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Epiphany



The Season of Glory

Fullness of Time series



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The Fullness of Time

SERIES PREFACE

ESAU MCCAULLEY, SERIES EDITOR

Christians of all traditions are finding a renewed appreciation for the church year. This is evident in the increased number of churches that mark the seasons in their preaching and teaching. It's evident in the families and small groups looking for ways to recover ancient practices of the Christian faith. This is all very good. To assist in this renewal, we thought Christians might find it beneficial to have an accessible guide to the church year, one that's more than a devotional but less than an academic tome.

The Fullness of Time project aims to do just that. We have put together a series of short books on the seasons and key events of the church year, including Advent,

Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. These books are reflections on the moods, themes, rituals, prayers, and Scriptures that mark each season.

These are not, strictly speaking, devotionals. They are theological and spiritual reflections that seek to provide spiritual formation by helping the reader live fully into the practices of each season. We want readers to understand how the church is forming them in the likeness of Christ through the church calendar.

These books are written from the perspective of those who have lived through the seasons many times, and we'll use personal stories and experiences to explain different aspects of the season that are meaningful to us. In what follows, do not look for comments from historians pointing out minutiae. Instead, look for fellow believers and evangelists using the tool of the church year to preach the gospel and point Christians toward discipleship and spiritual formation. We pray that these books will be useful to individuals, families, and churches seeking a deeper walk with Jesus.



I

The Glory

The Feast of the Epiphany on January 6 once had an alternative title. Pope Leo I (“Leo the Great”) referred to it in his Homilies not as *Epiphaneia* but as *Theophania*—a manifestation of God (*theos*). The famed “Tome of Leo” became a conclusive statement of orthodox Christology when it was ratified at the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451, and it remains today a christological gold standard for anyone seeking a clear statement of Jesus Christ’s person as *theophany*.¹

We will approach the season of Epiphany (or theophany) by focusing on just one word: *glory*. The season following January 6 begins, continues, and comes to a climax with various *epiphanies* of the glory of Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God. A good place to begin is one verse from the prologue of the Gospel of John, one of the most important testimonies to the

identity of Jesus in all of Scripture, and certainly a foundation for orthodox Christian belief:

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John 1:14)

In the unfolding of the lectionary for the season, we see the glory of the only Son. This word *glory* will inform the shaping of the pages to follow. Indeed, the *glory* of God is one of the most frequent motifs in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, appearing in many hundreds of verses. The Psalms are full of God's glory:

Ascribe to the Lord the *glory* due his name;
worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.
(Psalm 29:2 NIV)

Not to us, O Lord, not to us,
but to thy name give *glory*,
for the sake of thy steadfast love and thy
faithfulness! (Psalm 115:1)

In the biblical languages, the word for glory is *kavod* in Hebrew, *doxa* in Greek. The Greek word *doxa* comes over into English in *doxology*, literally, “to speak glory”—that is,

to utter praise to the *doxa* of God. Understanding the glory of Christ requires understanding the importance of *kavod* in the Old Testament. This should be stressed in order to maintain the unity of Jesus Christ with the so-called Old Testament God. They are not two different gods. They are one, and the glory of one is the glory of the other.

“The glory of God” of which we so often hear in the Old Testament does not describe God’s essence. A word used to identify that essence is *aseity* (Latin *aseitas*, “being from itself”)—God as he is in himself. *Doxa* is one step removed from God’s aseity. It is the radiant *revelation of* himself, an emanation of his attributes that humans can receive only by faith. It is his outgoing self-revelation perceived by disciples as dazzling radiance, yes—but more important still, as absolute power.

That is the combination—radiance and power—that makes *glory* one of the most telling words used to describe God in the Bible. Because it denotes God’s sheer majesty and dominion, it should always be a companion to attributes like “merciful” and “loving.”² The glory of the love of Jesus is not the same as human love, because his glory is something that is impossible for unaided humanity: namely, it is able to triumph over all that would destroy it.

