

Behold His Glory, Full of Grace and Truth

By: Stephanie Doeschot

December 24, 2019. The prophet Isaiah says a little child shall lead them. The way that children interpret nativity scenes can demonstrate that. Pastor Stephanie's message this Christmas Eve is about beholding Jesus, full of grace and truth, in and around the world.

*** Transcript ***

Grace and peace from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate together this evening.

A year ago I was invited back to the prior church that my husband Phil and I served, to speak at the installation of a pastor who succeeded us. My job was to give the "charge" to the congregation, a part of the service that acknowledges the partnership between pastor and congregation, urging the congregation to play its role well. Of course, I read the formulary that is part of the official installation rite. But I also had the freedom to speak personally, and so I did. Because it was early in Advent, and I had been reading the same John 1 portion that we often read this time of year, my head and heart were full of this phrase: we beheld his glory -- glory, as of the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. So I exhorted the church receiving their new pastor to continue to emulate the grace and truth they saw in Jesus. Come to think of it, that would be the same thing I'd encourage Christ Lutheran Church, as soon you will be welcoming your new pastor, following the lead of the one who is full of grace and truth. It doesn't get any better than that.

Tonight we are beholding Jesus. Our plan for this hour is just that simple. We came to see and experience something of his grace and truth. Now, we don't use the verb "behold" very often anymore. I'm not much of a fan of using antiquated language to communicate to 21st century people, but there are some words that I just hang onto because we don't have any one word in the English language to replace them. "Behold" is one such word. Whenever it is used in the biblical text, it is a commanding word. That means we should pay very close attention. The Gospel of John, chapter 1 says the "Word [Jesus] became flesh and dwelt among us . . . we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth." In that context, the word "beheld" means we have contemplated the full impact of his glory. That was the testimony of the early disciples. Well we have not merely noticed it, they're saying. We have wondered about it. We have marveled over it. His glory, his essence is full of grace and truth, the likes of which we see nowhere else. Beholding his glory, contemplating its meaning and marveling at it, requires our full attention.

A few weeks ago, I saw a photo on Instagram from a young pastor in Michigan who is my friend Monica. She and her husband Steve have three young children. She wrote that they had setup a nativity set on their coffee table that had all the traditional characters, made of unbreakable materials. It was a set designed for young children to handle, to reenact the story of the shepherds and the sheep coming near to baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph, with an angel nearby -- all of the main characters. You get the picture. But the photo Monica shared was of a scene that she and Steve were surprised and delighted to see a few days after the nativity had been brought out and setup. The children had added some of their own toy figures to this diorama. Spider-Man was there. So was Elsa from Frozen. There was a pirate, Marshall from Paw Patrol, and some dinosaurs. That photo prompted some good comments from friends, as you might well imagine. One reported that his son had added a pig to his own little nativity set. Now the dad's comment was that he hoped his son knew that even though a good Jewish family wouldn't eat it, the pig was welcomed as one of God's creatures, to come and see, to behold this newborn king -- a baby like no other. Apparently the children saw that everyone needed to be there.

Something special was going on in the birth of Jesus. In their own little minds and spirits, they beheld something of his glory, of his grace and of his truth. The "gift of God made flesh and dwelt among us" was for every kind of person and every creature. They seemed to realize that every type of character was welcome to come, to be near the newborn king.

Now, you may be familiar with a verse that comes from the prophet Isaiah that says a little child shall lead them. There's a lot of wisdom in that. The way that children interpret nativity scenes can demonstrate that. Monica and Steve's children perceived that there is something magnetic about this story, this truth, that God has come near. And we all must check this out, behold it, see it for ourselves. Poor shepherds, influential kings, and all types of people in between, are drawn to come and behold the one who embodied grace in all its fullness.

That got me to recalling something else that happened when our own children were young and their nativity set was out for them to play with. Sometimes, when it was time to pack up the nativity to put it back in the box until next year, the baby Jesus would be missing. Well, we'd look and look, and we'd find him in the midst of other toys that were also precious to our sons. It seems that they innately knew that Jesus had to be out into the mix of real life, not contained to one time or place. To really see Jesus is to behold him in and around the world. Beholding the coming of the one who came to dwell among us is also to see the truth of who he is and what is important to him. He came to this troubled world to shed the light of his truth through the entire world, for its salvation.

We have come together tonight to behold him. In the readings, the carols, the candlelight, we experience his grace and truth, and that is very satisfying. Will we also see him as we go out into the world which he loves so much? Will we behold him in our everyday lives in the coming days? Will his grace and truth illuminate the way we see the challenges in our jobs, or hear the political bickering going on, or notice the inequities in our city that keep people from flourishing? Will his grace and truth mend our impaired relationships, bring balance to our overstressed lives, and shine a light of love, allowing us to relax, receive, step into the stream of God's ever-present goodness, and be agents of his love toward others?

The people who walked in darkness have beheld a great light. Those who lived in a land of deep darkness -- on them and on us a light has shined. Friends, let us be drawn to this light like a child before the scene of Christ's birth. We have beheld him in his glory, full of grace and truth. By his grace, may we continue to do it every day and every year.

Thanks be to God.

*** Keywords ***

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