

## TEXT – Exodus 34:5-7

Introduction: Picture in your mind the Nativity scene. Often times we see the baby Jesus illumined or brightened in some way. There may be a light that shines down from heaven. Maybe there is a halo around his head, unfortunately there is often times a halo around Mary's head too. But Jesus wasn't lit up in any way. The light isn't necessarily out of place as it reveals that underneath Jesus' human exterior was God's Son with a divine nature that shines many trillion times brighter than the sun or any star in our galaxy. On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus allowed his divine nature to shine through his real flesh and blood as true man, and it was so bright that Peter, James and John couldn't even look at it. However, this was not the case in Bethlehem on that first Christmas. The holy Son of God appeared as a mere human child. Jesus came down to earth in human form to be our Savior. What Moses saw on Mt. Sinai and what Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and later the Wise Men saw was the essentially the same. They saw the one true God. They saw God's glory – for Moses a partial glory since he only saw God's back, while those on that first Christmas saw a completely hidden, concealed glory in the Christ-child, the Word made flesh. Yet what made that Christmas glory so great was why the Savior had come and what he would do for our salvation. On this Christmas Day we remember that CHRISTMAS REVEALS GOD'S GLORY. It reveals God's glory 1) to forgive sin in the Christ-child and also 2) to punish sin in the Christ-child.

### I. To forgive sin in the Christ-child

- In our text from Exodus 34, Moses was up on Mt. Sinai after the Golden Calf incident. The first tablets of stone he had received from God were broken and shattered when he saw the idolatry of God's people worshiping a calf of gold just like the ones they had seen in Egypt.
- Moses went back up the mountain and pleaded for Israel's forgiveness. The Lord said that his people could go to the land he had promised but that he would not go with them. Moses told the Lord that if he did not go with them, then what would be the point in continuing their journey if the Lord himself did not go with them.
- The Lord listened to Moses and promised to go with his people. Then Moses asked to see God's presence, his glory that would now go with them firsthand. The Lord then hid Moses in the cleft of a rock and let his glory pass by. With his hand the Lord covered Moses' eyes as he passed by and then removed his hand so that Moses could only see the tail end of God's glory. No sinner can see God in his full glory and expect to live.
- The Lord then revealed his glory in a way it can be viewed or read and taken to heart by sinners like us. He revealed his glory by saying, "the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiveness wickedness, rebellion and sin."
- Nowhere is that love and forgiveness more evident for us this Christmas than in the baby, born in Bethlehem, God's Son in human flesh and blood. This is God's greatest glory. This calls for our greatest praise – to praise our God for sending a Savior. Saviors save. They come to the rescue of those in those most dire circumstances. Nothing could be more harrowing than eternal condemnation in hell.
- God loved sinners like us who unfortunately are digging our own graves in hell because of our many, many transgressions, our many sins committed against God and against our fellow man. David writes in Psalm 51, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge."
- It was our sinfulness that moved God in mercy to send his Son, born of Mary. Paul reminds us in Galatians, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." Jesus was born to redeem us, to buy us back to God by forgiving our many, many sins.
- Through the prophet Isaiah the Lord says, "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more." There is no greater testimony of God's love and his full intention to forgive sinners than the little baby lying in Bethlehem's manger. There is no greater assurance of that love fulfilled and carried out to its completion than to see Jesus hanging on the cross as the sacrifice for all sin.
- A man had his share of troubles in life – a ruined marriage, a disobedient son, a permanent layoff after 25 years of faithful service to the same company. He really wished he could lodge his complaints with God for how unfair life was, how uncaring God was to let this all happen and so on. He thought it would be nice to write down all these complaints, put them in a box, and give them to God.
- As he continued to mull this over in his mind he concluded that it would probably only be fair if God could likewise put all his complaints or issues that he had with this man in a box and then give it to him. The more he thought about it he wondered if it was such a great idea after all.

