

There is a Greek proverb that contains a lot of truth, it says, “A people are known by the heroes they crown.”

Historically kings and emperors, generals and commanders, rulers and even dictators have been “crowned” heroes – they have been given the glory – revealing much of their people’s aspirations.

In this place and time we have recently passed through a period in which we crowned as heroes – in which we have glorified - anyone who could make a million from some computer gizmo, anyone who could build a major corporation from nothing, anyone who could produce a 10% rate of return from their Hedge Fund. Our regard for these heroes made the fall of some of them all the more difficult to bear.

In our modern media-driven world heroes are very likely to be musicians or movie stars or sporting superstars or American Idols or even Joe the Plumber, someone who is glorified today but by tomorrow is consigned to some obscure question in Trivial Pursuit!

Over even the past two weeks we have watched as one of the one world’s most well-known, respected and admired heroes, Tiger Woods, has seen revelations about his behavior in private life damage, diminish and maybe even destroy him.

All this is to say that most often the heroes designated by society at large or by the media are NOT the real, true, lasting heroes.

Mary, becoming convinced that the Child she was carrying was God’s new intervention into the fabric of the world, offered a song of praise and glory to God! Mary’s Song, the Magnificat, extols God for God’s decision to enter once and for all into the human condition. Mary praises God recognizing that she has been chosen to bear this Child, this Christ Child who will forever change the world, bringing mercy to every generation, raising up the lowly and the meek, bringing to nothing the plotting and the machinations of the powerful, turning the world upside down and right side up. The One to be born, this Jesus Christ though He will have nowhere to lay his head; who was meek and lowly; whose beauty had neither form nor comeliness that anyone should desire him; His was the splendor of a lonely Wanderer, weary and footsore, with nails through his hands and feet. Yet, to this One, to this Jesus, we join our voices with the angels of old and say and sing and speak and live, “Glory to God! Glory to God in the Highest!”

Hearing of and being convinced of the promise of the Child she will bear Mary sings, “My soul magnifies the Lord.” She calls God “Spirit,” “Savior,” “Helper.” The news of the child she was to carry to term allowed Mary to see for herself who God really was. Aware of, certain of, convinced of, God’s gift to her and through her to the world Mary “magnifies the Lord”, seeing and experiencing God in a whole new, larger, clearer, much expanded way.

“My soul magnifies the Lord,” says Mary. Magnifies – a word that carries within in it thoughts such as making clear, enlarging, bringing into focus, revealing. Who can ever forget the first time we gazed through a magnifying glass or a microscope or a telescope to see things we had never before seen, seeing life where before there had seemed only to be emptiness, seeing a whole new vista of possibilities, secrets being revealed.

The coming of Jesus, the birth of Emmanuel, “God with Us,” affirms that God has and will come to us. That God will keep on pushing into our narrow, limited, and confined world, giving us a view of a new, expanded, larger world. In Jesus we have found and continue to find all the God we want, and all the God we need. All that we know of God, we discover in Jesus; all that we say, all that we see, all that we share, is in Jesus.

And so as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, the miracle of the Incarnation, God taking on human flesh, we celebrate the day when God became one of us in such a way that people have not and never will be able to get away from God.

Jesus gave us a new and paradoxical definition of God, a definition rooted in the humility of God. Many people were offended.

They wanted a God of glory, not entering the world at the bottom, not from a despised place like Nazareth in Galilee, but coming in from the top – they wanted a hero according to their own pre-conceptions!

They wanted One who would be properly introduced – who would debut as this year’s “Messiah”. They looked for One who would be escorted and feted by the right people, with all the appropriate protocol, passing through all the required security checks – instead, God crashed the party!

They looked for a glorious King, instead they got the Babe of Bethlehem, the refugee from Egypt, the working man from Nazareth, who was prepared to give, and share and live a message of the humility of God.

They looked for a stand out and instead they received a stand-in. One who identified with God and with people and with so many of the things that the world, even today, doesn’t believe count for much, with such passion and compassion that the possibility of life, and fellowship and purpose God and humanity together was made possible.

We are about to stand – we are standing – on holy ground. We need a plan – glory is about to break in upon us – to cover us, to change us, to delight us. Glory is breaking in on us, and like Mary at the end of her song, we know that the world is still the same. We know that people still don’t get it – truth be told we don’t get it ourselves – not fully! The poor are still trampled down, the rich maintain their self-induced and self-focused haughty posture, BUT, because we join our voices with Mary’s and with the faithful of every age there is, at end of the song, a glimmer of hope. There is the new possibility given that God has taken on flesh that we will see that we too need to have deeply fleshly concerns for all those for whom our Savior offered His life.

God enters what the world is tempted to overlook, bringing a radical and renewing justice. God continues to reverse our expectations of power and worth and calls us to see God’s face in the lost, the betrayed, and the vulnerable. The God rendered in the Bible is not a “here today, gone tomorrow” God, who occasionally, in some sentimental season like Christmas, intervenes in the affairs of the world. In one important sense, God does not come to the world “from the outside” since the world, in its workings, inside and out, comes from and belongs to God in the first place.

As Christians, we sing and shout and live “Glory to God” because the God of Israel, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the church of this Jesus, are all passionately engaged in creation. Our Savior God and the Church of Jesus exist to flood the world with God’s love in Jesus’ presence. The Incarnation of Jesus, the Word made flesh is the great consummating chapter in the story of how God will stop at nothing to have a family.

We who are gathered here this morning, all of us tuning in on television, we are a truly visible confirmation that God will have God’s way with the world. Faced with the overwhelming love that God has for us and for us all, the only response we can make is to sing and speak and shout and live our “Gloria” – Glory to God in the Highest. Amen.