

BEHOLD HIS GLORY

Text: John 1:11-14

by R. Paul Caudill

My beloved friends. As we gather for the one hundred second session of the Southern Baptist Convention, we are keenly aware of the historic character of the occasion. This year some 75,000 churches, representing seven major Baptist bodies on this continent, are engaged in the first year of Baptist Jubilee Advance. What is said and done at this session, therefore, will have an impact upon the efforts of Baptists throughout our land in these eventful years of advance.

But this occasion is significant for another reason, for we join happily, tonight, in the observance of the one hundredth anniversary of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. And while the leadership and the messengers of our great Convention are gathered about us at this hour, we are also surrounded by another great crowd of witnesses, namely, the faculty, trustees, student body, and 1959 graduation class of our Southern Seminary.

It is fitting, therefore, that we pause tonight and think on the glory of our Lord, to the end that we may better appraise the world we face, and the responsibilities that rest upon us as ambassadors of Christ in this our day.

The days in which we live are wonderful days. Man stands at the zenith of scientific discovery and applied technology. Never before has he so nearly approached "dominion over all the earth." Nuclear science has shrunk the world until it is now one neighborhood. Man has invaded space and flung his artificial satellites into orbit with the sun, the moon, and the stars.

But the days of scientific triumphs in which we live are also days of peril and disaster.

The problem of mere existence confronts us. The world population is growing at the rate of 8,000 every hour or 70 million a year! By 2,000 A.D., there may be on the earth six or seven billion people.

Still we are told, two-thirds of the peoples of the world are underprivileged. Millions are hungry, even starving, and never know the meaning of a square meal. Literally millions are doomed to premature death by undernourishment. During the past twelve years, 200,000,000 babies died in infancy, largely due to improper medical care. Forty-four percent of the world's population over 15 years of age is illiterate.

We now have in our hands the means to commit race suicide. Threatened from two directions--the H Bomb, and the perils incident to overpopulation--we must seek, as ambassadors of Christ, to cope with world hunger, illiteracy, poor medical care, and the terrific political pressures such forces continue to exert. Communism, largely the result of hunger, and of the ceaseless yearning of the underprivileged masses for a better way of life, cannot be brushed away by negative outlooks and name-calling. We must seek rather to understand the background of cause and effect out of which this soulless monster that now afflicts one-third of the world's population has sprung. We must come to see the difference in the relative importance of a shot in the arm and a shot at the moon.

How can the church lead in these difficult days? What can you young men do, as you go out fresh from the halls of learning, to help resolve the issues of our day?

One thing is certain. Mere enrollment and nominal enlistment in our churches is not enough. The membership of American churches now stands at more than one hundred

and four millions for all faiths; and yet, in spite of this mounting membership, moral losses were at an all-time high in our land last year. There was a staggering increase in crime, and juvenile delinquency. Growing dishonesty and corruption appeared in public affairs. Racketeering in unions flourished. The problem of alcoholism was rampant. Mental illnesses soared to an alarming rate. Commercialized obscenity increased even in the face of new laws.

The answer is simple, as simple as it was in the days of our Lord. We all need to experience, afresh, divine encounter with the Incarnate Christ, and to behold His glory. We need to turn aside and look upon Him--our only source of hope. Only as we behold Him, and experience anew the transforming power of His redeeming love, can we face the conflicts of our day victoriously.

Let us hear again John's words as he speaks of His Incarnation, of His reception among men, and of His glory: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth."
(John 1:11-14).

His Incarnation

The Incarnation of our Lord and Saviour is the most divine, the most blessed event of all our human history.

When the virgin Mary gently held to her breast the child of Prophecy, in the crowded corner of a humble stable, she ushered into the realm of human experience

finite man's first complete and perfect expression of the Infinite.

The words "he came" mark a definite event in the plane of history. His Advent was the fulfillment of all the Messianic revelations of the Word to Israel. Centuries before His birth, the prophet Isaiah said, "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (7:14) Jesus himself declared that his life and death and resurrection from the dead were the fulfillment of all the things that had been written of Him in the law of Moses, in the prophets, and in the Psalms.

