popular "angelology" of the day.

Some years ago now, one of the most popular shows on TV was "Touched by an Angel."

- When Martha Williamson was invited to produce the show, the network already had a pilot
- The pilot depicted angels arguing with God and angels who argued between themselves

- She said, “No I won’t do this show unless it’s changed.” – They said, “Go ahead”
- The network scrapped a \$2 million dollar pilot because Martha Williamson wouldn’t bend to an unBiblical depiction of angels.
 - In her show, angels speak for God and they direct people to God – they are not an end in themselves.

The angels of Christmas were like Martha Williamson’s angels – they focused on God:

- They spoke His message
- They sang His praise
- They pointed the shepherds to the manger where His Son was born.

The shepherds didn’t get “angel focused” – the real glory was to be found in the manger in the face of a baby. And they went just as they were directed by the angels and found Jesus.

John wasn’t with the shepherds when the glory of the Lord shone round about them – but, as he saw the glory of God, too. He saw it in Jesus. He wrote:

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” John 1:14

Paul wasn’t with the shepherds either, but he saw the glory of God, too.

“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 4:6

The writer of the Book of Hebrews wasn’t in Bethlehem that night either but he too saw the glory of God in Jesus. He wrote...

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.” Hebrews 1:3

There are many places where God’s glory can be seen – in the majesty of His creation (Psalm 19:1-6) and even in the works of His created beings and occasionally in supernatural break ins by God in spiritual ways. But T.M. Moore, an American Christian writer, reminds us that unless we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus, we will be confused by the message of God’s glory communicated by these other sources.

For many centuries, Egyptian hieroglyphs were unreadable. The story of that ancient civilization was unknown because the script was unreadable to modern researchers. That is, until 1800 when Napoleon’s troops in Egypt discovered a stone monument, now called the Rosetta Stone, that had an inscription written in

both Egyptian hieroglyphs and Greek script. Using the Greek portion of the inscription, scholars were finally able to unlock the meaning of the ancient hieroglyphs.

Moore refers to Jesus as “the Rosetta Stone of Glory.”

He wrote: “Supremely, the glory of God may be seen “in the face of Jesus Christ,” as the apostle tells us. This is because Jesus is the manifestation of the glory of God *par excellence* (Heb. 1:1-3). He is the “focusing light” of the glory of God. The more we know about Jesus, the better we know Him personally, and commune with Him intimately, the greater will be our ability to appreciate the teaching and illumination concerning the glory of God which we find in Scripture and creation. Jesus is the Rosetta Stone of God’s glory, the key to unlocking, interpreting, appreciating, and benefiting from the revelation of the glory of God coming through all other sources.”

T.M. Moore, “The Rosetta Stone of Glory,” Breakpoint, December 7, 2004

It’s Jesus we need to meet, not just have “supernatural” experiences. Unless we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus we haven’t connected with God.

Have you seen the glory of God in the face of Christ?

Without Him, things will be confused and hidden – with Him, everything makes sense.

***When God breaks in and reveals to us the glory of God in the face of Jesus
He invites a response from us***

“And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.” Luke 2:16-18

“Let us go over to Bethlehem ...’ (v. 15) in Greek has a sense of urgency – “Let’s get going!” So “they went with haste” to see Jesus (v.16)

And having met Him, they left on mission – telling everyone they met about their encounter with the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. When we encounter the glory of God in the face of Jesus it is an encounter that will change our lives and priorities.

When we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus, the question God asks us of is this: **Will you make my glory your passion? Will you make it your mission to share the story of my glory?**

Karen Watson was a Southern Baptist missionary to Iraq. Prior to leaving for the Middle East Karen wrote a letter to be delivered only in the event of her death.

The letter was dated March 7, 2003. Karen was killed, along with four other missionaries, on March 15, 2004. Karen wrote...

*“Dear Pastor Phil and Pastor Roger:
You should only be opening this letter in the event of my death.*

*When God calls there are no regrets. I tried to share my heart with you as much as possible, my heart for the nations. I wasn't called to a place. I was called to him. **To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, his glory my reward** ...*

In regards to any [funeral] service, keep it small and simple. Yes, simply just preach the gospel....Be bold and preach the life-saving, life-changing, forever-eternal gospel. Give glory and honor to our Father.”

Then Karen quoted this description of “the Missionary Heart”...

**“The Missionary Heart:
Care more than some think is wise.
Risk more than some think is safe.
Dream more than some think is practical.
Expect more than some think is possible.”**

And she concluded her letter with these words...

“I was called not to comfort or success but to obedience....There is no joy outside of knowing Jesus and serving him. I love you two and my church family.

*In his care, Salaam,
Karen”*

Citation: "Keep Sending Missionaries," *Baptist Press* (3-24-04); submitted by Alan Price, Chatsworth, Georgia

Karen had made the glory of God her passion and her reward! Will we make God's glory our passion this year? This year, will we care more, risk more, dream more and expect more because we've encountered the glory of God in the face of Jesus?

Let's pray.

- Invitation to Prayer Ministry**
- Final Song:** Be Thou My Vision
- Benediction**