

## After the Glory

We are living in the waning moments of another year. The “holiday season” is quickly drawing to a close. The rush of preparation has culminated in a few hours of “quality time” spent with friends and family. The gifts have been opened, the food has been devoured; and for some, the house has been returned to order.

- The hectic pace of the holiday season can leave us longing for a break. What some have spent months readying for is over almost before it began. Many times we find ourselves at this juncture with a tinge of melancholy. The tinsel and glitter, the lights and decorations, the olfactory delights of cinnamon and spice, are recent memories; and are replaced with the mundane sameness of every day life. The glory of Christmas is past, and the New Year looms ahead. AFTER THE GLORY, where do we go from here?
- The phenomenon of Christmas is not a new development. Matthew and Luke record the beautiful story of the first Christmas. The wonderful scenes of shepherds, angels, mangers, and wise men are familiar to us all. How Mary must have felt as the angel said; (Luke 1:35b), "...The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. " What Glory! The almighty God of the universe met humanity in a way He had never done before! (Galatians 4:4b-5), "... God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law," In the words of the familiar hymn, “O the love that drew salvation’s plan, O the grace that brought it down to man”!!!
- Imagine the awe, the fear, and the glory the shepherds must have experienced as they were joined in the fields with a heavenly host of angels! (Luke 2:9-11), "And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Talk about a change of scenery! Few had seen the glory of the Lord, and yet He chooses to allow the lowly shepherds to share this experience.

- Wise men came from the east to see the newborn Saviour. What the very nation he came to save could not see, the magi discerned from afar. In great anticipation they inquired diligently as to where the King of the Jews would be born. (Matthew 2:9b-10), "... and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." What a glorious birth! What a glorious star! What a glorious time! No wonder they rejoiced. As the words of the familiar carol declare "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight!"
- The scenes I have just reiterated are so familiar to us. The lilting phrases of the King James Bible account we have heard until they are as much a part of the tradition as anything we associate with the Christmas Season. But what happened AFTER THE GLORY? When the angels are silent, the star has long since faded, the stable, the manger, and the swaddling clothes are all but distant memories. Mary and Joseph begin the tedious task of raising a family, and making a living. The shepherds return to their flocks, and the quiet existence of solitude that has been their lot for untold generations. The wise men return to their home; although they must return a different way than that by which they came.
- Yet things are not the same. Mary will never forget the things that she has experienced. There will be days when the angelic encounters will seem a surreal memory that was nothing more than a dream. There will always be the whispers of those who didn't buy her story. And there is the challenge and the awesome responsibility of raising the Son of God. Hardly what we would consider everyday life!
- The shepherds on the hillside would never be the same. I'm sure there were many nights around a fire that the stories of that eventful night were rehearsed. Maybe there was a wishful heavenward gazing of succeeding generations to whom the legend had been passed down. The encounter with God's glory left them (Luke 2:20b), "... glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen..."
- Perhaps of all the players in this wonderful drama, the wise men best understood the magnanimity of all they had seen. It was they who had come seeking the child. They had studiously poured over the ancient

writings, and diligently inquired until they realized that for which they had traveled so far. Yet when they were ready to depart, they were (Matthew 2:12b), "...warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod,[so] they departed into their own country another way." When God's glory is encountered; lives are never the same!

