

The Glory of Christmas to Come Revelation 21 – 22:5

Today's sermon is brought to you by the number seven and the number twelve and the color gold. Those are the numbers and colors of glory, the glory of Christmas.

In the past weeks, as we made our advent preparations and said our advent prayers, we discovered what Christmas is all about. How would you put it in one sentence? What is Christmas all about for you? According to the Bible Christmas is all about the Glory of God coming down from heaven to earth. Christmas is God himself, the presence of God coming down from heaven and being among us and blessing us. But what is even more brilliant about Christmas is that holy awesome presence becomes accessible to us. That glorious presence, that glorious brilliance comes down as the life and the light that brings healing, and grace, and truth, and joy, and peace and love into the darkness of human misery and brokenness and deadendness. And that is our Christmas hope, the hope of Glory. That is the mystery and the miracle of Christmas.

In the beginning the people of God – the 12 tribes of Israel - were in the desert of sin. They had just been set free from slavery to the gods of the world, the gods that run you down and destroyed your soul. They were free and on their way to the promised land. But in the desert of freedom they were surrounded by enemies, there was no food or water, just the blistering sun and dead barren rocks. They got lost, they complained and fought, and it seemed they would die in the desert like dinosaurs. But God came down from heaven and the glory of God filled the tabernacle built with human hands. And through the seven offerings, and the seven feasts, and the seven days of ordination for priests, and the seven days of purification as described in the book of Leviticus (that we hope to study in 2011) the Glory of God became accessible to the twelve tribes of Israel – the people of God. And at the end of the book of Exodus we are told that the glory of God fed them, watered them, protected them, healed them, and guided them into the promised land. That is the power of Immanuel – God with us.

The presence and the Glory of God was contained in the Holy of Holies in that tent of meeting, the tabernacle. Years later this tabernacle, this portable temple, was rebuilt as a more permanent place of meeting between God and the twelve tribes of Israel in the holy city, Jerusalem. God's friend, King David, drew up the plans and Solomon his son built the temple. This temple also had a Holy of Holies in which God was present. It is described in 1 Kings 6. God's dwelling place, the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary of the temple, was a perfect cube. It was room 30 feet by 30 feet by 30 feet. 2700 cubic feet of glorious perfect golden space. This Holy of Holies that contained the Glory of God was made of pure gold and had in it the golden ark with its two wall to wall angels made of pure gold. And when Solomon finished the temple, like at the end of Exodus, the Glory of the Lord (1 Kings 8:11) came down and filled the temple, so that the priests and the people had to withdraw from the temple and the priests could no longer perform

the seven Levitical duties. And Solomon said: The Glory of the Lord has filled this magnificent golden temple I have built as a place for God to dwell forever.” And after he prayed his great advent prayer, the twelve tribes of Israel celebrated an amazing Christmas that attracted the attention of people around the world. Even the queen of Sheba in southern Africa, came to experience this Glory of Christmas. Do you see where I’m going with all this?

Last week we read from the Gospel of John. And we were told that the glory of God, God’s truth, God’s grace, God’s love, God’s all powerful creating and renewing Word became flesh in the person of Jesus and tabernacled among us. John tells us that Jesus is the Holy of Holies in person. That God is making something new, a new temple and a people, and a new creation. Jesus is the person in whom the brilliant presence of God, the Glory of God lives. Jesus is the meeting place, the tent of meeting between God and us. And out of his fullness, out of his perfection, out of his golden life we have all received grace upon grace, 70 times 7 times. And the most mysterious and most miraculous thing about Jesus is that he makes God known and accessible. And so the birth of Jesus is the fourth great Christmas event, the fourth great coming down of God event described in the bible. There are seven in the Bible as you have probably guessed. And as we will explore in 2011, through the seven signs, and the seven I am statements, and the seven fulfilled festivals, and the seven Stations of the Cross, and the seven spirits and the seven churches Jesus radiates the glory and the love of God to his 12 disciples and the seven churches that are built on them. They become the pearly gates, the entrance ways into the city of God, the new Jerusalem. As Solomon the son, Jesus the son takes this twelve disciples fills them with the gold of his glory and builds on their precious rock foundation a temple, the church, the bride which according to Peter – the rock – 2:5 a spiritual house, spiritual temple built with living stones. Through his disciples Jesus builds a holy priesthood who offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. And this temple built with human flesh human beings, with you and me radiates the wonderful light and glory of God that grows children of God from all nations and peoples. It attracts them from the seven continents of world.

