

Glory to God in the Highest

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[0:00] Luke 2, the story of the birth of our Savior. I'll read it now and you're hearing from the Word of God, the account of the birth of our Savior, Luke 2. In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to his own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him, and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

[1:13] Today, in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger.

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child. And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. Angels, created spiritual beings, made by God, to be ministers to those who will inherit salvation.

[2:27] They inhabit this universe together with us. And though they usually keep out of sight, at significant places in the history of redemption, they have become visible to men.

Especially when they are bringing messages from God to mankind. And such was the case on the night of Jesus' birth. God said to one angel, Go and announce the gospel, the good news, to those shepherds on the hills of Bethlehem.

And so he appears, and the light of the glory of God, whose face he usually beholds, is still shining forth from him, such that the shepherds are terrified.

And he says, Don't be afraid. I bring good news of great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord.

The birth of a Savior. The gospel of salvation. Heaven wants you to know who he is and why he's here.

[3:46] But one angel's not enough for such a glorious message. And so suddenly the whole sky is lit up with a multitude of the heavenly hosts.

A whole regimen of God's army of angels suddenly appears. And what they said is our text, both for this morning and next week, Lord willing.

Glory to God in the highest. And on earth, peace to men on whom his favor rests. And in these words, we have heaven's commentary on the birth of this child.

What will his birth mean? Well, it has ramifications for God and for men. Both heaven and earth are gainers because of this birth.

By this baby, God in the highest will have glory and men on earth will have peace. So first of all, for our consideration this morning, we see that the birth of Christ brings glory to God in the highest.

[4:57] Now we need to notice that this is where the angels start. Not with men, but with God. The highest accomplishment of the birth of Christ is that God is glorified.

And how we need to get this lesson this morning. And we need to get it better. And we need to have it permeate us. We so quickly jump to man, don't we?

It's natural reflex. We jump to what the birth of Jesus means for man. It means peace on earth. It means salvation. It means everlasting blessing.

And all of this is true, of course, and the angels will get there. But it's not where they start, is it? So let's learn from the starting point of the angels that the most important thing about the birth of Christ is that it brings glory to God.

It brings glory to God. You see, the sinless angels don't suffer from our myopia, our short-sightedness, our me-centeredness, this worldview with self at the center of our universe, so that we think and evaluate and judge everything going on around us by how it relates to me.

[6:15] So if I'm thinking about the birth of Christ, I'm thinking, what will it mean for me? Well, these sinless angels are above that. They come with heaven's perspective.

And so they see everything first as it relates to God. His throne is the true center of the universe.

And His glory is what really matters.

It's all about Him. For from Him, through Him, and unto Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.

And we need to learn again from the angels. The grand, the chief end of God Himself. What is it that God is doing in the universe?

Why does He do anything that He does? Yes. Well, ask one of these young children from our Sunday school class, why has God made you and all things?

[7:15] And they will tell you, for His own glory. Indeed, Colossians 1.16, all things were created by Him and for Him.

God is out to make a name for Himself. He is glorious and He wants others to know that and to acknowledge that and to enjoy that. And that explains a whole lot.

It explains why I'm here and why you're here. And why the trees are here. And why snow is here. And why your family's here.

And why our country's here. And why the devil's here. It's all for His own glory. God intends to get glory to Himself.

And then we ask the angels hovering over the hills of Bethlehem, why is He here? Why does the eternal Son of God come in the form of man?

[8:20] And the first thing out of their mouth is for the glory of God in the highest. He's here to show forth the wonders and excellencies and praises, the attributes of God.

He's here to display how great and glorious God is. But didn't Christ Jesus come into the world to save sinners? Yes.

Thank God He did. But there is something even more important than saving sinners. It is that God should be glorified.

And so Jesus Christ will come and save sinners, but He will do it in a way that glorifies God. That is the uppermost reason why Jesus is born to bring glory to God in the highest.

Now to see that truth is to step into a whole new world, isn't it? Nothing looks the same when we realize that it's all here to bring glory to God.

[9:31] Even your own salvation is not an end in itself. It's a means to an end. To a greater end. Even greater than your eternal salvation from hell is the greater end that that salvation will bring glory to this saving God.

And that gives meaning to whatever is going on in your life this morning. This thing is in my life because God wants glory from it.

There's nothing higher to pursue. There's nothing more important than this. And so the issue becomes will I embrace God's chief end as my own chief end? His chief end is to bring glory to Himself.

Will that be my chief end? My highest pursuit? My goal in every activity of life? The reason I get up in the morning to display how great and glorious God is.

