

THE GLORY OF THE INCARNATION

JOHN 1:14

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In these Sundays proceeding Christmas, I have decided to talk about the meaning of the incarnation as it is described in the Prologue of John's gospel. Last week we saw how verses 1, 14, and 18, taken together, beautifully declare the fact of the incarnation. The Logos became flesh. The Word who was with God made His dwelling among men. The Word was God. No one had ever seen God, but God made Him known to us, and we saw that He was full of grace and truth. This is a summary of the fact of the incarnation as it is declared in verses 1, 14, and 18.

Perhaps most of us have heard about the incarnation so many times, that we have lost interest in thinking about its meaning. It's easy for that to happen with those of us who have grown up in a church. But, we must work hard not to let it happen. Whether it comes natural to think about the incarnation, or whether we must force ourselves to think, it is a good thing to take time to meditate on the meaning of this pivotal event in history that we call the incarnation.

Last week, I used JOHN 1:2-13 to help us meditate on the purpose of the incarnation. In those verses, we discovered a new creation or a new birth to be the main purpose of the incarnation. This new birth is a mystery. It's a miracle that God performs in the life of a person who believes in the Word that has become flesh. It is a second creation that allows the spirit of man to be restored to its original state, shining forth the light of God's image, making known God's love and holiness in a world of darkness.

Today, we are going to look at the second explanation of the incarnation recorded in part of verse 14. Although it is very brief, it is full of meaning that can bless us this Christmas season if we would only take time to think about it.

The focus of this brief explanation is on the word "glory." John says that he and others have witnessed the glory of the Logos that became flesh. What was John talking about when he used this word "glory?" Perhaps he meant the mighty power of God that was displayed when Jesus performed miracles like calming storms and casting out demons and healing the lame and the blind and the sick and raising people from the dead. Certainly, such mighty displays of power are demonstrations of God's glory.

However, there is also another kind of glory that was demonstrated in the life of the incarnate God. In a sense that is deeper than the powerful displays of control over nature and sickness and death, Jesus demonstrated His glory through the cross of shame. Listen to the words of our Lord as they are recorded in JOHN 12:23-24. "Jesus replied, *'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you're the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.'*" And then, at the Last Supper, the evening before His death, Jesus said to his disciples, "*Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.*" Those words are recorded in JOHN 13:31. Jesus knew that the time of His death had come, and He referred to that event as the time of His glorification.

I believe when John spoke of the glory he and others had witnessed in the life of the incarnate Word, he was primarily speaking of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Only when the wheat seed dies can it produce fruit. Only through the death of Jesus Christ can people experience a new birth in their lives. If new birth defines the purpose of the incarnation, then the death of Jesus Christ on the cross defines the method by which the new birth is made possible.

John said, "We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only." Although there are many Biblical references to the glory of Christ after He ascended into heaven and was seated at the right hand of the Father; and there are many Biblical references to the glory of Christ when He will appear at His second coming, those are things that John and the others had not yet witnessed when the gospel of John was written. And, none of those things would be possible without the death of Christ on the cross. The glory of the Word that became flesh witnessed by John and

others was revealed primarily in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

When we think of the incarnation where God became a man, we must think beyond the nativity scene to Calvary. We must think beyond the cradle to the cross. The cradle demands the cross. Without the cross, there is absolutely no possibility of a second creation happening in the lives of people.

All of us are in desperate need of the cross every single day of our lives, and our biggest problem is that we fail to realize it. The words of the prophet of old are fulfilled over and over again. In ISAIAH 53:2, we read these words, "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him." These words do not mean that the Messiah lacked beauty and majesty. Even while He hung on the cross with His flesh torn from His body, the Lord of Glory did not lack beauty and majesty. The words of Isaiah simply mean that all the beauty and majesty He possessed failed to appeal to people. And, why didn't it appeal to them? It was because they were blind and could not see. This is the trouble with the world, and all too often it is the trouble with us. We are blind and, therefore, we cannot see the beauty and majesty of the cross. We fail to see the salvation that is available to us every day for every problem we face. We are unable to behold the glory.

I recently read an article written by Jessica Gardner who wrote about her grandmother. She wrote, "I came into this world with a bashed head and deformed features because of the hard labor my mother had gone through. Family members and friends wrinkled their noses at the disfigured baby I was. They all commented on how much I looked like a beat-up football player." But, Jessica's grandmother was different. Her eyes twinkled with splendor and happiness at the ugly baby in her arms. Jessica was her first granddaughter. "Beautiful," she said.

Before final exams in her junior year of high school, Jessica's grandmother died. Prior to her death, she had become quite ill. And, about a week or so before she died, her body lost the ability to function at all, and the doctors decided to move her to a hospice. A hospice is a place where those who enter never come out.

Jessica told her parents that she wanted to see her grandmother. Two days later, she was brought to the hospice. What Jessica saw was not pretty. Her grandmother was slouched over in a chair, eyes shut, mouth numbly hanging open. The morphine was keeping her asleep. Jessica slowly sat down across from her. She took her grandmother's hand and held it in her own. She could not get over how awful her grandmother looked, sitting there helpless.

Then it happened. The small hand of her grandmother tightened its grip around Jessica's hand. In telling the story, Jessica wrote, "Her voice began what sounded like a soft howl. She seemed to be crying in pain. And then, she spoke.

"Jessica." Plain as day. My name. Mine. Out of four children, two sons-in-law, one daughter-in law and six grandchildren, she knew it was me."

Jessica cried, not just because her grandmother would never see her graduate from high school and go off to college, or get married. Above all, she cried because she finally realized how her grandmother felt he day she had been born. She was able to look through what she saw on the outside and look instead to the inside. And, when she did that, she saw life and beauty.

Jessica released her grandmother's hand from hers and brushed away the tears staining the cheeks of her grandmother as well as her own tears. She stood, leaned over, and kissed her grandmother and said, "You look beautiful."

What Jessica experienced on a human level, we all need to experience daily on a spiritual level. The glory that we need to behold this Christmas is not found in a manger. It is found in the cross of the one who loved us from the start despite the ugliness of our sinful nature. Now, we must look beyond the surface of the cross and see the beauty that is there. If we can really see the beauty, then there will be no problem too big for Him to solve and no heartache too painful for Him to heal. This Christmas season, bring your burdens to the Lord. Allow yourself to look at the cross and behold the glory of the One and Only who came from the Father."

Last week, I asked you to make a wish list and pray for those in need of a new birth. This week I am asking you to bring your burdens to the cross, realizing there is no other method by which we can find salvation, salvation

not only from the penalty of sins committed in the past, but also salvation from problems we face in the present.

I know some of you are feeling desperate. It is not wrong to feel desperately in need of salvation every single day of our lives, because we are in desperate need of salvation every single day of our lives. For that reason, we need to behold the glory of our Lord every day of our lives. For some of you here, it has been too long since you have come to the Lord with your problems. Please don't wait another moment. Come to Jesus now.