Previously, the Word was in the world invisibly. But now the Word appears Incarnate. Now He came to His own home . . . to His own people . . . to the land of Israel. For, the land and the people of Israel were his home, his people, "in a sense which no other land and people were, the home and the family of God, of Jehovah." That is why the prophet Zachariah called the little land of our Saviour's birth "the holy land" (Zach. 2:12), and why Hosea referred to it as "the Lord's land" (Hos. 9:3).

Just as the tabernacle was the dwelling place of the Lord, and thereby the meeting place of God and Israel, even so the Word of God, invisibly present in the world, became visibly present to man in the Person of Jesus.

In becoming flesh, our Lord became not a new being, but rather entered into a new mode of existence, retaining all the essential properties of the Word, and laying not aside the divine nature. In becoming flesh, He identified himself with the race of man, "becoming in the likeness of men," and "being found in fashion as a man."

In his Incarnation, both the first creation and the second creation centered in Him. And while His personality was divine, John, at the same time, affirmed the reality of His humanity. The Word became flesh . . . and dwelt among us.

The Lord's humanity was real, therefore as against the various heretical forms of doctrine which held that His Being possessed only an assumed appearance. The Word became flesh . . . not clothed in flesh!

In the Incarnation, our Lord's human and divine natures enjoyed a perfect coexistence "each fulfilling its own part according to its proper laws" as against the teachings of those who questioned the reality of His presence. Both the human and the divine natures were perfectly united in His Person, as against the claims of those who would assign Him a dual nature and interpret His acts on earth accordingly.

The humanity of our Lord was universal in that it included all that essentially belongs to the "essence of man without reference to sex or race or time."

The personality of our Lord was unchanged by the Incarnation. In becoming flesh, He remained the same Person as before. He possessed the same divine nature, but was clothed with a humanity that was real and complete. He did not simply become "a man," but rather "man." That is, "His mode of existence on earth was truly human, and subject to all the conditions of human existence; but he never ceased to be God."

Indeed Jesus is always represented in the Scriptures as a Person, and not as a principle; as an Individual, and not as a form of energy.

Foreshadowed by the tabernacle, He came and "dwelt among us," that is, "in our midst," among whom were many eyewitnesses like the evangelist (Exodus 25:8; Lev. 26:11). He walked in our midst even as God's presence walked in a tent and in a tabernacle during the wanderings of Israel. (2 Sam. 7:6)

Being a Spirit, God manifested himself to man in many and various ways before the Incarnation. In theophanies He appeared to Abraham, and to Jacob, and to Moses.

Through His created works He manifested Himself to all mankind. "For the invisible things of him from the foundation of the world are manifest, being understood by the things that are made, even as eternal power and God-head." (Rom. 1:20)

But the works of Creation were not enough to satisfy man's longings for a finite expression of the Infinite. Neither was the written Word. Nor was the symbol of the burning bush, nor the thunders and lightnings upon Sinai, nor the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night.

Only when "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:3-16), yea, in the historical person of our Lord, did man experience the crowning revelation of God's self-disclosures. Only in the Incarnation could we have the complete and perfect declaration of our God.

And this Incarnation has become therefore the central fact of Christianity. In the words of Edwin Markham:

"Here is the Truth in a little creed,
Enough for all the roads we go:
In love is all the law we need,
In Christ is all the God we know."

His Reception Among Men

The world into which Jesus was born, like the world of our day, was a world of cynicism and unbelief. Even though the Jews as a nation had been disciplined for the Advent of the Messiah, they refused to receive Him. Though Christ was "offered" to the people as the Coming One whom the Lord had promised, the leaders were unwilling to acknowledge Him as their king. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

But while the Jews as a nation rejected Christ, there were those who, as men, did receive Him. Passing by their own spiritual leaders, they received Him, and by their

personal acts of faith became the firstfruits of the new Israel. "And to those who did receive him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God."

