I hate “Black Friday”. I hate the idea of it –greed and avarice the day after we are to be giving thanks to God on Thanksgiving and the day that the secular world kicks off its celebration of Christmas. I hate the name of it –named the same as the day the stock market crashed in 1929. I hate that it is named for the absolute absence of light. As if something evil has overtaken our celebration of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who is “the light of the world.” I refuse to go shopping on Good Friday –I will not sell my soul for 60% off. I refuse to go online and use my computer on Cyber-Monday --I will not do what the world tells me is the way to celebrate Christmas. I will do what the Bible says. I hate that Black Friday sounds a lot like “Good Friday”, another black Friday where they nailed the Savior of the world to a cross and attempted to extinguish Jesus as the light of the world. Same thing. There is no glory in stressed out people waiting in long lines ostensively to buy gifts to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace. There is no glory on black Friday. Glory may only be had by the manger’s side, in the living presence of the Lord God Almighty, entering into the world. Glory to God in the highest! The light that shines from above can now shine from within. Do you want “Black Friday” or do you want the GLORY of God? Figure it out, Christian.

And now that I’ve come off like “The Grinch who stole Christmas” let me turn from what Christmas is NOT to what I believe Christmas IS. Throughout Advent and Christmastide in worship we will be studying about the nature of God’s glory. Glory is one of those biblical and theological terms that we use a lot, you know, like grace and faith, that we may not entirely know nor understand its meaning. I think that most people probably think of “glory” as being the same as light. My conclusion from studying the issue is that Glory is not the same as light. Glory and light are NOT synonymous.

We will focus on a different stained glass window each Sunday, Today we focus on the Annunciation to the Shepherds that is found in the Nativity Window that is in the back of the balcony in the sanctuary. It shows the angel of the Lord come to announce the birth of the Messiah to simple shepherds, out in the fields abiding, watching their flocks by night. So the shepherds are out in the fields late at night, they are isolated and alone. It is hard for us to imagine how black and dark that night would have been for them. No ambient lighting outside of Bethlehem; no shopping mall parking lot lights; no streetlights; no nothing, just utter darkness. And without warning an angel of the Lord appears to them out of that darkness and they are “sore afraid”. I don’t think the angel caused them fear or even the surprise. I think what caused them to be fearful was “the glory of the Lord shone around them”. (Luke 2: 9) Note that it did not come from the angel, this glory. The glory is “of the Lord”. It shone around them, not emanating from the angel. Because the glory IS the presence of God. All the creative power of the universe showed up and was all around them and all over them. The manifest power of the Almighty radiated about them. The light was not what caused them fear it was the GLORY. It was the presence of a Holy and awesome God. In HIM there is no darkness, only
light. The shekina glory had come in all its fullness. It presaged the coming birth of the Messiah into the world. He that was to bring glory into the hearts of all mankind was heralded by the glory and presence of God in the annunciation to the shepherds. It was not just light; it was glory; it was presence. The inbreaking of the glory from above had come to herald the coming King. The light from heaven shone all about them. Heaven had broken through to earth. It pealed back the darkness. It turned night into day. God’s presence in, around and through them. No “Black Friday”; only the GLORY of God!!!!

There is no Christmas without the glory of God shining within our hearts. It is not Christmas if the light that shines from above doesn’t also shine from within. **Will the GLORY of GOD come and shine into our heart this Christmas or not??** I love the process of restoring our stained glass windows in the sanctuary. They first take off the occluded and cloudy and darkened Lexan plastic covering the windows on the outside. And immediately there is far more light in the sanctuary and far more light streaming through the windows. Some people discounted it by saying that those windows were just on the sunny side of the church. But Pastor Kay took a photo of a window with three panels, two which still had the Lexan on them and one that did not and the difference was amazing. The one without the overlay of darkness shone ten times brighter. Men of the world love darkness rather than light. The true light is entering the world, the presence of Jesus Christ bringing the shekina glory of God, but many know Him not, many receive Him not. So our task this-- Christmas is to remove the dark Lexan overlay of the ways the world tells us to celebrate Christmas, remove the darkness from our lives, remove the “Black Fridays” in order to experience the light and glory of God in the new birth of the Savior this year. Take off the Lexan, please, and let the GLORY shine!

Think about it this way. Let’s prepare for Christmas the way some people prepare for Black Friday. Let’s rise up early for weeks in advance of Christmas and read up on the scriptures and pray earnestly asking for glory --in the same way some people devour the advertisements in the newspapers. Let’s rise up early and begin praying and preparing our hearts each Sunday in Advent for the glory to come and to shine into our hearts. Let’s spend more time preparing our hearts and less time preparing our homes. Add “God’s glory” to your “to do list”. Let’s invite so many people to experience the glory of God with us this year that we have trouble finding a place to park in the church parking lot just like at Target. Let’s be willing to stand in line 30 minutes before the church doors open at 7:30 a.m. Let’s expect the “doorbuster special” to be the Living Presence of the Lord Jesus Christ born anew in our hearts this year. Let’s be willing to jostle for a seat in the pew. Take off the occluded Lexan of the Black Friday ways the world celebrates Christmas and hear the song of angels once again! Because what you can find here in the church in the presence of God and in the presence of Jesus is the shekina glory of God, the message of angels, the glory from above and the light from within.

And, beloved, you won’t find it in the darkness out there! Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA*  
*IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*