

The Glory of the Lord is In His Temple Now

1 Kings 8:6-13 • 2020-12-27 • Christmas 1



I remember our home being filled with a lot of special things at Christmas time. But the special decorations I enjoyed the most as a child were the lights. The lights on the tree made a luminous display in our living room. And the lights outside on the large pine tree glowed brightly each night through the white layers of snow. Of course, it seems like today's technology allows for even more spectacular light displays. There are trees with fiber optics and special color displays. Immense outdoor light displays can be automatically synced to the latest exciting music. Even skyscrapers are sometimes decorated with laser light projectors which can be seen for miles. But the greatest display of glory at Christmas doesn't require technology and lights. It happened thousands of years ago. Christians know that no matter how spectacular a light display is no one can add to the glory which God has placed in our celebrations. Even the Christian's biggest light display is only a small attempt to reflect what is far more glorious about our celebrations. The greatest display of glory is seen in how God decorates his house. How does God make his house special? Today we'll look at 1 Kings 8 and consider how he fills his house with glory. He did involve music and lights, but in a far greater way than anything we have seen. And taking a look at how God brought glory to his house will help us keep the focus on what makes ours glorious too.

Some people put a lot of effort into planning Christmas decorations. But Solomon has them all beat with his plans. The house for God's glorious display of lights had been years in the making. The spot was chosen when the angel of the Lord withdrew his sword from killing the people of Jerusalem. God's mercy prevailed during David's time when the angel stopped his execution of the people. David saw this sight, and he decided that special place was where he needed to build God's house. The house of God is the Hebrew expression for what we call, "God's temple." David set plans in motion for what would be a glorious house with an incredible display.

David, however, wasn't allowed to build God's house. The Lord told him that his son would be the builder. So, David's son, Solomon, spent years preparing for this day. He enlisted hundreds of thousands of workers to be stonecutters, carvers, timber workers, and laborers. He commissioned the best artist and engineers for the project. This was no mere house project. It was the temple of the Lord. Solomon wanted it to be a glorious sight.

After seven years it was completed. Then the celebrations and final preparations were set in place. Solomon waited until the feast of tabernacles, or feast of booths. It was a time when the people were reminded of their deliverance from slavery. They had wandered for years in the wilderness and lived in temporary booths. God's temple had also been a tabernacle at that time. And it had remained one for the past five centuries. But that was going to change with the working of David's Son. The people were settled and had begun to enjoy peace from their enemies. David's Son, Solomon would finally complete a more permanent structure for the temple.

The temple dedication was huge and it involved a grand display of music and light. The ark, which contained the ten commandments on stone tablets, was brought up to the temple carried by the Levites. If you think you've ever seen an excess of food in celebration, then try to picture the sacrifices that were made on that occasion. 2 Chronicles records that it was too many sacrifices to count. Then the music came. All the Levites who were musicians began playing their harps, cymbals, and lyres. A modern orchestra will typically have around four trumpets. The Levite musicians were accompanied by 120 Levites playing trumpets. It was a glorious sound!

Then the priests took the ark with its long carrying poles and moved it step by step out of the tabernacle and toward the temple. They brought it into the temple. They could not touch the ark, so they left the poles there as they placed in the most holy inner room. The poles stuck out beyond the curtain into the first inner room, called the holy place. Their protruding presence was a constant reminder that no one could enter the inner house of God, his throne room. No one was supposed to ever enter except the high priest once a year. The ark was in the most holy place. And it was the symbol of God's presence with his people.

Once the ark was in the temple and the priest left, the light show began. It was what could rightly be considered the climax of the entire Old Testament era for the people of Israel. The priest left the ark inside and came out. The glory of the Lord came and filled the temple. This was the same bright and fiery cloud that had led the people of Israel while they lived in booths. It was the same bright cloud which had filled the tabernacle built almost 500 years earlier in Moses' time. Now, the unseen God was making his presence with his people visible as they dedicated the temple.

Do we get what this light display at God's house was meant to teach them and to teach us? It is both awesomely terrifying and incredibly comforting. Firstly, God was helping them understand that the people had no right to claim access to his house. There was a reason why the ark could not be touched and had to be carried on poles by the specially designated Levites and priests. There was a reason why mortals could not just approach the ark which symbolized God's presence with his people. It's the reason why two of Aaron's sons were put to death nearly 500 years earlier. It's the reason why the inner most holy place was so separate and secluded from people. It's the reason why the priests could not come inside the temple at its dedication because the glory of the Lord filled it and fire

loomed overhead. God's light display reminded the sinner that they cannot rightly come before him. He is a holy God, and we dare not approach his light as sinners unless we are ready to die and face judgment.

