

MILD HE LAYS HIS GLORY BY!
CHRISTMAS 2015

I've been taking my sermon titles this Christmas from lines in *Hark the Herald Angels sing* by Charles Wesley (and others); it has been a way of helping me find ways of looking at the story of Jesus from different angles so that we see as much truth as we can. It's been fascinating to do that, to give myself the challenge of fresh insights or, more likely, of old insights in slightly fresher ways! Today's line is "*Mild He lays His glory by!*" That presumes one thing: Jesus was full of the glory of God before He came to Bethlehem. The Bible tells us that Jesus was the Son of God with glory and that He gave up that glory to come into the world to save us. So He lays that glory aside for a time; He will take it up again later, but for a time He lays that glory aside to come amongst us. Let's see what that means.

C.S. Lewis has a really helpful picture in one of his books: "one may think of a diver, first reducing himself to nakedness, then glancing in mid-air, then gone with a splash, vanished, rushing down through green and warm water into black and cold water, down through increasing pressure into the death-like region of ooze and slime and old decay; then up again, back to colour and light, his lungs almost bursting, till suddenly he breaks the surface again, holding in his hand the dripping precious thing he went down to recover. He and it are both coloured now that they have come up into the light: down below, where it lay colourless in the dark, he lost his colour too." (Miracles p.115f) It is a fantastically evocative picture of Jesus, coming down into the world, losing His colour, giving up His glory; but the diver doesn't just dive down into the darkness for the sake of it; he does it to rescue something precious and Jesus didn't come down and lay aside His glory just for the sake of it; He did it to rescue something precious; He came to rescue us!

We celebrate Jesus as Immanuel, God with us, but it didn't seem that way for a long time. There were angels at Bethlehem and the shepherds were frightened by them! God was at work there to show people something special about the new-born child. God came to live in our neighbourhood. But "the fact that God was in the Nazarene neighbourhood for 30 years and no-one noticed..." (Hirsch *The Forgotten Ways* p133) How does that happen? It happens because Jesus laid aside His glory to take on something of an ordinary human being; on the outside, there is nothing remarkable about the child growing up in Nazareth, His schooling, His going to the synagogue, His working in Joseph's workshop; there is nothing remarkable about any of that, Jesus taking on our humanity and laying aside His glory; coming down!

That coming down is even more dramatic than just taking off a golden coat. We've been moved by pictures on TV this year of thousands of people moving across Europe to find a peaceful, prosperous life; they've come from Syria mainly, but also Iraq and Africa, running away from war and poverty; they are trying to find a new life, a peaceful life, a place where they can prosper. There's another picture, an image of Joseph leading a donkey, with Mary carrying her child, as they run away, travelling across the desert of Southern Judea and across into Egypt, running away, Joseph afraid for the lives of his wife and his child and his own life, escaping just before Herod's soldiers hit Bethlehem looking for the child who would be a threat to his power and his throne. Not only is Jesus laying aside glory, but He is embracing the darkness, living in the darkness of fear, knowing at first hand what this world can be like; these are some of dark, cold waters of our diver at the start; the cold, dark waters of the cross would complete that picture!

Why? P reminds us that He humbled Himself: "*Being in...*" (Phil 2:5f) He humbled Himself! He gave up what was His by right and came into world; He humbled Himself

to serve others; He humbled Himself to die on a cross. 3 times He humbled Himself and 1st of these was laying aside His glory to come into world. Quite remarkable choice to make on part of Son of God: consider how hard we find it not to stand on our rights; it comes instinctively to stand up for ourselves and for our rights; well, we know we shouldn't be doormats for everyone to trample all over us. But being humble is hard when every instinct tells us to be proud of ourselves and our achievements and we want to be 1st in queue! Jesus humbled Himself; Son of God humbled Himself and gave up His glory to come into our world, to serve, then to die for us on cross. "Mild He lays His glory by!" Heart of 'why' of Christmas.

But story doesn't end there; don't leave our diver in cold, dark water, colourless! God raised Jesus again and 2nd half of Phil 2 passage is all about Son recovering His place. He has humbled Himself, and now "*God exalted...*" (Phil 2:9ff) He takes His glory up again; He is king and Lord and whole world will 1 day know that and recognise Him for who He is. For a time that glory was hidden so that He could save us; then that glory will be revealed because it is His and it belongs to Him and will belong to Him forever. Jesus glorious Lord and king! Worthy of worship, praise; glory and honour are His forever.

He takes us with Him. "*For you...*" (2 Cor 8:9) *Mild He lays His glory by*, making Himself poor and we see what that means; but gt result of His making Himself poor is that we become rich! God has saved us: blessing of God is poured into our hearts because Jesus made Himself poor. We are forgiven; we are reconciled with God; we have peace and hope for our hearts; we have hope of heaven; we have sense of God with us always and everywhere; we have promise of help and strength for living of our lives day to day. All of this and more is what makes us rich. Rich b./o Jesus made Himself poor; laying aside glory to come to Bethlehem was start; completed in cross, vindicated by resurrection. We are rich in grace because Jesus lays His glory by.

Fantastic! Amazing! This is grace of God for us, seen in Jesus . *Mild He lays His glory by!* Humbled Himself to come into world, to serve, to go way of cross; made Himself poor that we might become rich. Diver breaks surface with precious thing he went to recover from dark, cold water. In gospel, we are that precious thing Jesus came to recover, people to save and redeem and reconcile with God, precious in His sight, people He loves. Glad to lay aside His glory because Saviour for us.

One final thought: P quotes that early Christian hymn about Jesus for a quite clear reason: "*Your attitude...*" (2:5) Learn to be like Jesus ! Some obvious ways in which we can't, but in this 1 way we can and are challenged: to be humble people, to consider others' interests as well as our own; to remember our responsibilities as well as our rights. We are people precious in Jesus 's sight; He came to rescue us; make us proud, arrogant? No! Make us humble, thankful, full of grace in way we treat one another. *Mild he lays His glory by* – there's grace here for us and an almighty challenge!