Now we need to see and appreciate that the world into which Jesus was born is a world where God's glory is greatly diminished. diminished. It's a world where God's glory is greatly diminished. [10:48] In the perfect world as it came from the hand of God all creation brought Him glory. The creation itself was a neon sign.

You've been by CVS at night and seen that obnoxious it's a better sign than that. But it gets your attention. And it says to us isn't God glorious? All creation says isn't God glorious?

And every Adam and the being of Adam and Eve responded yes he is glorious. And God was glorified perfectly in that perfect world.

But sin entered the world and changed all of that. The devil that fallen angel he is set against God's glory as much as God is set for it.

He hates God. God. And Satan's chief end is to ruin God's reputation to drag his name through the mud to steal his glory.

[11:52] And so he brings his smear campaign right into the Garden of Eden disguised as a snake who is on Eve's side to enlighten her to the way that things really are.

Eve God won't let you eat from any tree in the garden? Well he clearly is holding out on you. He doesn't want you to enjoy life. He doesn't want what's best for you.

And that's why he threatens you with death if you would eat it from that tree. And then he slanders the truthfulness of God. Not only the goodness and kindness of God but the truthfulness of God.

You will not surely die. God said you but you won't. You'll rather really begin to live. And you'll know good and evil. You'll be like God.

And by his lies he deceived her into sinning against God and Adam followed her in sin and the two of them became sinners. And they gave to their offspring indeed to the whole race of mankind a heart that is sinful.

[13:04] A sinful nature that from birth does not see God's glory or seek God's glory. And because of man's sin the whole creation itself was cursed by God and subjected to frustration and futility held in bondage to death and decay so that the world became a place where God's glory was greatly diminished to put it lightly.

Let's say you're in Greece and you're there to view the ruins of an ancient civilization and you come upon the remains of a magnificent building but time and wars have ravaged it and reduced it to rubble.

But the outline of the building that used to be is still visible because of the placement and where these stones and fallen pillars are lying and maybe just one or two massive marble pillars are still standing as dim reminders of the glory of that building that once was.

That's our world. That's the world into which Jesus came. The heavens are still proclaiming the glory of God but it's now a creation under curse frustration decay death and man himself the very pinnacle of God's creation who used to be a glorious temple in which God dwelled is now just a faint hint of what he once was.

He's now fallen he's now broken he's now ruined and under the curse himself and his own ability to perceive the glory of God and his taste buds to enjoy the glory of God have been ruined by the fall so that though the heavens are still proclaiming the glory of God he's not hearing he's not seeing God's glory in it he's not wanting God's glory in creation and in his life in Romans 1 Paul points out that this is the great defect in mankind that although they knew God from creation from their own conscience though they knew God they neither glorified him nor gave thanks to him but their foolish heart was darkened and so they wake up to a snow covered glorious morning like this screaming isn't

[15:56] God glorious and they see they see beauty they see wonder and they grab for their cameras and their canvas and paintbrush but they don't see God in it they don't say thank you God you're the one who's created the snow you're the one who's created the conditions in our universe such that there is such a thing as snow you've painted all so glorious you are a wonderful God no instead Romans says they rather exchange the glory of the immortal God for images and they worshiped and served created things rather than the creator who is forever praised so rather than coming to worship this glorious creator they grab their skis to go out and enjoy the creation that my friends is the greatest tragedy in the world today it's not in

Sudan it's not in Iraq it's not in some poor country of the world where despots are destroying human lives the greatest tragedy in our world today is that God is not receiving the glory that he deserves from his creation that's glory being withheld from God that's glory being stolen and it's not right and that's why to us a son is born that's the reason for the birth of Jesus he comes to right this wrong to bring glory to God in the highest to restore the knowledge of his glory to restore the acknowledgement of his glory the enjoyment of his glory by saving sinners changing their hearts and opening their eyes and changing their desires restoring them in creation to the grand end of glorifying God so the glory of God that is greatly diminished in this world is to be set right by what this child will do now let's consider that in the time remaining how will he do that how will the coming of this child bring glory to God in the highest how will it magnify

God's attributes well God is glorified in the first place by his birth his birth itself for thousands of years God had been saying and promising a savior messiah is coming a savior messiah is coming and now he's here and so his very birth brings glory to God by demonstrating God's great faithfulness to do all that he has said God is not a man that he should lie and that is his glory has he said and will he not do it has he spoken and shall he not make it good and then his birth displays God's omniscience he obviously knows all things even before they happen he's announcing centuries in advance the very lineage of this child he will be born of the line of Judah of the the tribe of Judah the line of David who he will be born to a virgin the very birthplace