The body of Christ needs to recommit to this concept of the glory of God. It has been in semi-eclipse of late, as Jesus has been presented as a moral exemplar, social activist, and religious teacher minus his unique identity as Son of God. Perhaps the very word *glory* seems bombastic to some, for reasons similar to recent attempts at eliminating the idea of Jesus as “Lord.” However, the glory of God and the lordship of Christ are too central to the biblical message to be pushed to the side in the church’s witness. In particular, the glory of God needs to be recovered as a preaching theme if we are to seek a more obviously revelatory way of proclaiming Christ.³ The Epiphany season, with its narrative arc shaped by manifestations of Jesus’ uniquely divine identity, is well suited to this project.

WHAT IS THE GLORY OF GOD?

What resonance does the word *glory* have in today’s English language? How often is it used, and with what meaning? The adjective *glorious* is familiar enough—we might say that we saw a “glorious” sunset, and we might hear of a pop star such as Beyoncé “in all her glory.” In the Greek and Roman worlds, *glory* was associated with fame,

reputation, and, especially, honor. These qualities were to be sought above all else, and most often were particularly associated with military glory. In late antiquity and medieval times, warriors and heroes of song and saga went on long and dangerous journeys to “get glory” for themselves. In the present day as in the ancient world, athletes seek glory in Olympic gold, which is given for crowning achievement. Glory in this sense of renown is for the elite. Usually it is earned, but it can also be bought or stolen. It can be taken away or lost; we often hear of “past glory.” It hardly needs to be pointed out that human-based glory is ephemeral. It passes away.

In contrast, the glory ascribed to God throughout the Old Testament is immutable and eternal. Its source is the Creator himself and it emanates from him. It is in the intrinsic character of God to possess this divine radiance. It does not change according to human response or lack thereof. If it is not perceived, it is still there, beyond human power to earn, to give, or to withdraw. At the will of God, it can be withdrawn from humans, but it cannot be withdrawn from the Creator. Therefore it serves as a judgment upon anyone who does not acknowledge it, whether they know it or not.

In the Bible, eternal glory belongs to God alone, and all who are called into service by God know that they can attribute glory only to God. However, we learn from Scripture that in engaging with human beings, God shields his *essence* from us precisely with its *manifestation*; he is willing to shrink himself, so to speak, so that we are not swallowed up alive by his glory. When Moses rather presumptuously asks that God show him his glory, God grants the gift but puts Moses into a cleft of a rock so that he will see only God's back (Exodus 33:18-23).

One of the most memorable biblical visions of God's glory is when God shows himself to the prophet Isaiah in the temple:

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory. (Isaiah 6:3)

Isaiah is completely overcome with fear and trembling. It is important for us to pause over this:

Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts! (Isaiah 6:5)

Most of us don't realize what we are singing when we toss off the familiar hymn "Holy, Holy, Holy," or when we sing the *Sanctus* during the eucharistic liturgy. It seems routine to us, but we should notice Isaiah's reaction. His vision of the glory of God results in an instantaneous perception of the *contrast* between God's purity and his people's contamination—their "uncleanness" because of sin. God's glory manifested in the epiphanies of the Bible evoke intense reactions ("The glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid," Luke 2:9-10 KJV). Epiphanies in Scripture are met with reactions of disbelief (Gideon), awe (the Magi), amazement (Cana), or—most often—"fear and trembling." It is precisely for this reason that the biblical angels are always saying "Fear not!"

Perhaps the most seminal of all the manifestations in the Old Testament is that of Moses in the desert and the bush that burns furiously but is not consumed. Moses reacts to the phenomenon as a "great sight," as though it were some sort of magic trick. But God speaks to Moses out of the bush, saying in effect, "Stand back! Do not come near my presence without trembling; take off your shoes; I AM WHO I AM, not who you thought I was."

“And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God” (Exodus 3:6). We should not come to an epiphany too quickly, before we absorb the message from the burning bush: “Stand back! Too hot to handle!” Exodus continues: “The *appearance of the glory* of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel” (Exodus 24:17).⁴ The glory of God comes upon Moses and Isaiah as a body blow.