This ability to receive Christ as Saviour and Lord is a God-given right. It does not stem from man, or from the organized church, or from sacrament, or from religious ceremony, or from works. It is an authority derived from God. Christ alone is the divinely appointed Mediator between man and God, and there is no other. Christ alone is Priest, and King, and Sovereign of the Universe. Yea, in Him all things cohere.

Created in the image of God, man is placed in position to become a child of God by faith. In this way both the human and the divine side of sonship find harmonious union. For while God alone can give man the right to become His child, man alone by his own initiative can appropriate the gift that faith makes possible.

And this right, this capacity, belongs to every man--by faith. There is no race nor clime in which it does not flourish as native to the soil. It belongs to the African no less than to the American; and to the Asian no less than to the European. It was this burning conviction that led the late M. T. Rankin to sit down past the midnight hour, during his student days, following a meeting in which he had faced the problem of the investment of his life, and write a letter to a dear friend, saying, "I have given my life tonight to preach the gospel in China."

A retired Bishop of the Chinese Episcopal Church, the Reverend Andrew Tsu, known to the American Army as "Bishop of the Burma Road," tells the story of meeting a Korean lad in Canton, China, who, recognizing his uniform as that of a Christian chaplain, confided in him that he, too, was a Christian. In the course of the conversation, the lad, a Baptist, showed the Bishop his New Testament in which he had written his name in

beautiful Chinese characters. Just to the side of his name, the Bishop noticed, neatly inscribed, were the words "God's little lamb." The lad (the bishop learned) upon receiving Christ as his Saviour and Lord, had become so deeply moved by his experience that ever afterwards wherever he wrote his name, he also inscribed by it his testimony that he was now a child of God--"God's little lamb."

And such he was--and such is everyone who, by faith, appropriates the God-given right of sonship.

This new life, says Jesus, is made possible by the new birth. The "begetting" depends not upon the traditional fleshly descent from Abraham, nor upon the carnal desire of the flesh, nor upon other human effort. It stems solely from God. "Except a man be born from above he cannot see . . . the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

The children of God are "begotten" of God through the communication of the very life of God. This is more than "mere" sonship established by the familiar pattern of adoption in Roman law. It is sonship based on a "community of nature."

Only the new birth can resolve the tragic and fearful issues of our day. If we would change the face of the world, we must first change the hearts of men. Men must be given new natures--new and righteous concepts of truth and duty. And these can come only from God. Only divine encounter can bring the youth of this "beat" generation new life, and cause the black spots of the soul to out forever!

This glorious transformation is possible only to men of faith--"even to them that believe on his name." It is not a process that can be reduced to mathematical formulae. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," said Jesus, "and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8)

And faith, beloved, is more than mere acceptance of religious dogma, however valid that dogma may be. To quote Marvin Vincent, "To believe on the Lord Jesus Christ is not merely to believe facts of his historic life or His saving energy as facts, but to accept Him as Saviour, Teacher, Sympathizer, Judge; to rest the soul upon Him for present and future salvation, and to accept and adopt His precepts and example as binding upon the life."

"By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain"

"By faith Noah . . . prepared an Ark for the saving of his house."

"By faith Abraham, when he was calledwent out, not knowing whither he went."

Behold His Glory

The earliest references to the glory of God in the Old Testament have to do with physical manifestations of the Divine Presence. There the form of God's presence found expression in the cloudy pillar. There the glory consisted of the fire and the thick darkness which enveloped the mountain out of which the Lord spoke to His people.

Even so, from time to time, in the history of Israel, the Lord manifested His divine presence by things visible, always imparting to the people of His name something of His majesty and beauty and power, and ever ascribing to Him honor and praise. He manifested it throughout the wanderings in the wilderness (Ex. 16:10), and in the Temple of Solomon (I Kings 8:11), and to the prophets (Isa. 6:3).

But now, John declares, in Christ's own Person appeared the true Shekinah Glory of God Himself, the God who was and is--even the Logos who existed before with God.

And this glory was not a reflected glory as of a human saint or prophet, but the glory of God's only born Son full of grace and truth. "And the Word was made flesh," said John, and "dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."