And that brings us to this brilliant advent vision, this great hope of glory showcased in Revelation 21. This is Jesus revealed, this is Jesus fulfilled, this is where we are headed, this is where creation is headed. This is the promised land, the promised hope, the promised glory that Jesus makes real. It is the seventh Christmas describe in the Bible. The seventh and final coming of God to dwell among us. Immanuel forever.

And like all the Christmases past the glory of God comes down into the Holy of Holies and fills this perfect golden temple, this golden city, this golden new creation with his glory. What John sees in this vision is the Holy of Holies that in the old order of things was 30 feet by 30 feet by 30 feet, but now in the new order of things, in the new creation in Jesus the Holy of Holies, God’s dwelling place and our tent of meeting is 12 000 (12

times a 1000) miles by 12 times a 1000 miles by 12 times 1000 miles. 3, 225, 000 cubic miles of glorious perfect golden space in which God comes down to dwell. What John sees is the church Jesus built, the new holy of holies made with living stones prepared as bride for God to know and love and be with. The new Jerusalem, the Holy City is the Holy of Holies church in which God will live forever. And what blessings, what joy, what peace, what love flows from that city. John tells us that what makes this city of God so beautiful and perfect are the seven things that are not there and the seven things that are.

Seven times the word “no” is used. In this holy of Holies city, the new Jerusalem there will be 1. no sea (1), 2. no death (4), 3. No unbelievers (8). 4. no temple (22), 5. no closed gates (25), 6. no curse (22:3) 7. and no night (25 & 22:5) Can you image a place like that. Can you image a city without chaos and evil people downing, without tears. Can you image a place without a temple without a church because God is everywhere. Can you imagine a place without locked doors, without border guards and full body scanners where everyone is welcome. Can you image a place of blessings galore, a place without darkness and depression and loneliness, a place full of joy and peace and love? The final Christmas is coming. God is making all things new through Jesus.

By listing all these things that are not in the New Jerusalem you may get the impression it's an empty place, humongous empty cube, just empty speculation. No this Holy City is full. John lists seven things that make this city so glorious. 1. God himself (3) 2. The glory of God (11) 3. rocks, and trees, and water (22:1, 2) 4. Many peoples (3 is plural) 5. Culture (26) 6. Life (22:1) 7. The Face of God (4). Can you image a place full of the presence of God, full of his glory, his love and his peace? Can you imagine the earth and the waters and the vegetation restored, no oil spills, no global warming, no hurricane and earth quacks? Can you image a place where people of all nations and all race and cultures live in harmony a place without ethnic cleansing, no racism and no war? Can you imagine a place where the great works of art and the symphonies of the nations are on display, and you can see the best basketball players in the world in floor level seat without tickets to get in. Can you imagine two trees of life bearing twelve crops of fruit, and the leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations. No more cancer producing toxins, no more autism producing fumes. Can you imagine looking into the face of God?

The final Christmas is coming. God is making all this a reality through Jesus. God is coming down from heaven one final time and filling the earth with his glory and it will be Christmas forever.

And the advent question for us today is this: Do you want to part of that eternal Christmas celebration? Are you hoping and praying and preparing for this final wedding feast. This final coming down of the glory of God?

Right now Jesus and the Holy Spirit are building the church, right now Jesus is getting the bride ready for the wedding of the ages, a Christmas marriage between God and his people. Jesus and the spirit are making us the church ready to be that Holy of Holies, to be that dwelling place for God to live among us forever.

John tells us that only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will enter into God's eternal golden city. Only those who have the name of God written on their foreheads will see his face.

Advent is time to get ready. Jesus says Look, I am coming, God is coming down soon. God is making all things new. Blessed are those who keep these things in mind and live accordingly. Blessed are those who are getting ready and washing their robes, and purifying their lives and letting the Holy spirit write the name of God on their foreheads, and watching Jesus write their names in the book of life. 22: 14 they will have the rights of children of God, they will have access to the tree of life, and free entrance through any one of the 12 gates into God's eternal golden city.

In advent we hear the voice Jesus saying. Yes, I am coming soon.

And our response is Amen. Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly.