

## Behold the Child!

A sermonette based on Matthew 1:18-24.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

July 22, 2013. Does anyone know the significance of that date? On July 22, 2013, the British royal family welcomed their newest addition, Prince George. Do you know how they did it...announced his birth? Probably the most anticipated birth of at least the past decade, and the world found out Prince George Alexander Louis of Cambridge was born from a piece of paper placed on a gilded easel outside of Buckingham Palace. Is that what you would have expected? Now, to be fair, a couple of days after that, Prince William and Kate Middleton appeared outside the hospital with their little baby boy, but for the first announcement, they opted for following family tradition and a more low-key announcement.

Obviously, birth announcements been on our hearts recently. We haven't done the official announcement of Gabriella's birth (as in, it's not Facebook official yet, so it's not official), not because we don't want to, but because of Wisconsin adoption laws we're a little more hesitant. The best we've been able to do is me holding Gabriella out in the air (like this) at home, like in Lion King. I'll even start singing the intro song; Mara gets a good laugh about it. But, in a culture where everyone these days is trying to be as creative and as grandiose as they can be, ours so far has been rather muted and subdued.

This morning, we have Jesus, the Christchild. Our theme is "Behold the Child." And I don't know about you, but to me, that sounds like the Lion King, with all the animals gathering around Pride Rock to see little Simba being lifted into the sky for all to see. I think of the birth of a child in the royal line of David getting non-stop coverage on national news. Yes, you might say, "But the angels...I mean, how's that for a welcome?!?" And I'll give you that, but who was it to? A few shepherds...so even the most magnificent birth announcement ever was missed by most, even with the birth taking place in the little town of Bethlehem (which, yes, I know was a fairly insignificant place, but you know how quickly word can get around in small town, but not here).

Truth is, there wasn't a whole lot of notice. There wasn't a whole lot of beholding. And our verses from Matthew this morning kind of give off that vibe, don't they? And, we're not going to fault Matthew. He wrote as God led him to write...he wrote what God led him to write.

But here it is: Before the birth, Joseph finds out his bride, Mary, is pregnant. He didn't do that. But he's an honorable man. He still loves Mary and cares about Mary, so he has it in mind to divorce her quietly, so as to allow her to maintain some semblance of a reputation.

But then an angel enters the scene, in the middle of the night, when there's no one there but Joseph, and shares with him the wonderful reality surrounding Mary and the child she's carrying...it's from God. So, Joseph quickly takes her home as his wife (maybe they even skipped having the whole reception), and then we're simply told this, **"He had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus."**

There. That's it. No pomp. No circumstance. Definitely no beholding...no grand announcement. Just the simple truth.

You know, I think we still see some of that today...not a whole lot of beholding...as in, Christmas not getting a whole lot of notice. And you're thinking, "Huh? Stores have been advertising Christmas earlier than ever before...well before Halloween. Christmas music has been playing non-stop in my house since Thanksgiving. Our house is beautifully decorated to celebrate. Christmas is in the air."

Yes, again, I'll give you that, but my question is really this...what is this Christmastime (or, more PC, holiday season – so you can even start seeing it right there) what is this all about? Filling up on a year's worth of egg nog in one month? Getting the best bang for your buck shopping so you can give more? Parties with friends, cookie baking extravaganzas? Binge-watching your favorite Christmas movies, or, if you're more like my wife, whatever cheesy Christmas movies Lifetime and Hallmark have to offer?

And all of that is fine and good, except, for many, it's become so much about the spirit that it's takes the place of the child. Do you see that too?

We spend the whole Christmas season building up the special day, and it passes almost like a blip on the radar. For the month, you hear many talking about Jesus being the reason for the season, but then it's crickets for the rest of the year. You dress your best for one night, and that's it...I've done my duty. Now the rest of Christmas is for family...or I'll see you in the new year." We didn't have Advent worship this year, so did you find time in this busyness to reflect and focus on the true meaning of Christmas?

What is all this without the child born in Bethlehem? What is this life if there's no beholding or focus on and no living for Jesus...and doing that beyond the month of December?

But you're here...and I'm thankful for that. Because you're here to hear the simple truth...to gather to that stable and the manger scene to ***"see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."***

And you're here because that simple truth – this birth - has made the biggest impact in your life.

I know we're so focused today on Jesus making his appearance in this world as a child. And that's so important, because God becomes man to live with us...to live as one of us. But I'm also going to challenge you to look beyond birth...because it gets better. Look further down the road and behold Jesus on the cross.

Again, Matthew made it seem almost a passing comment...the baby was born, and he gave him the name Jesus. Do you remember why? Because ***"he will save his people from their sins."*** Jesus literally means, "he saves." John the Baptist even focused people there when he said, "Look (or behold)! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Jesus is the reason for the season...and for life, because of what he came to do. The simple message of the gospel is this: Jesus came to live for you, to die for you, to rise for you. Jesus came as a baby so he could become a man who would face temptations like us but never give in. Even better, Jesus came to save, which he did, the moment he cried, hanging from the cross, ***"It is finished!"*** Best of all, Jesus rose from the grave as a birth announcement of sorts...that because he lived, died, and rose for you, you will have new life with him in the glories of heaven.

What better gift is there than that? Hint...there's not! Because Jesus is the gift that keeps on giving...all the way to and into eternity.

And so, today, as these children share with you the story of Christmas, you'll behold your Savior born to you. But I would say – and encourage - keep coming back to behold...and not just in these next couple of days. Because, you see, the rest of the world is going to quickly shift their focus away from Christmas and Jesus and turn their lives back to the darkness and true hopelessness that exists without Jesus...but that's not you. Isaiah once wrote, ***'The people living in darkness have seen a great light'*** (Isaiah 9:2)...that's you.

Now, you've made a good start...again, you're here. But don't chalk it up as I'm good for a while. Keep coming back, throughout the year – throughout the rest of your years – to behold Jesus and his love given at the cross and his blood shed on the cross to save...and to forgive you....and to make you a member of his eternal family.

And maybe one more encouragement before the children come up. We still have a couple of days to make that last push to hold up the Christmas...to hold up the true meaning of Christmas for others in our lives to see. So, let's do that. Let's hand out some birth announcements (invitations) and invite people we care about to come so they, too, might experience what we will...that the Savior is born for you...for me...for all. And, it's ok to be excited. We're ready to celebrate. So, come and behold! Amen.