

Behold Your King!

Our Immanuel (Matthew 1:18-25)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on December 18, 2016

Introduction

- ❖ *Behold* is not a word we use with much frequency anymore. It's because it sounds antiquated. It sounds very King James-ish. Like Old English. Like thee and thou. No one talks like that anymore. But that's a shame. **Because there's no good modern-day equivalent for *behold*.**
 - ▶ Some translations use "look" but it just doesn't carry the same weight. When the biblical authors use *behold*, they don't just want you to look at something. They're not just saying, "Check this out" or "Look at this".
 - **They don't just want you to fix your attention on something. They want that thing to have a fix on *you*.** Whatever it is – they want it to grab your attention. To grab *you*. To have a hold on *you*. **To behold something is to be thoroughly held by it, for your attention to be thoroughly captured.**
- ❖ So when the Bible commands to behold your God (Isa. 40:8) or behold your King (Mt. 21:5; Zech. 9:9), it's not just about checking him out. It's not just about dedicating an hour on a Sunday morning to think about the King. You're commanded to "Behold your King!" in the sense of being thoroughly held by the beauty and compelling power of the King of kings and Lord of lords. **Behold Jesus – in the sense of being held by him.**
- ❖ That's what we're talking about in our Advent series. **So far we've been in the book of Isaiah, beholding the Messiah in seed form, in the form of promises.** Isaiah issued his prophecies during the time of Israel's decline in power and prominence. It was during a time when their very existence was threatened by foreign powers.
 - ▶ Eventually, we're told that their repeated failure to trust and obey God led to defeat and exile. They spent 70 long years in Babylonian captivity. And even after being released and allowed to return home, they remained under foreign rule. Gone were the glory days when a king of Israel sat on the throne.
 - **Now all this time, God would continue to send prophets in order to communicate with his people.** Major prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Minor prophets like Hosea, Haggai, Micah, and Malachi. **They spoke promises of an Anointed King (Messiah/Christ) that God would one day raise up to reclaim the throne and re-establish the kingdom.**
- ❖ But not long after their return, God stopped sending prophets. That means he stopped speaking to them. **Over 400 years went by without a prophet, without a word from the Lord.** 400 years passed between the close of the Old Testament and the start of the New. We're talking about 400 years of dark silence where God seemed very distant, very gone.
 - ▶ **But that's why the New Testament opens with Matthew and why Matthew issues the call over and over again to *behold*.** That's one of his favorite words. Out of the 200 instances of *behold* in the New Testament, almost a third appear in Matthew's Gospel alone (62). It's been so silent and so dark for so long. **But it's in this wasteland, in this wilderness, that a voice pierces through the silence crying, "Behold your King! Behold the Lamb of God!"**

- ❖ Church, as we behold this morning's passage, let your attention be captivated. Let your heart be held. Be held by our God and King. **That's my goal this morning: I want to help you behold the circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth that you might be held closer by him.** It's a familiar passage. You probably hear it recited every year around this time of year.
 - ▶ I've divided it into three sections. First, behold the scandal of Jesus' birth. Second, behold the mystery of his conception. And third, behold the aim of his given name.

