

GLORY

Last week we learned a new word. Do you remember it? *Kenosis*. Theologians use this word to describe the self-emptying of Jesus at his incarnation. Jesus laid aside the rights and privileges of Deity and divested himself of his Divine glory – of God-form. Jesus even gave up the right to act like God on his own. He took human likeness, servant form. He humbled himself.

That's *kenosis*. The manger becomes an icon of humility for Christ-followers.

Charles Wesley captured that mystery of incarnation when he wrote: "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see; hail, the incarnate Deity!" And in next verse the line: "Mild he lays his glory by." Wesley got it just right. The humility of Jesus is breathtaking: the essence of Deity condensed to humanity.

But the essence was still there. Jesus laid aside his glory but he didn't stop being who he was. His goodness, love, compassion, rightness, and moral excellence – all of the Divine virtues showed up in everything he did. The Apostle John summed up his reflection on Jesus' life in the first chapter of his Gospel with these words: "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).

John packs enormous truth in this brief verse. He has already informed us that Jesus is the Word, the eternal expression of God. He is the one who was with God in the beginning, who is himself in very nature God, the one who created everything that is – this one became flesh – that's *kenosis*. Just as God made himself known to Israel in the wilderness Tabernacle, Jesus tabernacled among us. And just as Israel experienced God's glory in the pillar of fire and the cloud, John says, "We saw Jesus' glory – not the radiance of Deity, but the essence. We experienced one who was uniquely God's Son, full of grace and truth."

Had we, like John, been a witness to the life of Jesus, we would have seen a man who looked for all the world like any other man; but a man who acted like no other man. The glory John and the other disciples witnessed was the divine character distilled in Jesus humanity. Jesus radiated God in every aspect of his being: in his relationships, in the power of his acts and of his words, in his love for those closest to him and those lined up against him. Jesus even prayed for those driving the nails that fixed him to the cross, offering them forgiveness.

Only once in Jesus' lifetime did God draw back the curtain of humanity for people to see Jesus' glory. It took place on a high hilltop. Jesus was there with Peter, James and John – only three witnesses. Those three looked on as Jesus was transfigured into his heavenly glory. It was, they said, like staring into the sun. And then the moment passed. Jesus resumed the veil of his humanity, climbed down off the hilltop and returned to his ministry.

Jesus' glory, John said, was like that of God's only child – his Heir, full of grace and truth: kindness and authenticity; generosity and integrity; unprovoked love and unvarnished truth. Jesus spoke straight about God and about us.

Jesus never talked about his longings for his pre-incarnate glory until the very end of his life, on the night before his crucifixion. John records his words in chapter 17 of his Gospel. Jesus was praying. Listen to what he said: "...Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began"(John 17:1-5).

Jesus came veiled in flesh because mortals like us aren't wired to see Jesus in his eternal glory. When Isaiah described seeing Jesus in Isaiah 6, when John recorded his vision of Jesus in Revelation 1, both men told the same story – they came unglued. Isaiah thought he was a dead man. John was paralyzed with dread. A seraph – a great spirit-being – had to minister to Isaiah. Jesus himself touched John and encouraged him.

We can't handle Jesus full strength. A baby in a manger is approachable. We can enter with the shepherds and worship. Jesus in robe and sandals is comprehensible. We can put ourselves in his congregation on a Judean hillside and listen to him preach. But Jesus in the fulness of his glory? We can't handle that.

But we will.

Later in his prayer, Jesus added this request: "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory..." (John 17:24). I wonder what was in Jesus' heart when he said that. He had already told his disciples of his desire that they be where he is, in a place he is preparing for them – and us.

In another place, Jesus spoke of those who believe in him even though they hadn't ever seen him in the flesh. That would be us. Jesus says we are more blessed than his disciples. Why? Because of the high value Jesus places on faith – that capacity to be sure of what we hope for and be certain of what we don't see (Heb. 11:1). We believe their witness about Jesus preserved in the holy Scriptures.

Jesus' followers acknowledge him to be more than a religious genius, more than an inspired prophet. We see the baby in the manger and acknowledge God made flesh – incarnation, *kenosis*. We see Jesus in the temple and on the cross and proclaim the mystery of God walking among us, of God himself paying the debt of guilt we owe him.

We can't imagine Jesus in his Divine radiance. We can't imagine staring into a face more brilliant than the sun. Part of our eternal reward as Christ-followers will be having our bodies glorified, our sight cleared and our faith vindicated. We will stare into unearthly radiance and be transformed. In glorious recognition we'll exclaim: "I knew it – I just knew it!"

By the way, there is another hard edge to that truth. The Bible teaches us that *everyone* will see Jesus as he is. On that great and terrible day, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. Those who have embraced the good news of Jesus during their lifetime – who have followed him and served him – will respond with joy and worship. Those who have not, who all their lives have kept Jesus at arm's length, will be forced to bow as the terrible recognition dawns that they stand helpless, exposed as guilty rebels before their Judge, excluded forever from the presence of Jesus, the Son of God.

Jesus wants to be known as he truly is. That's why he came. He wants us to see his glory and share that glory forever. He came to bring people back to God. That's why they call him Jesus: he saves his people from their sins.

Come and worship, you who know Jesus, who anticipate his return in glory.

Come and worship, you who have never yielded your heart to his gracious salvation.

Worship Christ, the newborn King!