

"It's Beginning To Look A Lot Like...:The Arrival"

Luke 2

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Join me in prayer: O God, open us up. Open our eyes that we might see, and open our ears that we might hear. Open our hearts, God, that your word might fall in. And then, O Lord, open our hands that we might serve. Amen.

Those of you who are regulars here are aware that one of the characters in my life is my boxer dog, Lillie. She's a white boxer who is just ill-behaved but marvelous. She loves me unconditionally and she greets me when I get home everyday, as if I were the King of England having returned from a long journey. I love Lillie. So when I take her for a walk in the morning, I'm proud of her. And there is a child one and a half or two years old perhaps who lives down the street from us a ways. And about once a week we manage to cross paths. I'm out running with the dog and her mom is taking her for a morning stroll.

And every time in her little stroller as I come by with the dog her eyes get big and she points and says, "Dog!" And sometimes she says, "Augie!" or "Aug!" The specific word is irrelevant but the meaning is absolutely clear. "Mom! There is a dog there! Do you see that dog? Are you paying attention? Dog! Dog!" I mean it's a big deal.

I think that's why kids and children get Christmas. I don't know what happens in us but we lose that sense of amazement and excitement about almost anything.

There is a word in the New Testament used 216 times. In Greek when the word is transliterated it's *idou*. And we've sort of stopped translating and the newer translations leave it out altogether. It confused them and bothered them as they were translating it and didn't make for easy translation so they left it out. The word really lived better in the old King James Version. And the word is "behold." I have an old King James Version Bible that belonged to my grandfather. Let me read to you. really the first place this Greek word appears in the New Testament. It's in the Gospel of Matthew.

"But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost."

"Behold the angel of the Lord appeared..." And when the angel of the Lord appears to you - wake up! Notice that! See it! Experience it! Have a little wonder or amazement!

It occurs in the Hebrew in the Old Testament right at the very beginning as well. God creates all the world, the first day, the second day, the third day. And at the end of each day, the Scripture says, "And it was good." But at the end of the sixth day, God looks out and says, "Behold! It was very good!" It's like he's saying "Check this out! How cool is this!" That's a loose translation of *idou*.

But that's the spirit of this word- "Behold!" And the truth is that the essence of the Christian faith is not through so much believing. Now believing is important, don't understand me, but all through Scripture it makes it clear that God is to

be "beheld" to be experienced, to be amazed at. To be encountered and wondered at.

So let me share with you three times of those 216 that this word is used in Scripture. Here's the first one.

It's from the Gospel of Luke, words we read just a few minutes ago. "And the angel said unto them, fear not, for behold" - "Check this out!" - "I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people for unto this day is born in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Behold. God has decided to come and live among us as one of us. Is not that amazing? I mean Christmas after Christmas, after Christmas we hear the story. You probably could have recited it along with Linda as she read it. But have you *beheld* it? Have you realized what a miracle, what an amazing decision of God's this is, to come and be among us as one of us?

Our next door neighbors just had a baby. This is their first baby, and they're a really wonderful young couple. Right after the baby was born a couple of months ago they sort of "hunkered down" inside. Sort of stayed inside their house for fear of germs or something. And then finally they emerged. She came out of her house a few weeks ago when I was out working in our front yard. She walked along with one of those 18-wheeler baby carriages covered with blankets. Hiding, you know lest some ray of sunshine hit her child.

But she walked by my house, walking very slowly like "I got a baby here." I'm working in the yard. So I said, "You just stop right there." And I opened the front door and called up to my wife, "Dee, the baby is out here!" And man, you could hear, boom, boom, boom, she came down the stairs. She's rounding the corner, she's out the front door as fast as she can because everyone wants to see a baby. A brand new baby, a tiny little thing.

Fingers are this long - tiny, tiny little fingers. And feet that really seem oversized for a baby's body when you really look at them. Oversized - too long. And wrinkled all on the bottom. See, when we encounter a baby we want to see it because we use this phrase, "That is something to behold!" It's something that amazes us.

Now listen, this isn't just any baby that's born on Christmas. This is your baby. What did the Scripture say? "For unto you is born...a baby."

When we left here many years ago from St. Luke's when I was the youth pastor here we moved to South Houston. And we went to a church where there were no children and none had been there for some time. Three days after we moved our fourth child - Callie - was born. So being our fourth child we had no protective instincts anymore whatsoever. So we simply took her right to church that very first week. She's was about two days old and we took her to church. To a brand new church. You would have thought those people had won the lottery. They thought to themselves, "Do you see that baby?" Everyone was saying, "Can I hold her? Please?" Now they had their baby - this was theirs.

This Christ is your Savior. God has chosen to enter this world for you.

Let me share with you the second Scripture. This one is from the Gospel of John. It's also in the very beginning of the story although John does not have a birth narrative. It goes: "The next day, John seeth Jesus coming unto him and saith, 'behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sins of the world.'" Be amazed!

