

"Behold"
Christmas Eve
the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor
Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church

Luke 2:1-20 (KJV)

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them,

Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

¹⁶And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Prayer.

"Behold"
the angels proclaimed
to the quivering shepherds.

Behold: "to perceive
using visual or mental faculty"
the dictionary tells us,
"to look upon, or, to gaze."

Behold
we hear proclaimed this night
from pulpits across the land.
Look upon
gaze upon
Jesus.
Take it all in.
Take a good look
at your Savior
for this night
it is as if we can see
with crystal clarity
the baby denied
a warm hearth
by the inn's glowing fire.

In my feeble mind
skewed by gender's lens
it appears to me
that all babies look alike.
Tiny,
grumpy,
and with malformed heads;
giving testimony
to the violence of birth.
All of which
goes to prove
my point:
make the effort to
heed the angels
and follow the star;
take a good look
at the baby Jesus
born in a manger
in Bethlehem's barn
midst barnyard animals
feed and droppings.
This is the Savior
you and I depend upon.
This is the one
who will come to judge us.
This is our God
we will meet face-to-face
one day

on heaven's far shore.

Take a good look
and burn his image
into your memory.
Burn his story
into every brain cell in your body
that you might be prepared
on the day of accounting.

Each Christmas Eve
I anticipate
standing before you
to share the good news
of our Savior's birth.
To be completely honest
I also look forward to
the evening homily
with a sense of dread.
As a parish pastor
I am entrusted with
the spiritual guidance of my flock.
There is no responsibility
I take more seriously
than the care and guidance
of my people.
Like Easter, a large portion of
the flock are in attendance
this traditional evening.
I can not help but think
who before me
will this be
their last Christmas Eve?
Is it you?
Perhaps it could be mine?

Are
our houses in order?
Have you and I spent
all possible resources and effort
to prepare the way of the Lord?
to behold his image
that we might recognize him
and that he might know us?

In the absence of any candid
Kodak moment
we can only behold him
in context;
in the context of
his story,
the narrative
from prophecy
to birth
through ministry
to passion, suffering, and death
through resurrection
to ascension
through the work of his Holy Spirit
taking his church
apostolic and universal.

***If you know the story
if you believe in the story
and if you live a new life
as a result of the story
then you will recognize
Christ
on that grand and glorious day,
when judgment will be as grace
and salvation will be our prize.***

Life doesn't have to be perfect.
None of our lives are perfect.
This is the very point
why God went
to such great efforts
to step over the great divide
and into the shoes of humanity.
Jesus came to us
because we are broken
and imperfect.
Jesus was born
Bethlehem's baby
not to condemn the world,
but that the world
might be saved
through him.

Life doesn't have to be perfect,
but it does have to be changed.
It is not enough
simply to breath and consume,
to live life as if it was a grand party
then to die and return to the dust
of the earth.
Jesus asks of us
something more than
lip service.
Jesus asks us to recognize our
imperfections,
to repent of our imperfections,
and to strive for perfection,
as John Wesley would say,
"to go on to perfection."

Jesus is that perfection.
He is the source of all perfection.
He is the destination
of all that we are to strive for.
Simply put
Jesus wants us to know him
to have recognition of him
to know his story
and to relate to him
as a student relates to a teacher,
as a friend
relates to a friend.

It really is this simple.

"Behold"
we hear the angels proclaim
this Christmas Eve night.
Behold we hear
through trumpet, sax, and string.
Behold we hear
in song and carol
word and text.
Behold,
a savior is born.
Take a good, long look at him.

Learn his story.
Don't ever forget his face.
And if this is yours
or my last Christmas,
so be it.
We can rest assured
that our Savior
Christ the Lord
will take us by the hand
lift us up
and lead us home.

Behold,
my beloved.
Amen.