Bethlehem but Mary and Joseph live in Nazareth not Bethlehem never mind God knows and he knows all the end from the beginning you see how the birth of Jesus displays the glory of God's omniscience and then it shows forth his sovereignty history isn't just spinning out of control Israel was under the dominance of Babylon then the Greek old Medes and the Persians and then Greece and now Rome is it all out of God's control his kingdom is not coming like he said no it's not out of control it's all being governed exactly as God sovereignly brings it to pass he directs and controls all that happens bringing to pass in time what he's planned in eternity so the heart of

Caesar Augustus is in his hand and he moves in at just the right time figuring the pregnancy of the Virgin Mary and all the rest it nine months and we need to get her down to Bethlehem and he sovereignly moves in Caesar's heart to come up with another census the very birth of Jesus declares God glorious in his sovereignty over all the earth it shows his power what is the power of this God to bring forth a child from a virgin that's impossible ah but not with our God and his very birth demonstrates the glory of God glory to God in the highest and when God's glory is demonstrated in his person who he is well the one in the manger is God there's no doubt about that now the world may doubt that the world may not know his identity but the angels do and they sing glory to God in the highest he is no less God than the father he is no less man than you are he is the

[22:01] God man God incarnate in him God's glory is seen it's made visible for he is the image of the invisible God Colossians 1:15 God was pleased to have all his fullness to dwell in him in a body for the son is the radiance of God's glory the exact representation of his being and so true is that representation that if you have seen me Jesus says you've seen the father the word in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory the glory of the one and only full of grace and truth glory to God in the highest he's

God don't you love the beginning of Handel's Messiah quoting Isaiah chapter 40 the voice of him who crieth in the wilderness prepare ye the way for the Lord make straight in the desert a highway for our God every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill made low the crooked straight the rough places plain and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all flesh together will see it for the mouth of the Lord has spoken the glory of the Lord will be revealed 700 years later John the Baptist is in the wilderness saying prepare the way for the Lord the glory of the Lord is about to be revealed how is it to be revealed oh it was revealed in so many ways in the

Old Testament wasn't it revealed there in Egypt by ten plagues that pummeled the enemies of God's people and brought them out in that great redemption how often when Israel was in trouble and God's people were being oppressed that the glory of the Lord was revealed his strong saving arm and here's this prophecy about the glory of the Lord being revealed and now John the Baptist the forerunner is in the desert and he's saying it's coming it's coming the glory of God and then he appears he who is the glory of God the radiance of God's glory appears and John says behold behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world there's the glory no wonder the angel

sang at his birth glory to

God in the highest because in his person he reveals the glory of God in his preaching God's glory is seen Jesus remember in John 7 his preaching teaching in the temple courts during Passover and the rulers of the Jews send out their temple guards go and arrest him we don't like his message and they went and then they came back empty handed and the rulers say what's happened here why didn't you bring him in and they said never did man speak like this man I say his preaching revealed the glory of God Jesus says no one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven the son of man and he comes from heaven with the very words of God he has been there he has seen God he has known

God and he comes to earth and preaches God no one magnified God in his preaching like the child of Mary no one has ever seen God but God the one and only!

[26 : 26] no! one seen God the one and only! they sing who is at the father's side he has made him known John 1 18 it's the word for exegesis which we seek to do with the scriptures and draw out of the scriptures the meaning what has Jesus done he's come here and by his life and teaching he is exegeting God the father something that only he can do because only he has seen and been with the father and come to tell us about him yes glory to God in the highest God's glory will be seen in his preaching God's glory will be seen in his miracles at Cana he turns the water into wine and after that whole glorious miracle this is the summary of John this is the first of his miraculous signs Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee he thus revealed!

His glory! And his disciples put their trust in him the miraculous signs revealed the glory of Jesus the glory of God revealed in him because he does what only God can do the lame walked the blind saw the lepers were cleansed the dead were raised to life he just commanded that lame man to rise up take his bed and to walk and he done it just as Jesus commanded and then we read this amazed everyone and they praised God saying we have never seen anything like this before yes his miracles revealed the glory of God this is the authority and power the goodness the glory of God on display so that even Nicodemus that

Pharisee must say we know that no one could do the works that you are doing unless God were with him there is the mark of God's glory upon your miracles yes his miracles brought glory to God in the highest but nowhere do we see the glory of God more brilliantly displayed than what this child would grow up and do at Calvary we see God's glory in his death now that's about the last thing we'd expect to see right death is not glorious death is the end of life and the end of all things good is the way that man perceives it but the Bible the New Testament especially holds out the death of Jesus as the most glorious thing such that Paul says I will glory and nothing else save the cross this is the ultimate glory of God Jesus dying for sinners because there at the cross and in the death of Jesus we see just how holy and just God is yes our Bibles tell us he's holy holy holy yes they say he's righteous and just but when we come to Calvary it's like the test is set out before the whole universe okay God says he's going to punish sin wherever it's found but what will he do!

when sin is imputed to his own son that he loves and his own son goes to the cross bearing the sins of his people what now what will we see in the way of God's holiness and justice and it's at Calvary we see that he did not spare his own son he crushed him he wounded him he damned him he cursed him he abandoned!

