

O Almighty God, who through the holy Apostle Saint John has revealed to us the mystery of the Word made flesh: Keep us steadfast in the faith that the Son of God has come; that believing in Him we may have life through His name; to whom with You and the Holy Spirit be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 27)

[T]he Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about Him, and cried out, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.'") And from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made Him known.

In Christ Jesus, who is one with the Father and is God in our human flesh, dear fellow redeemed, worshippers of God born in Bethlehem:

When the glory of the Lord shone round about the Shepherds in the nighttime sky outside Bethlehem, it initially struck fear in their hearts. The angel began his announcement with those familiar words: "Fear not!" The frightful glory of God to the sinner was translated into a joyous enlightening when they heard: "unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord ... you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

The Apostle John, about 90 years later had this to say: "we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth". The glory of the Lord which the shepherds witnessed, John, along with Peter and James, also witnessed on the mountain of Transfiguration. On this day we remember the Apostle John, let us rejoice in this, that **We, too, Behold Jesus' Gracious Glory Shared with the Father.**

I

What makes God's glory bearable for us sinners? In Christ, the Son of God is wrapped in human flesh. God stands among us as our brother. Just as our Lord promised His people through Moses, who said: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among you, from your brothers--it is to Him you shall listen--just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brothers. And

I will put my words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him."

The Apostle John stood with Jesus in the many gatherings of various sizes hearing the Word in the flesh speak the gracious words of peace and salvation. It is a well-established tradition that John was first a disciple of Jesus' forerunner, John, the Baptizer. John may have heard the following from the Baptizer first hand referring to Jesus: "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because He was before me.'" Leaving the Baptizer to follow Jesus was not only a natural progression of following the forerunner but was exactly what the Baptizer himself wanted for John and all his other disciples. Although, there would be some hangers-on until the time he was executed by Herod.

The Baptizer was a Gospel preacher for sure, but he was also known as a strong Law proclaimer calling sinners to repentance. The same could be said of Moses, but as John observes in our text: "the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Through the very same books of Moses, Christ is found. When sinners got to know Jesus not only to be true man, but true God, His *persona* would carry a heavy Law component. Remember Peter, after the great catch of fish, when he came to realize that he was in the presence of God Himself, he inappropriately responded to Jesus: "Depart from me, for I am sinful man, O Lord."

Therefore, the words of gracious forgiveness were heard from Jesus, God come in the flesh, with a profound impact upon sinners like you and me. It is from this first-hand experience as an equally sinful man, John observed: from Jesus' "fullness we have all received, grace upon grace".

Is not this your experience too my fellow redeemed sinners? How can we repeatedly return to the throne of God in our prayers asking for forgiveness and trusting every time that indeed we are forgiven? It is because we have come to know and trust from Jesus' fullness we too receive grace upon grace.

II

The Christmas season is a time we Christians especially cherish God's gracious condescension to us on our level, right where we live, breathe and have our being. God's Son entered our world not separated from sinful mankind, but to live and work among us for the express purpose of saving us from ourselves and the world we have so pitifully corrupted.

St John was one of those sinners Jesus came to save. Remember Jesus needed to rebuke him and his brother, James, for coveting

positions of prominence in heaven with Jesus. Again, they were rebuked when they wanted to call down fire to destroy a Samaritan village which rejected Jesus. Additionally, John tried to stop someone who was casting out demons in Jesus' name but was not part of the close disciples of Jesus and again Jesus rebuked him. John was a part of the argument on the night Jesus was betrayed about who was the greatest before Jesus. John also chimed in when Jesus mentioned that one of the disciples would betray Him by asking: "Is it I, Lord." John was a sinner in need of a Savior and he, by the Spirit's gracious working, knew it well.

So, when John in our text recognized the gracious glory Jesus shared with the heavenly Father, this was no casual observation. It was a confession of faith, the same confession you are blessed to make this morning as well. You are no different than the Apostle John who said in his first letter: "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

This is what our Christmas joy and peace is all based upon. God sent His Son in the flesh to dwell among us to bring us His grace and truth, which frees us from sin, death and hell. Tradition has it that after Jesus gave John to Mary as her spiritually adopted son, who would care for her, John took her into his home. Tradition also says John moved to Ephesus in Asia Minor and cared for Jesus' mother there. If true, both continued to behold the glory of their Savior hidden in Word and Sacrament together receiving of Jesus' grace upon grace as repentant believing sinners, declared in Christ to be saints there in a distant land, just as you do today.

Again, tradition informs us that John lived into the 90s of that first Century, AD. But not without much tribulation. He was exiled to the Island of Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. So, while not executed for confessing the name of Jesus, he did endure many trials. Yet, here again in the midst of this life on earth in the revelation given to him by our Lord, John beheld the gracious glory Jesus shared with the Father. Jesus said to him at the beginning of His revelation: "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living One. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore."

Fear not my fellow beloved in Christ, this blessed glory of the Son of God, which John testified to almost 1900 years ago as an eyewitness is still yours to enjoy. John, the saint AND sinner at the same time for Jesus' sake, directs you, no less – no more a saint and sinner at the same time now, to the grace which abounds to you.

"From His fullness *you too* have all received, grace upon grace."

Think of your worst and most diabolical thought, word or deed, God who became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ took it upon His holy body and paid for those and all your sins. In turn He gives you His holiness to claim as your own, so that you will share in His glorious inheritance forevermore. Amen.