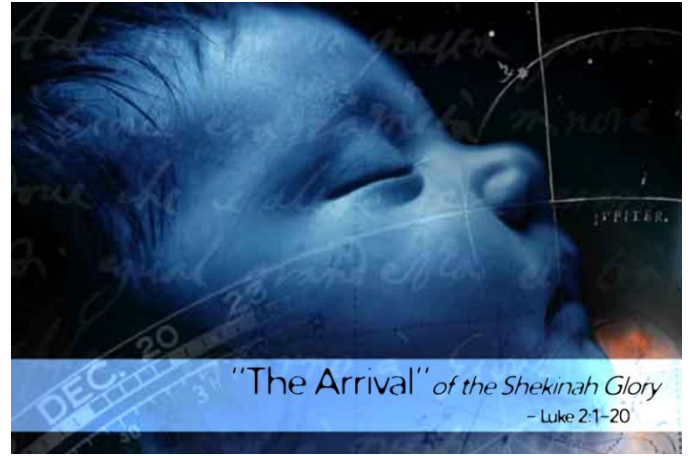


"THE ARRIVAL" of the *Shekinah* Glory - Luke 2:1-20

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on August 16th, 2015



LUKE 2:1 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire.2 (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.)3 All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.4 And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.5 He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant.6 And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born.7 She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.8 That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep.9 Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified,10 but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.11 The Savior — yes, the Messiah, the Lord — has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!12 And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."13 Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others — the armies of heaven — praising God and saying,14 "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."15 When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."16 They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger.17 After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child.18 All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished,19 but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.20 The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them.

If you are a student of scripture, you no doubt know that the word *shekinah* does not appear in the Bible, but you also would know that the concept clearly does. And the **root** of the word *shekinah* **is** however found in scripture. It is found in the Hebrew biblical word "shakan" and appears in scripture where God is said to "settle in" or "dwell with." "...construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may **dwell** (**shakan**) among them." (Ex 25:8) The Jewish rabbis went on to coin this extra-biblical expression "shekinah", which then means "where God is dwelling, settling or where His Divine Presence is." Thus "shekinah glory" speaks of a divine visitation of the presence or dwelling of JEHOVAH God on this earth.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum defines **Shechinah Glory** as...."the visible manifestation of the presence of God. It is the majestic presence or manifestation of God in which He descended to dwell among men. Whenever the invisible God becomes visible, and whenever the omnipresence of God is localized, this is the Shechinah Glory."

This glory was seen when God's presence filled the Temple. It was again when in the wilderness God was a light during the night and then a cloud of His glory by day to shade Israel in the hot sun of the desert. His presence was manifested in the tabernacle also... a bright light that filled the place, and on the Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus shined brighter than the sun when He spoke with Moses and Elijah.

This "shekinah glory" of God was both mysterious yet tangible. While no man could see God face to face and live, mankind has throughout history experienced that Shekinah and have been radical transformed. Moses was one of the first to "shoot those rapids" and come out the other side. Exodus 33 records a man passionate and driven to not only know God and please God, but He wanted to *experience* God. Moses was fully "in the game" and holding nothing back as he tells God in verse 18, "*Lord...show me your glorious presence.*"

19-23 *The LORD replied, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will call out my name, Yahweh, before you. For I will show mercy to anyone I choose, and I will show compassion to anyone I choose. But you may not look directly at my face, for no one may see me and live." The LORD continued, "Look, stand near me on this rock. As my glorious presence passes by, I will hide you in the crevice of the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and let you see me from behind. But my face will not be seen."*

Most of us know about what happened next. Even though Moses didn't die, he didn't exactly make it out unscathed either. The account tells us that his close proximity to God's presence and glory lit him up like a Christmas tree and his face "radiated" to such a degree that the people were afraid to go near Him.

Ex 34:5 -7a "*Then the LORD came down in a cloud and stood there with him; and he called out his own name, Yahweh. The LORD passed in front of Moses, calling out, "Yahweh! The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin...."*

And we then saw what is truly the manifest of someone who has so experienced God and His glory! There was utter humility, submission, and surrender. There was a total acquiescence to God, His ways, and His priorities. There was no longer any fight in Moses. Verse 8 says "*Moses immediately threw himself to the ground and worshiped.*" And then he prayed a prayer I so very much understand and have prayed myself...

Verse 9-10 "*O Lord, if it is true that I have found favor with you, then please travel with us. Yes, this is a stubborn and rebellious people, but please forgive our iniquity and our sins. Claim us as your own special possession.*" And God replied with the answer I hope to hear from Him also... *The LORD replied, "Listen, I am making a covenant with you in the presence of all your people. I will perform miracles that have never been performed anywhere in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people around you will see the power of the LORD — the awesome power I will display for you."*

Why Moses? Why some nobody shepherds in the middle of nowhere in an obscure corner of the world? As the shekinah glory of God poured out over Judea that night it found root in the humble...the searching...those that were ready to answer and would drop their lives to go to where He called. It was some shepherds in a field. It was Moses, and Abraham. Elijah and Noah. Peter and John. Matthew and James. These were the likes of those who saw it...experienced it...was transformed by it...the shekinah glory of God.