Behold the Scandal of His Birth

- ❖ Let's begin by beholding the scandal surrounding the birth of the Christ. It's recorded for us in vv18-19, *"¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly."*
 - ▶ We're told of the events from Joseph's perspective. It says that during the period of his betrothal to Mary she was found to be with child. **The betrothal period was similar to engagement but with an even greater commitment and expectation.** It was essentially the first in a two-part stage to getting married back in antiquity. The betrothal would last for a year while the bride remained in her father's house.
- ❖ There was no physical consummation at this point. **So when Mary is found to be pregnant, Joseph draws the only reasonable conclusion: My betrothed was unfaithful and had sexual relations with another.** That, according to Mosaic Law, called for her death (Deut. 22:23-24). But remember, by their day, the Jews were under Roman rule, so they had no legal right to carry out the death penalty for violations of Mosaic Law (otherwise they would've executed Jesus themselves and would've had no need to bring him to Pilate).
 - ▶ **But regardless, Mary's life is at risk.** If she doesn't face immediate death, she'll certainly face ostracism. She'll be shunned as a social pariah. And as a single mother in antiquity, you're as good as dead. You'll be banished from your father's home. No man will marry you. So they'll be no one to support you and your child. You can't just go get a job and support yourself. It didn't work like that back then.
 - So at this point, the baby bump is showing. There's no way around it. **This young girl from Nazareth, who didn't do anything wrong, is nonetheless shrouded in shame.**
- ❖ Now fortunately Joseph is among the noblest of men. It says in v19 that he was a just man and did not want to put her to shame. **That means he didn't want to drag her to court and make a public spectacle of her.** Being a just man, he knew he couldn't consummate the marriage for she was (by his rational assumption) an adulteress. But he planned to divorce her quietly. The Law simply required him to hand her a bill of divorce in the presence of two witnesses (Deut. 24:1). It didn't have to be in court or at the city gate in front of everyone.
 - ▶ **But even if he's discreet about the divorce procedures, there's still no way to hide the baby growing in her womb.** The truth will out. Very soon everyone will learn that the marriage is off and that Mary is pregnant with someone else's baby.

- ❖ So there's no way for her *not* to eventually be put to shame. Unless. **Unless Joseph is willing to do the unimaginable – to swallow his pride, to bear the hurt, and to cover her shame – by going through with the marriage.** And that's what he eventually does.
 - ▶ But before we move on to see that, let's stop and think about why it was so important for Jesus to have an earthly father like Joseph. God the Father felt it was necessary to entrust his only begotten Son into the care of Joseph the Nazarene carpenter.
 - Why? **Because God wanted Joseph to train and prepare Jesus for his future vocation. Not as a carpenter. But as One would grow up to bear the hurt and cover the shame of a countless many.** That is Jesus' true vocation. To be our Savior. To cover our shame of our sin that we may not be put to shame on the Day of Judgment.

- ❖ Think about it. **Jesus grew up watching his earthly father love on his mom.** He knew all that Joseph sacrificed for Mary. He knew the hurt that Joseph must have felt when he found out about the pregnancy. He knew Joseph absorbed that hurt and did not lash out in righteous anger. **He knew the cost that Joseph bore to go through with the marriage anyway, in order to cover his wife's shame, so that she could keep her honor and dignity.** Jesus saw it growing up. He had an amazing example in his earthly dad, and that prepared him for his eventual work – his cross work on behalf of sinners like us.

- ❖ **Friends, you and I have plenty to be ashamed about.** We have all sinned in thought, word, and deed. Some of it's public, and we're already feeling the shame of those failures. But much of our sin is private. Maybe no one but yourself knows about it. For now at least.
 - ▶ Because the truth will out. **One day all of our sins, even the most secret of them, will be laid bare before the Judgment Seat of God.** Not one will be missed. The devil himself, the great Accuser, will personally ensure that every sin will be there to condemn you and put you to shame.
 - That's why you need a Savior. **One who doesn't shy away from scandal and shame but rather chooses to be born into it.** You might be tempted to think that Jesus would want nothing to do with you if knew what's in your mind and in your heart. But he already does. And he stands ready to cover your shame. So come to him. Draw near to him and he will draw near to you.

Behold the Mystery of His Conception

- ❖ Behold the scandal of his birth – that's our first point. Next, behold the mystery of Jesus' conception. In v20, an angel of the Lord is sent to Joseph to explain the mystery of the conception of this baby in Mary's womb. I'm sure she already tried to explain what the angel Gabriel told her about the Holy Spirit coming upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowing her (Lk. 1:35).
 - ▶ **I'm certain she tried to explain that the baby came directly from God.** But I don't blame Joseph. That's hard to believe. That's why God felt it necessary to send an angel to Joseph in a dream saying, *“Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”*

