

COME AND BEHOLD HIM CHRISTMAS SUNDAY



Catalog No. 20191222
Luke 2:15–20
Christmas Message
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December 22, 2019

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Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent, and Christmas is just around the corner. Christmas is, and always has been, one of my favorite times of the year. The Christmas music, the Christmas cookies, the feasts with friends and family—I love it all!

The best news imaginable

One of my favorite things about this time of year is, unfortunately, something most of the kids here in the Bay Area have never experienced: snow days. In Minnesota, where I grew up, we had a couple of snow days every year. Snow days represent all that is good about Minnesota in the winter: sledding, snowball fights, snow-flocked trees, hot cocoa by the fire, and (of course) no school.

It took quite a lot for schools to shut down in Minnesota. If we woke up tomorrow morning to half an inch of snow in the Bay Area, chaos would break out. Businesses would shut down. The ditches would be full of cars. People would think the world was ending. In Minnesota, not so much. Kids learn from a young age not to be too excited if it's snowing when you go to bed. If it's snowing in the evening, the snow plows will work all night and life will go on as usual in the morning. But, if it started snowing in the middle of the night and kept snowing through the morning, then things got interesting.

I remember so clearly those mornings of waking up to fresh snow still falling. My sisters and I would stare out the window while listening to the radio announcer read the list of schools that had shut down. (Yes, this was before schools made these announcements online!)

As we listened for our school to be named, anticipation grew. We were either about to get the best news imaginable or be completely crushed. On those rare days when our school made the list, we jumped for joy and rushed outside to play. Those days were the best.

This morning we have been thinking back to the well-known story of Jesus' birth some 2,000 years ago. We have heard how Mary and Joseph made their way

to Bethlehem, how all the hotels were booked, and how the Baby Jesus was born in a barn and laid in a feed-trough. We have heard how the angels appeared to the shepherds and delivered to them “good news of great joy” — a Savior had been born. The Messiah was here! The Promised One that God was going to send to rescue and redeem his people had finally arrived.

When I hear this story, I think back to those mornings of waking up to fresh snow. As I listened to the radio and learned that today was indeed a snow day, it felt like the best news imaginable. But it was nothing in comparison to this news that the angels shared with the shepherds.

Come and see; go and tell

Luke 2:15-18:

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

When the shepherds heard the news of Jesus' birth, the first thing that they did was come and see Jesus for themselves. They found their way to the stable, they made their way past the cows and sheep and goats, and they found the baby Jesus lying in a manger. No pomp and circumstance. No lights and music. Nothing extravagant at all.

And yet somehow, they were compelled by what they saw. So shepherds went and told everyone about what they had seen and heard.

I find this simple story so fascinating. First, the shepherds come and see Jesus. Then, they go and tell people about him. Come and see; go and tell. It's so

simple, yet it's so profound. Come and see; go and tell. This response of the shepherds--the first people to get the news of Jesus's birth—is the model that God uses to build his church. Come and see; go and tell.

This is the way that any good news travels. The new Star Wars movie, *The Rise of Skywalker*, came out two days ago. I hope to see it soon, and I hope it's amazing. But I am not going to recommend it to you until I see it. I will come and see it. Then, if it's good, I will go and tell you about it. Or better yet I will go and tell you to come and see it for yourself!

Now, think about how you first came to hear about Jesus. Maybe that day is today. Maybe that day was 50 years ago. Perhaps your parents have been telling you about Jesus since the day you were born. In any case, somebody came and saw Jesus, then went and told someone about him. Then that person came and saw, then went and told. Come and see; go and tell. Come and see; go and tell. Over and over and over. Come and see; go and tell, until somebody went and told you. And then you came to see Jesus. It's amazing. This action is how God builds his church. This is how God spreads the Good News—the very same news that the angels announced to the shepherds—a Savior has been born, and this Savior is Christ the Lord.

But come and see, go and tell doesn't capture the whole story. It doesn't capture everything that happened that day when the angels told the shepherds that Jesus had been born. It doesn't explain why the good news about Jesus has been passed on from person to person, now having reached billions of people all around the world, and eventually made its way to you.

Wow, God!

Something happens between come and see and go and tell. Something happens that moves us from coming to see Jesus to actually going out to tell others about him. What is it? Why do the shepherds go and tell? Why would we go and tell?

The key lies in one word: BEHOLD. Behold means to look at something impressive and to be amazed by it. It's what you do when you see something incredible and all you can do is say wow!

This reaction is exactly what happened as the shepherds went to see Jesus. As they stood by this manger, they were amazed. They were captivated. All they could say was Wow, God! Wow.