Some years ago someone gave us a Christmas tree ornament. And it was a very unusual Christmas tree ornament. It's a metal spike this long. Just a heavy metal spike. The instructions on it said that you were to put it near the center of your tree so

that you are reminded always that the baby who is born is the same one who is crucified. "For unto you is born a Savior."

Look, we don't like to think on Christmas about the cross. But lest we become too sentimental, the truth is that this is the beginning of the story that leads to that place. This is the beginning of God's love for us so great that he sent his Son for us.

This last year we were on a Journeys of Paul trip with a number of members of St. Luke's. It was a wonderful experience and we went to Rome, and to the Vatican. That's the first time I'd been there in Rome or the Vatican. To see all that magical art in those places, but only one place really got hold of me. Perhaps you've seen it. It's Michelangelo's *Pieta*. It's the statue of Mary holding the body of her son, holding the body of Christ. It's full of pain, and sadness, but the overwhelming message is one of love. Pain and sadness are not mutually exclusive of love. Love includes those things.

That's the story here, that God loves us so much. Boy, if we could just somehow get that!

Lucinda Williams has a great song. She's got a sort of "blues" voice. Here are some of the lyrics: "You weren't born to be abandoned, you weren't born to be forsaken, you were born to be loved. You weren't born to be mistreated, you weren't born to be misguided, you were born to be loved. You weren't born to be a slave, you weren't born to be disgraced, you were born to be loved. You weren't born to be abused, you weren't born to be lose, you were born to be loved."

That's the purpose of why you're here. You're here to love God but you were created so that God could love you.

If we could just behold that! We hear it, we hear preachers talk about it, we read it in stories, but somehow it just

doesn't get through to us. We don't really *behold* it. We don't really get it.

Just one other word from First John 3:1. "Behold what manner of love the father has bestowed upon us." The love that we see in the cross.

Now here's the last verse I want to share. Revelation 3:20 - from the other end of the story. "Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me."

I read recently a letter that was written from a young woman to her finance after she had broken off their engagement. Let me read to you: "Dear Jimmy, no words could ever express the great unhappiness I've felt since breaking our engagement. Please say you'll take me back. No one could ever take your place in my heart, so please forgive me. I love you. I love you. I love you., yours forever, Marie. P.S. And congratulations on winning the lottery."

We laugh at that but that's kind of the way our lives are, right? So we know in our heads that God loves us, and wants to be in a relationship with us. God wants to have that relationship with us, we know that.

But we sort of go on about our lives taking it for granted and sort of ignoring the knocking. But then something happens. It'd be nice if were the lottery but it's usually not. Maybe it's something like a diagnosis you didn't want to hear. Or the death of a friend or parent, or loved one, or spouse. Or, God forbid, a child. Or maybe it's a baby being born in your life. A good thing or a wonderful thing. But something happens and you kind of think, "All of this time God has been wanting to have a relationship with me and I just ignore him."

"Behold I stand at the door and knock." Listen! Wake up!

In every Christmas pageant if you have the full blown pageant it has an innkeeper. You have to have an innkeeper there because we were taught - though the King James Version got it wrong - that Mary and Joseph came to Bethlehem and "there was no room for them in the inn."

So if you have an inn, you have to have an innkeeper, I guess.

The truth is that the word "inn" in Greek is the word *catalluma*. And that means, "guest room." It's the same word that's used for the Upper Room where Jesus and his disciples celebrate the Last Supper. They were not renting a banquet room in a hotel.

Here's the implication. Mary and Joseph didn't stay in a stable because all the motels were full. Mary and Joseph stayed in a stable because their extended family turned them away. That when they showed up at their family's house they said, "There's just no room for you."

Sometimes maybe Jesus just keeps knocking on our door and we are otherwise occupied. So what if we *beheld* that knocking? What if we experienced it as God's overture to us? I want to come and be born in your life.

So "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy!" "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." "Behold I stand at the door and knock."

My favorite poet is Wendall Barry. I don't know if you've read any of his writing. He's a Christian poet, I guess. But he has a poem that's called "Sabbaths" and it's a long poem. But I want to read to you just one stanza because it's been very powerful for me over the years.

He lives out in the country and works in his barn and things like that. This is about him going to his barn late at night. Here's how it goes:

"Knowing that it happened once, we cannot turn away the thought as we go out cold to our barns, toward the long night's end, that we are ourselves are living in the world that it happened in, when it first happened. That we ourselves opening a stall, a latch thrown open countless times before might find them breathing there. Foreknown, the child bedded in the straw, the mother kneeling over him, the husband standing in belief. He scarcely can believe. In light that lights them from no source we see. An April morning's light, the air around them joyful as a choir. We stand with one hand on the door, looking into another world that is this world, the pale daylight coming just as before. Our chores to do, the cattle all awake, our own white frozen breath hanging in front of us. And yet we are here as if we have never been before. Sided as not before. Our place only though we knew it not."

Friends, as you go back to your barns, your Christmas tables, your family gatherings, and into your cubicle at work. God has decided to be born right there in that place. Right there with you. It's holy ground. If we'll just open our eyes in wonder and amazement and behold God's glory. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.