- As the Christmas season approached the man was reminded even more of his misery. He continued to ponder what it would be like if he could actually do this. He knew the things he would write down, but he also wondered what God would write.
- Would God write about that time when he was unfaithful to his wife or the time when he stole from his employer? Would God write on his note the hatred that filled this man's heart every time his former brother-in-law's name was even mentioned? As he was thinking about this he heard the Christmas account and pondered the depth of God's love for sinners in the Christ-child. It was then that he realized exactly what God would write down on his note and put in the box to give to the man. God's note would simply read, "I forgive you."

Transition: Christmas reveals God's glory to forgive sin. We rejoice in God's gift of a Savior who has come to take away our sins. To do this, however, God must punish sin in the Christ-child. But this too reveals God's glory.

## II. To punish sin in the Christ-child

- The Lord revealed his glory to Moses as a God of forgiveness – forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. That is great news for sinners. The only problem with forgiveness is God's holiness, his justice that demands a payment for sin.
- Moses had just witnessed the Israelites sacrificing to a golden calf and indulging themselves in a pagan type orgy. This was hardly in keeping with God's commands and rightly deserved God's anger and punishment. Moses told the people, "You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." Moses then pleaded with the Lord to forgive their sin.
- But how could he? How could God let such flagrant sinners off the hook? And how are we any different? Does it really matter to God what type of sin it is? Sin is sin. Certainly some sins have greater consequences in this life. But any sin has the same consequence for eternity – eternal death in hell.
- So how can God forgive sin? Does that mean he just lets it slide? The Lord told Moses, "Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." The Lord mentions the third and fourth generation because that's usually how many generations lived in the home. You had grandmas and grandpas even great grandmas and grandpas living in your house. They were all guilty of sin and should be punished.
- God will punish those who reject his forgiveness in Christ. He will punish them forever in hell. But how can God forgive sinners who put their faith in Jesus. God forgives them because he punished Jesus in their place. God sent Jesus into this world for one purpose only and that is to suffer and die for the sins of the whole world, even for those who reject his forgiveness.
- God didn't send Jesus to remain a nice, cuddly baby. Jesus would grow up into a young boy, a teenager and finally into an adult. God hung the law, every commandment he gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai, around Jesus' neck to be obeyed without the slightest disobedience. Nothing could be missed.
- Then God strapped on Jesus' shoulders the entire burden of our disobedience. The guilt for every sin of every person of all time came crashing down on Jesus as he bore the punishment for every one of those sins on the cross. Hell with all its fury tormented Jesus' body and soul.
- When Jesus' cried, "It is finished," sin was paid for. God's holiness and justice was completely satisfied. But isn't this Christmas? Shouldn't we be talking about how wonderful God's gift is to us of a Savior? Shouldn't we be rejoicing as we picture the baby Jesus in Mary's arms?
- And yet, it's not the full picture unless we see the cross lurking in the background. That's why Jesus was born to suffer and die for our sins, to satisfy God's righteous anger and punishment for sin. But that's what brings true joy to our hearts because we know that Jesus came to be our Savior, to make us what he is – holy and sinless.
- God's true glory, his amazing love for sinners, his grace and mercy to forgive sin begins in glorious splendor with the manger and the joy this precious gift from God gives to sinful hearts, and God's glory ends with the cross as the punishment for sin given to the one born in Bethlehem to save us. God's glory is then validated and confirmed beyond all doubt by Christ's own resurrection and his ascension to the right hand of God.

Conclusion: What's your picture of the Nativity scene? Maybe it's along the lines of your favorite Nativity set. Yet no manger scene that depicts our Savior from sin born into this world is quite complete unless it stands in the shadow of the cross. There is God's ultimate glory in the Christ-child who purchased our forgiveness as the punishment for our sins on the cross. Moses saw the physical manifestation of God's glory on Mt. Sinai. In Jesus we have seen not just a physical manifestation of God's glory in the Word made flesh but a spiritual manifestation of God's grace and love for us to forgive sin by punishing his Son in our place. That's the true glory of Christmas. Amen.