But that's not what you think of when you look at Christmas light decorations today, is it? You don't think of the holiness of God and the separation which sin has caused. You don't think of the dark curse that weighs on all the world because of our sins. That's because God's light displays at his house had another message to share: God is present in grace with his people.

At the dedication of the temple, the glory of the Lord made his holy presence known. When the shepherds at the first Christmas saw the "glory of the Lord" fill the night sky around them, they were terrified. They knew what God's light display meant. As sinners they did what all of us should do in the presence of a holy God and fell down in terror because of their sin. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid." God had come to fulfill his promise. He was going to remain present with his people. And he did not come to bring terror, but peace to sinners.

Mary and Joseph weren't carrying an ark to the temple courts a few days after that event. They carried a lowly child whose birthplace had been where cattle feed. And there were no trumpets sounding or sacrifices being offered as they drew closer to the temple in Jerusalem. But they were carrying the brightest and most glorious decoration ever to adorn God's house. It was far more than a box with the Word of God that symbolized his presence. They carried the Word made flesh. God was now indeed present in his temple like never before.

At the dedication of the temple, when the ark was brought to it, everyone fell with faces down in worship saying, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his mercy endures forever." At the dedication of Jesus, the Word made flesh, he was presented in the temple courtyard. He was then welcomed by a single man given a promise of prophecy and by an aged prophetess. They too echoed, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his mercy endures forever." God had kept his promise. He had come to his temple to establish his house forever.

Do we see what is most glorious about our Christmas celebrations? God is capable of putting on the world's greatest light show. But what we celebrate is that child who was held in Simeon's arms and gave such a light to the eyes of faith that Simeon declared it to be the greatest light display ever seen in God's house, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." (Lk 2:29-32)

The Son of David, Jesus, had come to build God's glorious temple. And he was going to put on the greatest light display in this world of darkness and sin. Years later, when it came time for the sacrifice, Jesus did not enter a copy of the heavenly throne. He came as the perfect high priest to enter the very throne room of heaven itself. And the sacrifice he offered was not the blood of an innocent lamb, it was his own perfect, holy blood. And by that priestly sacrifice he completed the greatest promises of God. That moment when Jesus entered the very throne of heaven, the Son of David and Son of God entered his temple. It could rightly be considered the climax of the New Testament. Jesus fulfilled everything foreshadowed by the earthly temple. The perfect sacrifice was made in the temple of the Lord.

The temple was made to stand in testimony to all the nations that God had given his Word to the people of Israel. God had promised to dwell with them forever. That promise brought them peace. The birth of God's son who came to the temple of the Lord stands as a testimony before every nation today. His life and death and resurrection are a light for all nations and the glory of the people of Israel. It is the glorious humility of a Savior who lowered himself to come to a dark world of sin and bring it light and life. That is what brings us peace.

Sometimes the streetlights and satellites and bright lights of this world can distract us from what is truly glorious. I look at the world's display of glory and I see a glory that quickly fades. The tallest towers will fall. The brightest stars will fade and die. And even the decorations in my home will one day burn up and become ash. I myself will face the darkness of the grave and ought to dread the terrors of judgment which awaits us all.

But then I look at the way God decorated his house. I listen to the sounds of the heavenly choir. I hear the song of Simeon. It points us to the bright glory in a lowly child. He veiled the glory of the eternal God in human flesh. Then the distractions fade away. And I realize in faith how God's house is decorated in the most glorious light.

God's house is still being built by Jesus, the Son of David. Through faith in Jesus the Christ you share in the peace that comes from having a perfect high priest. You share in access to the very throne room of God. And you will live securely in his glorious house forever. You are now part of the house of God and make up his glorious temple. As redeemed sinners we stand as holy building blocks of his house. "In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord." (Eph 2:21) You join the heavenly choir and all the angels as you bask in his light. We hear the Son of David say, "I have surely built a glorious house!"

As we carry the light of his gospel, we put out a display of glorious light to this world. It does not appear like any other the world has ever seen. God has come to his temple. And with his glory he fills his temple, his dwelling place forever.