

Good evening and Merry Christmas. If you're visiting tonight, welcome. We've spent the last few weeks looking at the different passages you heard Jomita read during our worship time that use the word "behold" to tell the story of Christmas. It's an amazing word that commands our attention and asks us to absorb and grasp whatever we are witnessing, and it's so fitting because of the season we are in.

Christmas is full of scenes to behold. It might be a house with amazing decorations some of you just saw that and thought "I'm going to pull that off next year." It may be a Christmas feast found on a beautifully decorated table. I hesitate to show you that at the beginning because you may not hear another word I say! If I hear stomachs rumbling, I'll just assume that's an "Amen!" It may be a beautifully decorated Christmas tree that you sit in front of regularly or smile as you walk by it, or maybe the bounty of presents found underneath that fills you with anticipation. But there's another scene found this time of year, and it's easy to overlook. It might be described as quiet, humble, and maybe even a little rickety. But more than any of these other things, this is a scene to behold.

And that's what I'm praying God will help us do tonight. We're going to hear "behold" used one more time, in a birth announcement, given by an angel to a group of shepherds, that declares and calls us to truly grab hold of what God was up to in a manger in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago.

[Luke 2:8-14] ⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

An angel appears to some shepherds in the fields and reports on what has occurred in a manger in Bethlehem. It is good news that should induce great joy, and includes three magnificent truths about who this baby is and what he's come to do, all found in v11, that the angel calls us to behold.

"Behold" proclaims God is a gift-giver.

The angel begins this good news with "For unto you". This event has happened for our benefit. This baby is a gift. If he had a gift tag attached to him, it would say "To: Humanity, From: God". Think about what a gift is. **It is something of value, given as an expression of love, at a cost to and fulfillment of the giver, for the blessing of another.** This baby fits all those criteria. He is a gift of eternal and infinite value. It's not cash or an xbox or golf clubs. This baby is God himself. This gift is an expression of love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." God's love for us inspired him to give Jesus to us. It comes at a cost to the giver, which we'll see more here in a minute, but it also delighted him to do so. And he gives for our blessing. Nothing compares to the blessing found in Jesus.

Every preacher worth his salt is going to preach against the commercialization of Christmas and the materialism that detracts from the true meaning of the holiday. I made a reference to that tonight and even more so the first weekend in December. But I have an encouragement for you tonight: Give each other presents! Yes, you heard that right. That doesn't mean go spend a bunch of money, but here's why I say that. When we give each other gifts, we reenact what God has done by giving us Jesus. When we give gifts wrapped in paper, we are reminded of the gift wrapped in swaddling cloths. When we give out of love for others and for their blessing, we are reminded of God's love for us and his desire to bless us. When we experience the cost of that gift, we are reminded of what it cost God to send his Son. And when we are fulfilled by our giving, maybe we get a glimpse of the pleasure God has experienced by giving us his Son. So kids, if you want more presents, just look at mom and dad and say "Hey, let's do that thing that shows me the generosity of God!" They won't be able to resist! Behold the generosity of God. The greatest gift he's ever given us is Jesus, and he did so because of what the angel says next.

"Behold" proclaims God wants to be with us.

God gives himself to us because God wants to be with us. The Gospel of Matthew references the prophet Isaiah who said this baby shall be called Immanuel, which means God with us. God's plan from the beginning of time was to be with him in an intimate relationship. Christmas is him seeing that through. But remember, a gift is often given at a cost to the giver. For Jesus, it was to empty himself of his glory and take on flesh. The angel says "unto to you *is born this day*" ...our eternal God comes as a baby; vulnerable, completely dependent, fully human.