- ❖ So that's it. That which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. You can still marry her, Joe. She's still a virgin. She didn't sleep with another man. **This is a virgin conception. It's a miracle.** Later in v23, Matthew says this all took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet Isaiah in chapter 7:14, "*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son*".
- ❖ Friends, this is no peripheral claim. That is *not* an unessential issue as some have claimed it to be. **I've been disappointed to read of Christian teachers and preachers who try to minimize the importance of Mary's status as a virgin.** They say it makes no difference to their faith in Jesus if he had a biological father.
 - ▶ The argument usually consists of pointing out that the Hebrew word for virgin (*almah*) in Isaiah 7 is more accurately translated as a young woman of marriageable age. That's led some to suggest that Isaiah was not expecting the Messiah to come from a virgin. And that may be true.
 - But when the Hebrew OT was translated into Greek by ancient Jewish scholars into what we know as the *Septuagint*, they specifically used *parthenos*, the Greek word for *virgin*. And when Matthew wrote v23 he cites from the *Septuagint*, meaning he's completely comfortable using a word that specifically means *virgin*. He knows how crazy that sounds. But that's his understanding of what happened – a virgin gave birth.
- ❖ **And that belief directly informs our other belief in the dual nature of Jesus as both Son of God and Son of Man – fully God, fully man.** That's the historic, biblical position on the singular personhood and dual nature of Jesus Christ. It's a doctrine strengthened and secured by a virgin conception.
 - ▶ Think about it. If Jesus had not been born of a human mother, we might have questioned his full humanity. And yet if he were conceived like everyone else – through the conjugal union of a human father and mother – then we'd question his full divinity. **It's a virgin conception that strengthens and secures our conviction that Jesus is both fully God and fully man.**
- ❖ Now think about the implications of this. Let me offer two. One is direct. The other is more indirect, and you may not have considered it before. We'll start with that one. So think about this with me: **If Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, then it's not like there was already an embryo inside Mary's womb and then the Incarnation took place at some later stage of gestation when the Spirit came upon it.**
 - ▶ Rather what took place is that the Holy Spirit actually created a human embryo inside Mary. The Incarnation occurred at conception. **That means the Son of God was once a microscopic embryo. Now that fact alone gives dignity to every human being in the embryonic stage of life.**
- ❖ So think about it. **If the Son of God's incarnate life began at conception, then it's safe to say that all human life begins at conception.** If Jesus was once an embryo, then how can we justify treating any embryo as mere human tissue or simple surgical waste?

- ▶ I think it's obvious where I'm going with this. **One of the indirect implications of the virgin conception is that it strengthens a pro-life conviction by rooting it in the strongest argument of all, Jesus.**

- ❖ With all that's going on in our culture over the sanctity of life at its earliest and most vulnerable stage, it would be amiss if I did draw the connection, be it indirect. But here's the direct implication: **The virgin conception makes Jesus unique above all saviors.** He stands apart as the perfect mediator, the only mediator, between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5).
 - ▶ The Scriptures teach that there's a great divide between God and mankind, a deep hostility due to the offense of our sin against the purity of his holiness. And there's nothing we can do to reconcile ourselves to God. We desperately need a mediator.

- ❖ Now think about what a mediator does. A mediator brings two disputing parties together. He helps to achieve reconciliation. **And the best kind of mediator is the kind that can fully represent both parties, who perfectly understands both sides.** Now that's already difficult to achieve in most disputes, but if we're dealing with hostility between God and man, then it's downright impossible to find a mediator that fully represents both. Unless. Unless he's a God-man. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, fully God and fully man.
 - ▶ Jesus is the best of all mediators. So look no further. Conclude your search. He's the only one who can reconcile you to God because he's the only Savior who is God incarnate, God made man.

Behold the Aim of His Given Name

- ❖ So we've beheld the scandal of Jesus' birth and the mystery of his conception. Now to our third and final point, behold the aim of his given name. He's actually given two names. If we keep reading in v21, the angel continues to instruct Joseph in a dream saying, *"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."*

- ❖ Joseph's plan was to not go through with the marriage, but now this dream changes everything. He ends up taking Mary to be his wife and he ends up naming the baby Jesus. And in that culture the act of naming a baby is how father declares his acceptance of a child as his own. **By naming Jesus, by essentially adopting him, Joseph confers legal status upon the child.** He is now a legitimate heir.
 - ▶ Now being poor, Joseph doesn't have much to give, but what he does have matters immensely in the grand scheme of God's plan of redemption. **Because Joseph accepted him, Jesus now has a legitimate claim to David's throne.** He is – just as his adoptive father was called in v20 – a legitimate Son of David.