Today's church so often fails to ever know such things. Oh...we have *heard* of Him. We even "believe of Him." We know that Jesus "came to man" that night in Bethlehem, and we have sought for Him to "keep coming" ever since. And indeed he is faithful. He is faithful to meet us where we are because He loves us and hungers to commune with us.

But then there are those few crazy ones. Those that long so much to be near him, and seek so much to be a part of what He is doing. And that is a heart that must radiate into the heavens like the bat signal. For it is to these to whom God calls. There will be many who will spiritually dine on the fish that is so served, but then there are the few who answers him when He calls "*come and follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*" Millions of mankind have come to know of Jesus and His birth. But only a few guys went to where it was happening and participated in the manifest of God in flesh. Only a few who have sought out the "shekinah glory of God." Only a few were willing as Peter and Andrew, who upon such an invitation "*straightway left their nets, and followed him.*" (Mt 4:20). The rest that followed was, as they say, the "stuff of legend." What they saw, and what they experienced was and has been unparalleled in history.

Acts 4:13 records this: "*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled; and they took knowledge of them, **that they had been with Jesus.***"

These shepherds were essentially nothing in the grand scheme of things. They had no clout, no education, and no social standing. They just had a passionate desire to "go and see these things" for themselves. So they left their flocks and hoofed it over to where everything was going down. These, more often than not, were "*...the foolish things of the world (that would go on to) put to shame the wise, ... the weak things of the world (that would) put to shame the things which are mighty.*" (1 Cor 1:27)

Once in awhile...there is that rare individual for which church, faith, and even salvation is not enough. That is not in any way meant to minimize or degrade the coming of Christ to a lost people and the gospel redemption that followed...the free gift of new life and forgiveness of sin! It is just to say that for some, there was and *is* the subsequent incredible drive to be where Jesus is and where He is "dwelling" in a Shekinah glory. Like the 10th leper in Luke 17 who followed after Jesus when the 9 took their healing and went home. Paul the apostle said he just had to do it...he just **had** to be there! 1 Corinthians 9:16 "*... preaching the Good News is not something I can boast about. I am compelled by God to do it. How terrible for me if I didn't preach the Good News!*"

The Jewish Targum, the Aramaic translation of Hebrew Bible, paraphrases Jehovah's declaration in Exodus 25:8 as "*And they shall make before Me a sanctuary and I shall cause My **Shekinah** to dwell among them.*" I wonder if that is what we are building here? Is that our passionate desire? Our compelling need today? Are we so willing to drop our nets...leave our sheep...to follow Him? Are we, like Matthew in Matthew 9, willing to just walk away from our lives and livelihood to experience Christ in that way?

There have been a lot of folks through the years that thought so, only to begin to experience the costs involved and "went on back to their boats and their fishing" and they are no longer amongst us here. Immediately following the Shekinah experience on the Mount of Transfiguration, those few "inner circle men" came down to a crisis for which they had no answer and no remedy. That's the life of chasing after Jesus. That's the cost of being witness to God's Shekinah glory. Or will we go on back to our fishing, our hunting, our business's and our family pursuits?

To witness such glory is expensive. All but one of the apostles died as martyrs. Moses walked away from the comfort of Egypt's royalty! Shekinah does not "fit into" life as you know it. John recorded in testimony "*the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the Only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" Today God "dwells" amongst all of us, but few will ever truly "behold His glory." And what is the criteria? What separates those that do and those that don't? Certainly God *chose*. But with a timeless God one must ask the million dollar question: did His choice compel these, or did He chose those that were so compelled?

Spurgeon commenting on John 1:14 observed that while all believers have "God in their midst," few lived truly in His Shekinah glory. Spurgeon wrote that in and around the OT Tabernacle... wherein the Lord dwelt in the center of the camp... there was a manifestation of the presence of God. He commented "*This was the glory of that house: but how scanty was the revelation!*" The people in mass, according to Psalms 103:7, saw the *acts* of God...but Moses, to Him were "made known the *ways* of God."

Paul in his letter to the church in Colossi says "it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to **dwelt** in Christ (Col 1:19) and that in Christ "all the fullness of Deity **dwells** in bodily form" (Col 2:9) This is who...this is *what* came that day in an obscure corner of the world. This is what caused the shepherds to leave their flocks, the apostles to leave their nets, Moses to leave Egypt, Abraham to leave the comfort and safety of his home, Paul to leave his position and status to preach the gospel of Christ!

What makes you move Christian? What, if anything, makes you set aside everything else and would compel you to walk away to follow Him? We know He came to save us. But save us from what? Because whatever so moves you is truthfully your god today. No one "makes room" for Shekinah glory. It is experienced by those whose heart compels them: *Let's (go and) see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.*