[30 : 20] him oh what is the holiness and justice of God that even his own son will not be spared if he is bearing sin even though it was not his own sins but ours imputed to him and then we look again at Calvary and we say oh how loving is this God in heaven that we the sinner should be saved from eternal damnation he so loved us that he gave his own son to die in our place what an amazing glory to God in the highest his grace and mercy run out at the cross and then we see it in his resurrection his ascension tower death can't hold him up to the throne of God in heaven glory to God and we see it in his return and judgment of all for his coming the

Bible says in his glory and in the glory of his father and all his angels that's a lot of glory and with power he will speak the word and all who are in the graves will come forth and to damn and his judgment will show God's anger and wrath against sin and his mercy and grace to the undeserving and there in his right hand will be all his redeemed people Matthew 25 tells us and the question of the day will be how did all of these sinners get here why are they here in heaven to enjoy glory forever and the whole answer to that question is heard in the angels shout at the birth of Jesus glory to God in the highest they are here because of what God has done in

Jesus Christ Charles Spurgeon says these angels that night were not Arminians they didn't lay the glory at the feet of man's almighty will as if his will was the ultimate thing to be thanked for their salvation that's what determined the fact that they're there at the father's right they were smart enough to figure out the plan of salvation and they opened their own eyes so that they saw glory in Jesus to come to this Savior and to turn their back on their no no the angel saw from heaven's perspective and said what this child is here to do brings glory to God in the highest it's he who chose us it's he who sent his son to die for our sins it's he who sent his holy spirit to wake us up to bring us to life when we were dead in transgressions and sins and to live in us it is he who is able to keep us from falling and to present us before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy glory to

God in the highest that's why the son of God is born a man to bring glory to God and the mission was begun at his first coming and so the angel sang completed at his second coming you know the song only swells you've been to revelation and you've seen glory to God in the highest echoed throughout eternity when the final victory of this child born to Mary is experienced and we'll promise that one day the knowledge of the glory of God will fill the earth will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea kids how much of the sea is covered by waters well you say all of it there wouldn't be the sea that's right the sea is covered entirely by water and what

God has promised is that a day is coming when the knowledge of the glory of God will cover the whole earth just that thoroughly There won't be a square inch on the whole earth where God's glory is not again manifested and acknowledged and so it all begins here in the manger with God's eternal son becoming man!

[35:08] You know the same commitment in God for his own glory is found in this Jesus isn't it? And that's the driving principle of his life that's why he does all that he does and we see that so clearly as he approached Calvary what's the bottom line with Jesus what makes him tick what makes him get up in the morning early after a long day of ministry and do it again what makes him stare down the cross and keep moving towards it with steady step and flint like jaw well we're not left to guess John tells us as he's approaching the cross he prays and John is given to hear what he says and he says now my heart is troubled and what shall I say you ever been there troubled heart you don't even know what to say in prayer

Jesus has been there what shall I say and he just starts to talk about what he what he's thinking about saying father what shall I say father save me from this hour no no that's that's why I've come to this hour rather father glorify your name and a voice was heard that says I have glorified it and will glorify it again do you see what drove Jesus Christ the same thing that that brought him from heaven that first day came into the world it's still driving him 33 years later he's come to bring glory to God in the highest and that holds him on course and that's a beacon to him when he doesn't even know how to pray or what to do that's it God may you be glorified in this and that holds him and secures our salvation so do you have that fundamental conviction and commitment to God's glory is that what makes you tick is that what gets you up every day is that what thrills you at the end of the day if anything of that has been done is heaven's priority your priority well then grieve that we live in a world where God's glory is greatly diminished and then pray and live and worship and witness and suffer that he might receive more glory that God be glorified is more important than my ease my pleasure my health my wealth if only he be glorified then rejoice in the birth of the son of God who came that glory might go to God in the highest now someone will ask you know if God so committed to his own glory why didn't he just keep sin out of the world well that's a good question

I mean he was being glorified there in the garden why didn't he just keep sin out of Satan's heart and out of Adam and Eve's heart wouldn't have it been so much more glorious but can't we see can't we hear hear from the angels song that there was more glory to go to God through man's fall and subsequent salvation than if man never fell at all in the first place that there are glorious attributes of God that would have lied buried in the Godhead unexpressed!