This glory was no fleeting, illusory experience. It literally "dwelt in a tabernacle among us"--Christ's body being the tabernacle in which his divine nature dwelt as in a temple. And the evangelist was an eyewitness to that glory, as was also Paul and others who left their witness concerning His impact upon their lives.

This glory was full of grace--full of manifest expressions of God's redemptive love. He was the author of a perfect redemption.

In the words of the apostle Paul, "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 4:6).

Standing in the synagogue of His own beloved Nazareth, at the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus read from the book of the prophet Isaiah, as He interpreted His ministry of grace. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," said he, "because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18,19)

Wherever He moved among men they felt His gracious presence.

"For He healed their sick at even, and He cured the leper's sore,
And sinful men and women sinned no more.
And the world grew mirthful-hearted, and forgot its misery
When the glory of the Lord was passing by."

(W. J. Dawson)

And in the intervening years, wherever men have experienced the glory of His grace, they have never been the same again, for they have been transformed.

Samuel Niwa, a young Japanese Kamikazi pilot, frustrated, bewildered, and bitter, at the sudden close of the war only days before he was to go on his supreme mission, stood on a street corner in Osaka and listened for thirty minutes to an American missionary tell the story of Christ and His redeeming love. Said he, "As I stood and listened to his words of grace and truth, my heart began to melt, and I found myself becoming then and there a follower of the Christ."

The early Christians who were graced by His glory chose to suffer, even to die, rather than renounce their Lord. Yea, "they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goat-skins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented . . . they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth," and yet they forsook not their Lord.

"Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see."

But not only was His glory full of grace. It was also full of truth. Christ was the author of a perfect revelation. The truth which He manifested was not merely the truth of spoken word. He himself was the perfect embodiment of truth. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17) who declared, "I am . . . the truth." (John 15:6)

"I am the light of the world," he said, "and he that followeth after me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

In His grace we experience the perfect revelation of God's love.

In His truth we realize the perfect revelation of God's light.

When human hearts have been stirred by the full light of the truth of His glory, they have been able to meet any crisis. New Zealand missionary David Edwards, who fled Red China following World War II, tells the story of a young Chinese soldier who was caught up with a host of other youth for a course of indoctrination in Communism. Week after week he met with the indoctrination classes, and day after day, he would testify to his faith in Christ.

One day the Commandant said to him, "Tomorrow you will have your chance to renounce Christianity and declare your loyalty to our new way of life."

Tomorrow came, and the youth was asked if he were ready to renounce his claims to Christ.

Instead, he stood up and boldly declared, "Before Communism came to China, I was a believer in Jesus Christ. I am a believer still. And if you will give me an opportunity, I will tell you why."

He was not allowed to speak further, but to the amazement of all was not put to death but allowed to continue his classes.

On Commencement Day, when the certificates of indoctrination were handed the students, the young Chinese Christian was called forward and likewise presented a certificate. But his was different, for down the center of the certificate, written in bold, red, Chinese letters were the words, "A convinced Christian." And the Commandant said to him as he handed him the certificate, "I would that I had your faith."

A little Baptist church in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, with only eighty members caught a stirring vision of His glory, and began to establish other preaching stations where they might share His glory. Now the little band of 80 believers maintain and care for nine other preaching stations--some of them seventy miles away from the mother church. And how are they maintained? They are maintained by Christian laymen who go on Sundays and preach, giving of their time faithfully and devotedly--because they have seen His glory full of grace and truth.

His glory may be seen again and again. I beheld it in the operating room of a tiny mission hospital in Shaki, Nigeria. I beheld it on an old chieftain's face in a remote, obscure village in Ghana. I saw it in the countenance of a young University student in Pusan, and in the face of a brilliant woman who spoke seven languages in Jakarta. I beheld it in the plaintive voice of a blind girl in Macao, and in the soft, but determined, words of a teenager's confession in Stalingrad. I saw it clearly on the face of a mission doctor in Southern Rhodesia. I beheld it in Tokyo and Taiwan.