- ❖ I think it's cool that Jesus was an adopted child. **In the same way he dignifies the embryo, Jesus dignifies the adopted child and affirms the "realness" of adoption.** No one argues that he's less real of a son of Joseph compared to his brothers and sisters, to Joseph's biological offspring with Mary. **Just as it's important to root our pro-life convictions in Jesus, we ought to do the same when it comes to our appreciation of adoption.**

- ❖ But besides dignifying adoption, I think there's a deeper theological point being made here in Jesus' adoption. **The fact that he has no human father is highlights the theological point that salvation doesn't come from man but from God alone.** Scripture could not be any more clear in demonstrating this. Just as this child was conceived not by the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God (Jn. 1:13) – so too is our salvation. **Saving is God's prerogative. We cannot save ourselves.**
 - ▶ That point is reinforced by the name the child is given. **Jesus literally means “The LORD saves”.** It's the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name Joshua. It was a common name in those days just as common as Joshua might have been.
 - But while most kids were named Jesus to commemorate God's saving acts on behalf of his people in the distant past, this Jesus – born to Mary and adopted by Joseph – has a name that points forward to what God will accomplish through him to save us all from our sins.

- ❖ Unlike the saviors of other religions and worldviews, Jesus didn't just achieve an exemplary life, modeling what it looks like to live conscious of God on a daily basis, to live a moral and unselfish life. **He didn't just show us the way to live in a relationship with God.**
 - ▶ **No, Jesus came to be the Way.** To be the one mediator who perfectly lives the life we should've and could've lived if not for our sins AND who humbly dies the death we deserve to die because of our sins.

- ❖ To be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus, but that requires you to first follow him to the cross. **At the cross you learn just how horrible your sin is** that it would require something as horrific as a bloody cross to atone. **But at the cross you also learn just how loving God is** that he would send his only begotten Son to die in your stead – that if you so believe in him you will not perish but be granted forgiveness and life everlasting. **Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, is the Way and the only Way the LORD saves.**

- ❖ That's the aim of his name. But there's another name he's given. Did you notice that in v23? According to Isaiah's prophecy, the Christ will be called “*Immanuel (which means, God with us).*” Now there's no record of anyone in the Gospels addressing him as Immanuel, so it wasn't used as a first name like Jesus. But he certainly fulfilled the prophetic expectation.
 - ▶ Jesus is God with us in such a real sense that even Isaiah couldn't not fathom. God with us. That's what makes Christianity so special. **Christianity is not just here to offer you good advice on how to be closer to God. No, it offers good news about how God broke into human history – into humanity itself – to be closer to you.**
 - All religions encourage their followers to become more like God. But only Christianity offers a God who first becomes like you. Who again lives that life you should live and dies that death you should die. And he offers his life and death to you as a gift – a free gift to be received by faith alone.

- ❖ Let's conclude by looking back at v24. *“²⁴When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.”*
 - ▶ Remember, Joseph was faced with a seemingly impossible decision. I'm sure his close family and friends tried to convince him to let her go. They probably told him that it's not his fault. That he doesn't owe her anything. Taking her to be your wife based on a dream? Come on, that's ridiculous. Be sensible, Joe. Be realistic.

- ❖ But this is what faith looks like. **This is what trusting God looks like. You count the cost and it pales in comparison to the gain of having Jesus in your life.** Joseph stepped forward in faith believing he was going to literally, physically gain Christ, in the form of a baby swaddled in his arms.
 - ▶ Friends, you if do the same, if you step forward in faith, you'll gain Christ as well, in the form of a Lord and Savior who will hold you in his arms. Behold you King in faith and you will be held by him.