The glory of God is not summoned by human striving or wishing. It cannot be conjured up by anything we can do.⁵ It is pure gift. It comes to us solely at the will of the Creator. It comes from another dimension, over against the world of human bondage to sin and death. It is not accessible to the unaided human eye. Thus Paul teaches us that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50), and John says that “no one has ever seen God” directly (John 1:18); in Jesus Christ the living Word, he has been made visible. Only as God chooses do we see God’s glory; such a vision is not available as a mere religious option, a human choice among many others. God’s glory is not to be confused with sentimental or superficial human ideas of glory. The only entrance into heavenly glory is through God’s work

and Word in Jesus Christ. If we confuse this with human sight, human potential, human possibility, we have altogether missed the glory of God.

THE UNIQUE GLORY OF GOD IN CHRIST

In dictionaries, definitions of *glory* use words like radiance, splendor, luster, majesty, brilliance, resplendence, grandeur, and effulgence.⁶ It is notable that many of these words are associated with light. Jesus Christ himself said, “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). We are so familiar with this that we don’t notice its audacity. Who would talk like this about himself? Yet this is what he says himself in John’s Gospel. Wouldn’t we think such a person was mentally deranged? How can we defend such statements if Jesus is only one more religious teacher? We need to remember, in proclaiming Jesus, that our gospel makes no earthly sense. The Synoptic Gospels say that when Christ was crucified at noonday, the sun was darkened, because the Light of the World was going out.

Through his life and work Jesus radically altered the definition of *doxa*. The change that comes over the word *doxa* in its journey from secular to biblical Greek is theologically very important. In secular Greek, *doxa* refers to

honor given to someone who is thought to have earned it. In New Testament Greek, however, the definition is transformed.⁷ In the New Testament as in the Old, only God possesses glory, and the chief vocation of believers is to praise God's glory. This is a significant change in meaning. Human beings actively seek glory, but there is no reason or need for Jesus to "get glory" for himself. Glory has been his since before time began, for it is intrinsically part of his nature as the living three-personed Creator. In his divine nature he does not "need" anything. He purposefully enters into *human* need, experiencing hunger and thirst and weariness like any human being, but his divine being in the Godhead is forever secured. God's *doxa* in Christ is a manifestation of the Old Testament *kabod* carried forward into the new Jerusalem, the abode of God's people in the kingdom to come.

The season of Epiphany offers an opportunity to focus for several weeks on the glory of Christ as the second person of the Trinity, in all his intrinsic, immutable, inestimable glory, which can never pass away. With regard to the glory of God in Jesus Christ, all subjectivity is eliminated. The *doxa* of God is not earned, not negotiable; it is inherent and unchangeable.

The glory of Jesus Christ has some surprising features that could never have been conjured up by human imagination, projection, or wish fulfillment. For example, in the famous prologue of the Fourth Gospel, we are warned that many will not believe:

The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. (John 1:9-11)

The promise, however, is made to those who do recognize him:

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John 1:12-14)

John's prologue is always the Gospel reading for Christmas Day. The worshipers are pointed ahead in the

direction of the Epiphany season, in which the “glory as of the only Son from the Father” will be displayed. We will learn that many will not receive him, and that his destiny is the opposite of what one would expect from a glorious Messiah (in this way the Gospel reading points ahead to Holy Week). “But to all who receive him,” he will bring the uncreated light of God, for he was in the beginning with God, and he was God (John 1:1-2). No definition of glory can be greater than that one. Later in the Fourth Gospel, we see this glory at work in the most extreme circumstances: As Jesus stands with Mary and Martha of Bethany at their brother’s tomb, Jesus commands that the very door of death be opened. Martha protests that there will be a stench. Jesus replies, “Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” (John 11:39-40).

The apostle Paul demonstrates a proper understanding of God’s glory in his vocation as the recipient of the risen Christ’s own personal choice. Given his unique stature as apostle to the Gentiles, Paul might have been especially tempted to claim honor for himself, but he did the opposite: he accepted dishonor as part of his job. He looked not for any worldly reward, but for the glory

promised to him personally by Christ; the new Christians will be his glory (1 Thessalonians 2:19). Indeed, Paul, having been imprisoned many times and knowing he is likely to be martyred, declares that Christ will be glorified in his own body “whether by life or by death” (Philippians 1:20). Paul’s declaration about this is one of those radical statements he makes that cannot be emphasized often enough: the glory of Christ was paradoxically made known in his crucifixion.