In Czechoslovakia, not far from the city of Prague, the Russian armies picked up a little Baptist preacher, along with many other prisoners, for forced labor in Siberia. For days they walked, driven like cattle, until they reached the infamous Auschwitz concentration camp where, footsore and weary, they rested briefly. Then they were herded into freight cars and sealed in for the long journey to Siberia. His experience there reveals how the glory of the Lord can break in upon the soul of despair and bring hope and peace when all but life is gone.

"After more months working in Siberia's coal mines /1945-46/," said he, "I became ill. The food and barracks conditions was very defective. Beside a small piece black

bread we received for a longer time only a soup, warm water, in which were some turnip leaves. We would be glad to find many such leaves, but there were none. I became more ill and was transported to a special barrack for ill prisoners. We were many in one room. I saw to die people on my left and right side. I tried to comfort some of them in spite I for myself became more and more ill. My body was so ill I could not stay on my feet. Slowly I felt that my end is coming nearer to me also. I became now very sad. Through the thoughts of my wife and my five children, I didn't know where they were and are they still alive, in my soul I get very dark and sad. I ought to die, but in such condition, without peace in my soul? I prayed much, but without especially result. I wept. It was too difficult for me to forget my church, all the others but especially my dear family. Then I prayed once more and with the last strength of my thoughts. I gave my wife and my five children in God's hand and was ready to die. In this very earnest and difficult moment, when I was ready to die and to loose from all and put all in God's hand, in this very moment through my ill body went like an electric shock and I received a wonderful peace and a total assurance that I shall not die. I became not at once well. My weight remained for some months 70 pounds. But in spite of all that there remained in myself the assurance I have to live. I promised God if he would bring me again home to my family and church work, I shall serve Him with the whole strength of my life until the end."

And God made it possible for A. Lehotsky to be reunited with his beloved wife and children who too had shared the ills of the concentration camp elsewhere. He now lives with them in Novi Sad where he is Secretary of the Baptist Union, and President of the little Baptist Seminary. And he it was who served for twenty-eight years as pastor of the little church of eighty members that now maintains nine other preaching stations.

Is not this our compelling need today--to kneel at His feet and tarry in His presence, until the glorious light of His grace and truth break in upon us. Every problem in the realm of human relations could be resolved in Christ Jesus.

"In Christ I feel the heart of God
Throbbing from heaven through earth
Life stirs again within the clod
Renewed in beauteous birth;

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"Holding His hand, my steadied feet
May walk the air, the seas;
On life and death His smile falls sweet,
Lights up all mysteries;
Stranger nor exile can I be
In new worlds where He leadeth me."

If there is to be real advance in world evangelization; if man is to find satisfactory answers to the fundamental questions concerning his own creation, his place on earth, and the end to which his life should be directed, I believe it will come only in proportion as we behold His glory.

Only the purifying Light of His presence can dispell the dark shadows of materialism, humanism, and selfishness that hover about us like a strange and unseasonable winter. Only His redeeming love can change the discordant hearts of men in a society where twenty out of every hundred men on our church rolls never attend church; where twenty-five attend only now and then; where another twenty-five attend only selected services; where less than three out of every one hundred are New Testament soul winners; and where no more than twelve out of a hundred are Scriptural givers.

Only the convicting power of His Spirit can lead a great fellowship of believers to lift up their eyes and see that the field is the world--a world that is perishing for lack of brotherhood and in which seven out of every ten persons know not the Christ.

Only His grace can lead us to repent of our selfishness where in a land, beautiful with church spires, we have upwards of seventy-five church-related workers for every missionary we have outside the United States.

Let us, then, behold His glory--the glory of Him who is "the root and offspring of David, and the bright and morning star."

Behold His glory--the glory of Him whose name is called "Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

Behold His glory--the glory of Him who is "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens," and who "humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Behold His glory--the glory of Him who "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."

Behold His glory--the glory of Him who is "the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys."

Behold His glory: that is our one encompassing need. For when we have beheld it, it will be reflected in us!

"Christ's Spirit taketh breath again
Within the lives of holy men.

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"In whose sweet lives we still may see
The One who walked in Galilee,

"And preaching through the human page
Christ's living gospel to our age."

(W. C. Braithwaite)