Hidden! Where would have we seen his boundless mercy and amazing grace that has started a worship in our hearts that won't end for all eternity glory the glory of his grace we'd never seen that where would have we seen his love for the undeserving his patience his kindness his long suffering toward his enemies his holiness and justice and punishing sin at Calvary his wisdom and sovereign power and working out a perfect plan of salvation whereby God could remain just and at the same time be the justifier of the ungodly who believe in Jesus what wisdom what power we've never seen

that had there never been a fall where would we see the infinite worth of the son of God whose obedience and blood saves a multitude of sinners from all their sins you see the greatest display of God's glory is to be seen in his rescuing fallen sinners through the incarnation and life and death and resurrection of his son no wonder the angels shouted glory to God in the highest when he came this child's coming because of sin is going to bring great glory to God in the highest now God chose then the backdrop of a world a dark backdrop of a world where his glory was greatly diminished to be the canvas on which he would display the most brilliant display of his glory I say he did that for Jesus that was the world Jesus came into folks he's still doing it today in the followers of Jesus you know there's sometimes that we just we just wonder God when you save me why didn't you just make me sin proof or why didn't you just take me out of this world but he didn't do that yes he gloriously and radically changed our hearts but he left sinful desires on the inside and he left us with nasty habits that need to be put off and new habits that need to be put on he left us with stubborn sins that needed to be killed powerful temptations surrounding us every hour now either God made a huge mistake or else he means for this fallen world to again be a dark backdrop on which he will display his glory through his people but what he did in

[41:50] Christ he means to do and continue doing through Jesus Christ in your life in the midst of a world that greatly diminishes God and counts him as irrelevant that means that God who makes no mistakes has got you right where he wants you with all your struggles against sin God will be glorified by you struggling against sin than if there never was sin so when you repudiate some proud thought when you reject some lustful look when the world offers you some pleasures to drag you away from God's law and God's smile means more to you and you reject God is greatly glorified and when you fall into sin and come broken and humbled by it to Jesus Christ and trust afresh in his blood that cleanses from all sin

God is greatly glorified do we even know how much he is glorified when we come with a felt sense of our utter weakness and inability to live for him to live for his glory and he sees us casting the weight of ourselves upon him glory to God in the highest and yes when bad things happen to us in this world that diminishes God's glory and we're mistreated and we bear up under it under unjust treatment because we're conscious of God he's greatly glorified greatly glorified and greater glory comes to God than if no one ever treated us wrongly and when suffering the effects of sin's curse and sickness and old age and we remain thankful and joyful in Christ oh how he's glorified folks this is the only place this is the only time now is the time when you can bring glory to

God in the highest in your fight against sin rule up your sleeves redeem the time this period of time it's only now one day we will glorify him forever with no presence of sin but now our opportunity is the same as Christ in the sense that he glorified the father in a world that greatly diminished his glory and you and I are called to do the same but when Jesus Christ came the Bible says he came to his own and his own received him not have you glorified God for his gift of his son you know how you do that you receive his son you receive his son to be your savior lord and God is glorified he sent him to save sinners and in the salvation of sinners he's greatly glorified you don't have to question would he take me would he want me would he receive me folks he delights to save sinners it brings glory to his name come to him you know that's perhaps the most one of the most condemning words I said that about

Romans 1 but it's true of John 1 as well that when God the glorious God visited the earth men received him not you see something there you see something of the problem the greatest travesty of justice they received him not they said no thank you and went on with their lives oh today sinner friend glorify God by receiving his son and benefits is the response of angels believers what should our response be these angels that sang that night or spoke that night shouted that night they were amazed that God would give up his own son they knew how much the father loved his son they saw it between them they knew that

Jesus was the favorite of heaven and this night they see God the father giving up his own son and they cry glory to God glory to God folks he wasn't giving up his son for angels Hebrews 2 tells us he did not do that for angels you remember when angels fell he sent no savior to them but they were reserved in chains of darkness until the coming of eternal hell but he did send his own son for favored fallen mankind and if the angels who had no personal stake in that just see what God is doing for sinful men and they rejoice and they glorify God what should our response be folks it was to us a child was given to us a son is born he's coming to bear our sin and if angels cry glory what should we cry let us enter into this praise of heaven that broke out on earth the day that Jesus was

born and learn to find great joy if only God is glorified and open up our mouths and praise and thanksgiving and shout for joy that indeed his coming means God in the highest is glorified may may may