During the holiday season, there are so many people trying to captivate our attention with their newest product, trying to amaze us with the latest gadgets and technology, trying to win us over with incredible deals. I was at the mall earlier this week, which is rare because I do most of my shopping online now. But I had to go pick up something in the store. As I walked through the mall, there were so many things that I was tempted to behold—the iPhone 11, freshly baked cookies, these comfy-looking slippers that I don't need because I already have slippers, but they were on sale for 70% off, and they looked so cozy! Everywhere I turned, something or someone was trying to get me to say wow, that's awesome. I need that.

But we all know the reality of these things. The iPhone 11 is going to be outdated in six months. The cookies will be gone in 30 seconds. The slippers will wear out, or I will put them in the bottom of my closet and forget about them altogether.

The truth is that there is only one thing that can genuinely leave us amazed, and it's the same thing that left those shepherds amazed as they gathered around that manger in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago: a Savior has been born, and he is Christ the Lord.

What was it about Jesus that was so amazing to those shepherds as they looked at him? What is it about Jesus that is meant to captivate us — to leave us saying wow, God? What is it about Jesus that we are supposed to behold?

Behold his power

One of the most mind-blowing things about the incarnation is that the baby that lay there in that manger was the all-powerful God of heaven and earth. He just looked like a baby—as weak as any other baby. But this baby was the very same God who spoke, and stars were created. He was the very same God who breathed, and life began. He is the same God who holds the universe together, who keeps the laws of physics operating as they should, who keeps my heart beating, moment after moment.

Last winter, my family and I went up to Lake Tahoe and enjoyed a weekend in the snow. At the time, we had a two-year-old and a five-month-old. There's not a lot that you can do in the snow with a two-year-old and a five-month-old, but one thing we could do was go snowshoeing. So we loaded up the kids in the hiking backpacks, strapped on the snowshoes, and hit the trail.

We started down the trail, and after maybe a mile or so we came to an overlook with a spectacular view. We could see for miles, and everywhere we looked was breathtaking. I was struck in that moment by the power of God—the power to create mountains and valleys; the power to bring a storm to cover these mountains in a beautiful white blanket. The God who did all of that is the same God who lay in that manger as a baby.

But, as we know babies do, this baby would not stay a baby forever. He would grow up to be a man—a man who rebuked the wind and the waves, and they stopped. A man who called Lazarus out of the tomb, and he came. A man who made the blind to see and the lame to walk. Sure, this baby looked like any other baby, but don't let the cute baby cheeks deceive you. He was the all-powerful God of the universe. Wow, God. Wow.

Behold his humility

Alongside the power of God, the birth of Jesus highlights the humility of God. It wasn't accidental that the all-powerful God became a defenseless baby. It was intentional. Very intentional. The apostle Peter tells us that this was God's plan before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:20).

Do you know what would happen if you put the baby Jesus on a sled and shoved him down a mountain? He would scream, just like any other baby. He would probably fall out, just like any other baby. He would get cold. He would get frostbite. He would get hypothermia. Eventually, he would die. He was a baby—a real baby, a human baby. He was fragile and defenseless. He was dependent—completely and utterly dependent.

He was the creator of the heavens and the earth, but he chose to put himself in a situation where someone else needed to change his diaper. That's humility!

But that was just the start of his humility. This baby grew to be a man who was a servant to all. He hung out with dirty, smelly people, some of whom had infectious diseases. He was friends with people that no one else would even look in the eye, with no regard for his own reputation.

When his enemies rose up against him, he didn't defend himself. Rather, he chose to make himself vulnerable. He took the beatings. He took the insults. He

willingly gave up his life on the cross. He bore the very wrath of God though he had done nothing to deserve it. That's humility. Unimaginable power and unimaginable humility, all wrapped up in this one little baby. Wow, God. Wow.

Behold his love

Why? Why did he do it? Why did he choose to create people that he knew would rebel against him? Why did he leave his heavenly throne, take on the limitations of a human body, live as a servant, die as a criminal? Why? Because of love. Because of love for me. For you.

He chose to create you because he loves you and wants a relationship with you. He chose to become one of us because he wanted to know us and be with us. He gave up his life for us because that's what it took to save us.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that it was for the joy set before him that Jesus endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2). That joy is joy in you. It's joy in me. It's joy at the chance to be in a loving relationship with you and me for all of eternity. That's love. Wow, God. Wow.

So come. Come and behold him. Let Jesus captivate you this Christmas season. Let Jesus amaze you. Let him overwhelm you with his power, with his humility, and with his love. Then go and tell others all that you have seen and heard. Invite them to come and see for themselves. Invite them to come back in two days so that they might hear about God's incredible love for them.

The only natural response

After the shepherds go and tell everyone about this beautiful Savior that has captured their hearts and lives:

Luke 2:20:

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

When you have had an encounter with the Holy God, when you have witnessed the glory of the incarnation, when you have experienced a personal relationship with the God of the universe, the only natural response is one of praise and worship. That is exactly what we are going to do as we continue our service.