- But it is the account of Mary and Joseph that best displays this thought. One can hardly imagine what went through their minds during this tumultuous time. Angels appearing, shepherds coming to worship, magi bringing gifts, and a special star in the sky! It almost more than mere mortals can comprehend! The glory of the advent scarcely has time to become a memory when there is a drastic turn of events. Our text told of the angels warning to flee into Egypt.
- Egypt! The land of bondage. The land that represented all that was pagan and sinful. Why would they be called upon to go there? Could not God protect this tiny infant and his earthly family? Where were the angels now? Where was the glory they had just experienced? Welcome to Life, AFTER THE GLORY!
- This day is much like that first Christmas so long ago. Our lives are much like those whose stories we have just relived. The glory of a Christmas just a few hours ago is already fading in our memory. And like so many of life's greatest moments, there is a sense of let down when all is said and done. Perhaps it comes from reaching the peak we have been striving to attain. The "let down" may come from not reaching the goal we desired. And sometimes it comes because there is a loss of direction, a questioning of "where do I go from here"? It is the Egypt experience. It is what we experience AFTER THE GLORY!
- We are not told what happened during Jesus' sojourn into Egypt. We are not privy to the "why's" of the situation. Matthew records that it happened to fulfill the words of the prophet. There are many speculations we could propagate. Perhaps it was to allow Mary and Joseph to gain perspective. Maybe it got Jesus out of the public eye. Possibly it was to quell the rumors circulating around the virgin birth. But regardless what the reasons were, we can be sure it was all in the plan of God.

**AFTER THE GLORY**, there is always a time of regrouping and reflection. Maybe that's why the New Year comes shortly after Christmas. It is a time of new beginnings. It is a time for fresh starts. It is a time to reflect on where one has been and where one is going. It is a time to "regroup", to reevaluate one's priorities and goals.

**AFTER THE GLORY** of the flood, we find Noah offering sacrifice in a whole new world. **AFTER THE GLORY** of Mt. Carmel, we find God speaking to a burned out Elijah in a still small voice. **AFTER THE GLORY** Jonah finds himself perched under the shelter of a gourd, waiting for the destruction of Ninevah. **AFTER THE GLORY** of Pentecost we see Peter on his way to another prayer meeting. **AFTER THE GLORY** of "great wonders and miracles among the people", Stephen is stoned. **AFTER THE GLORY** of the Damascus Road experience, we find Paul in Arabia being tutored by the Holy Ghost.

- As you reflect this morning on the passing Holiday Season and on the events of the year, let me direct your attention to far weightier matters. Many have experienced great heights in God. You've "been on the mountain with Jesus". You have seen things in the Spirit, and in the Word that have greatly impacted your life. You have received definite direction from God for your life. God has used you in mighty and wonderful ways. But the glory of those times, and of your dreams has become a distant memory. You feel you have been sent to Egypt. You feel you are in a land of bondage. You do not see the plans God gave you ever coming to fruition. You are living **AFTER THE GLORY**. What is next, you do not know. That is what I have come to tell you today.
- We do not always live on the "mountain top". There are times we go through valleys. There are valleys of depression, of indecision, of lost focus, of deep questioning. But God's plan is never to leave us in the valley. He uses them to lead us into greater glory, into greater service, into stronger anointing, into larger influence, into deeper relationship with Him. Past glories are not all you will ever see. God has greater plans for your life! Just as we are changed "from glory to glory", so God desires to lead us from glory to glory. Persevere through the Egypt experience. Just wait 'till you see what is on the other side!

- Jesus did not stay in Egypt. He returned to live in Nazareth. Nazareth was not the most desirable place to live; yet it was here that we read, (Luke 2:52), "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." You see, the "nowhere land" between mountain peaks is the preparation ground for your next great encounter with God's Glory.
- Moses met God at the burning bush on the side of a mountain. It was many years, and many trials later that he again met God on a mountain to receive the Law. Then after years of wandering in the wilderness, he went to the mountain to view the Promised Land. Were the years in between wasted time? Absolutely not! The valleys were where ministry took place. You do not minister from the mountain. It is there you receive direction; but it is AFTER THE GLORY that you impact the lives of others.

### **THE WORK OF CHRISTMAS**

*When the song of the angels is stilled,  
 When the star in the sky is gone,  
 When the kings and princes are home,  
 When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
 The work of Christmas begins:  
     To find the lost,  
     To heal the broken,  
     To feed the hungry,  
     To release the prisoner,  
     To rebuild the nations,  
 To bring peace among brothers,  
 To make music in the heart.  
 -Howard Thurman*