God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross
of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world
is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.
(Galatians 6:14 KJV)

Paul “glories in” the cross, and time-honored hymns contain such lines as, “In the cross of Christ I glory.”⁸ The sheer audacity of this claim is insufficiently stressed in the preaching and teaching of the church. Throughout the Gospels, we are continually pointed ahead to the shocking culmination of Jesus’ earthly ministry. The season of Lent moves toward the scandal of Golgotha as surely as Paul and John the Baptist point to it. The paradox is that Jesus’ seeming defeat is actually his glory. John’s Gospel

specifically refers to the Passion as Jesus' hour of glory (John 12:23; 13:31-32).

The connection between the glory of God shown forth in Christ and the crucifixion of Jesus should never be severed. When the fourth evangelist writes that “we have seen his glory” (John 1:14 NIV), it is not a free-floating attribute; it pertains to him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Paul, the theologian of the cross par excellence, refers constantly to the glory of God in Christ, in one passage writing that “we all, with unveiled face, beholding the *glory* of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of *glory* to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). In this and many other places Paul specifically states that the Christian will partake in this glory: “Through [Christ] we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the *glory* of God” (Romans 5:2). In one particularly resonant verse Paul states, “Far be it from me to *glory* except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14).

We will return to the cross in the pages to follow, because the Epiphany season leads to it as the very center of

the glory of Christ. Indeed, it is precisely as Jesus calls his disciples away from any notion of earthly glory that we see most deeply into what his glory actually is.

EXPRESSING THE INEXPRESSIBLE

The Epiphany season is designed to replace minimalist notions of glory with the real thing. This is a challenging project, because the human psyche is always wired to take credit whenever possible. For example, Wikipedia offers a definition of *glory* as the word “used to describe the manifestation of God’s presence *as perceived by humans* according to the Abrahamic religions.”⁹

What is wrong with that? If we can answer that question, we will come closer to an understanding of what it is that we learn during Epiphany. Note the subject of the verb in this dictionary definition. It is a word used to describe God’s presence “as perceived by humans.” God’s glory is therefore subjective, not objective. Unless we perceive it, it’s not there; it has no use. Its importance depends entirely on our perception. There, in one sentence, we see the difference between “religious” thinking and biblical theology. In most religious (or “spiritual”) approaches, our human capacities are at the forefront.

Contrarily, in biblical theology God is the subject of the sentences about himself. He is not an object of our perception. He *originates* our perception, *guides* our perception, *corrects* our perception. Think of Job when he has actually been confronted with God himself, at God's own instigation: "I [have] uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. . . . I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. . . . I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:3-6 KJV).

We could use a lot more of this "shock and awe" in our teaching about the glory of God. Isaiah, for instance, minces no words:

Enter into the rock,
and hide in the dust
from before the terror of the Lord,
and from the glory of his majesty. (Isaiah 2:10)

Scripture makes it clear that we cannot look at God's glory directly. It has to be mediated to us, as this hymn affirms:

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;

All laud we would render, O help us to see
'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee.¹⁰

Actually describing the glory of God is, in a sense, an impossible task. It requires indirection, as in the phrase “as it were.” The prophet Ezekiel has demonstrated this in one of the most mesmerizing, mysterious images in the entire Scripture. His book begins this way:

The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest . . .
in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar;
and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.
(Ezekiel 1:3)¹¹

Then Ezekiel speaks:

As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the
north, and a great cloud, with brightness round
about it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in
the midst of the fire, *as it were* gleaming bronze.
(Ezekiel 1:4)

This is developed for eleven verses, and then comes the famous vision of the wheels within wheels:

As for the appearance of the wheels and their construction: their appearance *was like* the gleaming of

a chrysolite; and the four had the same likeness, their construction being *as it were* a wheel within a wheel. (Ezekiel 1:16)

This goes on for several more verses, and then the key to it all:

Such was the *appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord*. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking. (Ezekiel 1:28)¹²

The glory of the Lord is described here with extreme awe. This is shown in the way the description of the surpassingly strange vision is distanced three times from the perception of the prophet. Note the three *ofs*, meant to emphasize the impossibility of actually describing or approaching God via human perception.¹³ Clearly the passage is meant to express the inexpressible, something arriving from another sphere inaccessible to our human faculties. Nothing is said of Ezekiel's "spiritual preparation" for receiving this epiphany; it arrives independent of human effort, according to God's own volition.