A couple of months ago I had the immense pleasure of chaperoning a three-day fifth grade campout with my youngest son, Joe. I had done the same with my older two boys when they were in fifth grade, and both of their trips were in September. That means it was brutally hot, and it was miserable at times. But Joe's was at the end of October, and I knew we were in for cooler weather. What I didn't know was that we were in for temperatures in the mid-40's, unceasing downpours, and mud...pretty much everywhere. Our first day, as I was paddling a canoe while the rain came down so hard I couldn't see the dock, I learned the difference between waterproof and water resistant. Not fun. And the next morning I woke up in a warm flannel sleeping bag, no rain or mud in sight, and I did not want to move. I was in the perfect place.

Jesus was in a perfect place. Jesus was in a perfect state. He could have just stayed where he was because the alternative was nowhere near as appealing. But God wanted to be with us, so he came.

"Many people visualize a God who sits comfortably on a distant throne, remote, aloof, uninterested, and indifferent to the needs of mortals, until, it may be, they can badger him into taking action on their behalf. Such a view is wholly false. The Bible reveals a God who, long before it even occurs to man to turn to him, while man is still lost in darkness and sunk in sin, takes the initiative, rises from his throne, lays aside his glory, and stoops to seek until he finds him." John Stott

When you behold what has happened in the manger, you behold the glorious truth that you matter to God. The angel said this good news was for all the people, and that includes you. You matter so much that he sought you out. He stepped out of the perfection of heaven and into the

cold and rain and mud of creation because he wants to be with you. The infinite became finite. The extraordinary became ordinary. But he came not just to be with us for a few years on earth. He came to be with us forever. And for that to happen, he had to take care of something first. He wants to be with you, and...

“Behold” proclaims God will accomplish everything needed to make that happen.

The holidays are often prime time for the release of movies that tell heroic tales of rescue, but they are all mere images of the true rescue mission launched from heaven. The angel says this baby is a Savior, Christ the Lord. He is God who has come to rescue us. **Jesus not only had to cross the distance between heaven and earth, he ultimately had to cross the distance between a perfect God and imperfect man.**

Do you know Christmas has the potential to be insulting? Christmas tells us we are in need of rescue and we can struggle with that idea because we don't like that we can't solve our problems on our own. If you've ever tried, though, my guess is that you've had limited success. We all have this condition called sin. It's terminal, it separates us from God, and we can't take care of it ourselves. Thankfully we don't have to. While most every religion asks what we will do for God, Christmas declares what God has done for us. The good news of great joy isn't a list of things to do to save ourselves, it's a person who's come to do it for us. **The one born in Bethlehem will one day hang from a cross at Calvary and emerge from a tomb three days later.**

Some of you here don't normally go to church or may not believe what we believe, and you hear that we believe this baby is both a human and God himself. But here's why we believe that. For Jesus to be the forgiver of sins, he has to be fully God, because only God can forgive sins. But for Jesus to be our rescuer, our Savior, he has to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. So he also became fully human to live the life we could not live and to stand in our place and die the death we deserved. He paid for our sins in order to forgive our sins.

The angel's message says God gave himself to us, in order to save us, so that he could be with us, forever. But for a gift to accomplish what a gift is intended to accomplish, it must first be accepted. That gift is received simply by believing that God did that for you, or remembering what you accepted years ago.

The Youversion Bible app people publicized the most searched verse of the year. It was Philippians 4:6, which begins “Do not be anxious about anything...” We live in anxious times, don't we? The antidote to anxiety is to behold. When we behold this scene, when we behold the angel's words that tell us what God did for us 2,000 years ago in a manger in Bethlehem, we let the good news of great joy take root in our hearts and direct our lives. It is news that casts out fear, news that brings peace, and news that God was on the move to secure our eternity with him forever. Rejoice that he has come. Behold, for unto you is born this day in the city of David **your** Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

We are going to close this evening with the lighting of our Advent candle while Noah leads us in Silent Night. It represents the hope, joy, and peace of the season, and I think it's especially

Behold/Christmas Eve
Behold: The Gift of God

Luke 2:8-14

Kurt Pressler
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appropriate tonight. When we behold, the truth of Christmas is set ablaze in our hearts. Let it change your life, and then be quick to pass it on to others.