There are a great many passages in the Scriptures that refer to the transcendent nature of the glory of God and its unlikeness to anything comparable on earth. Paul

struggles to express God's glory (some would say only partially successfully!):

There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. (1 Corinthians 15:40-42)

Paul gives up his attempts to create analogies:

I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (1 Corinthians 15:50)

Paul finishes his extraordinary exposition with the words, “we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:52).¹⁴ He speaks of the resurrection to eternal life, but even in our present life, the power of this hope of transformation is the moving force in the church's worship as we

acknowledge the risen and reigning Lord by giving ultimate glory to him.

The biblical testimony to the glory of God is always to be understood as God's choice. Karl Barth bases his entire massive theological project on the conviction that knowledge of God is "grounded entirely in the miracle of grace."¹⁵ Clearly the vision of Ezekiel was vouchsafed, not earned. The season of Epiphany is designed to show that there is no road to the glory of God through human seeking; it cannot be summoned by human endeavor. It cannot be repeated too often: it comes as pure gift. It is revealed only from God's being, from his will and his self-revelation, for the salvation of his creatures.

There was a time when Episcopal clergy memorized and often used this ascription from the epistle to Jude:

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before *the presence of his glory* with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority*, before all time and now and for ever. Amen. (Jude 24-25)

These two verses of Scripture say a good deal about the glory of God that we emphasize during Epiphany:

- God is *able* to save us not only in the present but also in his eternal future.¹⁶
- Through his Son our Lord Jesus Christ, he is our only God and Savior.
- God is eternally himself, in glory, from before time and beyond time.

THE GLORIFICATION OF GOD AS ENJOYMENT

The first sequence in the Westminster Shorter Catechism is time-tested and much loved by many:

*Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?*¹⁷

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.¹⁸

We may not like the use of the generic word *man*, but if we try to update this, we would also have to lose the word *enjoy*, because it is very unlikely that anyone today would use it in this ever-so-slightly-bygone way. We might have chosen *delight in*. In any case, the calling of human beings to glorify God is affirmed as though it were the same thing as “enjoying” God—relishing, savoring,

delighting in his presence. Our common, colloquial use of *enjoy* without an object is indeed a poor thing compared to the “enjoyment” of the glory of God. To enjoy a meal, or a movie, or an evening out is to take fleeting pleasure in a brief and perishing moment. The summons of the Scripture is a summons to a life of purified and everlasting joy, not in some fleeting hour or destructible object, but as our eternal future in the age to come, where we—in the fellowship of all the redeemed—are to become purified recipients of the love of God. Enjoying God means to “glorify” God and to take delight in doing so. The Epiphany season is designed to teach us to glorify Jesus Christ and to “enjoy” his presence in this way. It is a strange glory, because it points to the cross, but it is a glory just the same—ininitely more than any glory that the world can offer or even imagine.

Precursors of this joy are available to us even now in the worship of the people of God, as we are lifted out of ourselves to behold his excellence and majesty—for the glory of the Lord Christ is far more than his own radiance and majesty. His glory is not simply an attribute that causes awe and wonder in the worshiper. Crucially, it is also his to give. The Heidelberg Catechism, much loved

for its pastoral warmth, affirms: “Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.” This is the glory of life in Christ. Such a life is secure in the purpose of God.

But, we might protest, we are not living wholeheartedly in this way. We are anything but wholehearted. What then? To which the answer is always, “I belong to him.” That is *our* glory, as given by him to us. And he gives it along with his power, power to defend us from our own sinful condition and “keep us safe from all enemies.” This is unconditional, you’ll notice. But there is more. The unconditional gift of the glory of Christ our head is defined by his gifts—gifts of “true righteousness and holiness” that take root and grow in us. Such gifts keep us safe precisely because this power is his to give.

In one of his most original and revelatory sermon-essays, “The Weight of Glory,” C. S. Lewis opens up an unexpected aspect of the glory of God. God’s “brightness, splendour, luminosity” is not only something intrinsic to God, but is also something God promises to give to all who love him. Lewis then goes on to affirm that we do not simply observe the glory of God from outside but are

actually taken into it according to his promise: “We are to shine as the sun, we are to be given the Morning Star.”¹⁹

This is an eschatological gift, bestowed from the future, belonging to God’s redeemed creation yet to come.²⁰ This is the deep meaning of the phrase “changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place.”²¹ Even now, as we ponder the glory of God, we can begin to understand how he promises to work in us toward our perfection, through “the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love.”²² We can even speak of God’s glory being our own:

Thou, O Lord, art a shield about me,
my *glory*, and the lifter of my head. (Psalm 3:3)

Thus the incomparable George Herbert writes of our glorification in his poem “The Star”:

Bright spark, shot from a brighter place,
Where beams surround my Saviour’s face,
Canst thou be any where
So well as there?
Yet if thou wilt from thence depart,
Take a bad lodging in my heart. . . .

First with thy fire-work burn to dust
Folly, and worse than folly, lust:
Then with thy light refine,
And make it shine.
So disengaged from sin and sickness,
Touch it with thy celestial quickness,
That it may hang and move
After thy love.²³

Herbert, with his special gift of addressing the individual conscience, shows how the radiance of God is not something simply to wonder at, but so much more: it is the promised gift of a “refined” and transformed human heart both now and in the kingdom yet to come. Joy is bestowed upon us through the transformative power of God’s glory. This is the deepest meaning of the phrase “from glory into glory.” A resounding baptismal declaration of the early church announces, “He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13). Because this deliverance is of God, it has—as it were—already occurred; it is an eschatological event planted in the present.

.....

This special emphasis of Epiphany is needed by the church right now as a drowning person needs a lifeboat. Paul identifies it in one of his letters to his most troublesome church, the one in Corinth. He is greatly distressed by its members turning away from the true gospel to false preachers who are teaching a distorted message. They have even resorted to personal attacks on him in order to win over the congregation. He writes an impassioned letter to his people in Corinth, fearing to lose them.²⁴ Here is a sample of what he wrote; there is no passage in all of Scripture more apt for teaching in Epiphany than this one:

Unbelievers [do not see] the light of the gospel of the *glory* of Christ, *who is the likeness of God*. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the *glory* of God in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:4-6)

This is as close as we are going to be able to come to understanding what the season of Epiphany is designed

to be and to teach. From its beginning by the light of a star to its culmination on the mountain of transfiguration, its Sundays are designed to display *the glory of Christ who is the likeness of God*, shining in and transforming our hearts even now. As the Epiphany hymn quoted earlier puts it, the season teaches “God in flesh made manifest.” What we preach is Jesus Christ as Lord over every hostile power that would enslave his creation. As the church—the bride of Christ—recommits herself to the praise of his glory, he himself accompanies the promises of his Word through his living and powerful presence in its worship, in its fellowship, and in its self-giving service. In the praises of the church, the Lord lives:

All *glory* be to God on high,
and peace on earth from heaven,
and God’s good will unfailingly
be to all people given.

We bless, we worship you, we raise
for your *great glory* thanks and praise,
O God almighty Father.

O Lamb of God, Lord Jesus Christ,
whom God the Father gave us,

who for the world was sacrificed
upon the cross to save us;
and as you sit on God's right hand
and we for judgment there must stand,
Have mercy, Lord, upon us.

You only are the Holy One,
who came for our salvation,
And only you are God's true Son,
who was before creation.

You only, Christ, as Lord we own
and *with the Spirit, you alone*
*share in the Father's glory.*²⁵

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