

THE THREE VERBS OF CHRISTMAS - COME, BEHOLD, ADORE

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Probably the best known of all Christmas Carols - "***O Come, All Ye Faithful***" - contains **three verbs** which describe a course of action. It's not primarily a **doctrinal** hymn, though there is great truth described. No one would rank the depth of theology along side of **Charles Wesley's "Hark the Herald Angels Sing."** There is simply nothing else like that theological manifesto of Christmas anywhere in the history of the church.

Yet, "***O Come, All Ye Faithful***" has it's own place of greatness. What shall we Christians **do** when we understand the glory of Christ's birth. How shall we celebrate Christmas **like Christians?**

"COME!" - "BEHOLD!" - "ADORE!" It's not complicated. But it's rich. **Frederick Oakeley** wrote down in music what he thought people should do upon hearing the old story of Christmas again and again. And two hundred years later, the world remembers the carol but, sadly, the world for the most part, has ignored the instructions.

Let's quickly go over them again tonight"

- 1) **"COME"** - Immediately we're reminded **not just to hear**. There is something deeper than **information** needed. We are being urged **near**. All must **come**. There is not a simpler message in the world than that. **There's something here that must not be missed. Put down whatever else you're doing and just come!**

When you stop and think about it this idea gets reinforced in the Christmas story we all know and love:

IPAD TEXT - Matthew 2:1-2 - "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem {2} and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and *have come to worship him.*"

Then you find the fascinating account of the Shepherds and their angelic visitation. Luke's is the only gospel account of this strange event:

IPAD TEXT - Luke 2:8-15 - "And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. [9] And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. [10] And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. [12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, [14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" [15] *When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."*

I was actually reading a Christmas account by Karl Barth. He's a very densely theological writer and I had no great expectations. I was simply trying to read someone who probably gets little attention by evangelicals thinking about practical Christmas truth.

Suddenly I bumped into his simple observation that at no point in Luke's detailed account are the shepherds **commanded** to go to the manger. They are told **how to recognize the baby if they go** (12). But Luke labours to make it clear the shepherds **made the decision themselves to go to the Christ** - **Luke 2:15** - "**When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."** - IPAD TEXT.

We **need** to make the bold decision to come to the Christ. This is not the **natural** response of sinful people to a holy God. Remember Adam and Eve when they sinned in the garden? Fleeing is a more natural response for people like us than coming.

Note those words of the wise men - "**We have come to worship Him**". What made them come? There was no recorded message in the star - no voice that said, "**Now make sure you get up and come!**"

We know these wise men had been studying the prophetic Scriptures about the coming Messiah. Why wasn't it enough just to **know** the secret of Jesus' birth. Clearly, the voice they heard wasn't in the stars. **It was in their hearts**. There was an inner compulsion to **get up and come to the side of Jesus**. God initiates and invites that kind of contact.

And yet, that's not the most striking part of the **coming** of these wise men. We've all cut our teeth on the New Testament Christmas story. We've heard of these "**wise men**" for so long - perhaps even acted them out in Sunday School Christmas **pageants** - dressed up in house coats and turbans- for so long we don't get the striking point.

These **wise men** (we assume there were three) were not so called because of their intelligence. They consulted the stars. They did all those things that were called "**abominations**" in the Old Testament. And just what are **they** doing at the side of newly born God the Son - the same God who inspired all those wrath-filled Old Testament texts condemning people like the Wise men?

It seems like there's a mistake made here - some kind of poor planning on the part of the Trinity. At the very least, the optics don't appear right. I mean, who would you invite to the manger if you were God? Billy Graham or a fortune teller? What is God up to here? Why does He invite the fortune teller

It's no mistake. It puts on vivid display the **purpose** of the baby's birth. This will be, perhaps, the most famous story in the whole world and God wants **rescue** to be at the center of it.

Maybe you need this call today. "**Just come!** Reject that voice in the back of your head that says, "It can't be this simple." It **is** this simple. **There's Someone here you can't deny. Someone you can't ignore. Someone who will reach and transform your heart. Just come and give Jesus a chance!"**

- 2) **"BEHOLD"** - We don't use that word much anymore. It's highly descriptive. It's not just **looking** or **seeing**. **It's looking with effort. It's seeing with perception.** It's seeing with the intent of **getting the point**. It's seeing until you've factually **understood**. **It's seeing in slow motion.**

You've had some experience with this, I'm sure. It's like a teacher who makes you go over your own math paper until you **see** where you've made your mistake. Suddenly the lights go on. You suddenly get what's going on. Maybe you even wonder how you could have missed it up to that point.

That's the summons of this carol's call to "**behold.**" We're told to study this baby. On the surface this looks like any other poor little newborn baby. But that's just a surface glance. **This is a baby like no other.** That's why we sing Joy to the World, the Lord has come!"

Yes, but try to **behold.** Ask the important questions. Take it all in. **Why has he come?** What's going on in this great event?

IPAD TEXT - Hebrews 10:5, 12-14 - "Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, *but a body have you prepared for me....*[12] But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, [13] waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. [14] For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified."

These are Christ's **own words.** In an astounding passage of Scripture we get to listen in on a holy, triune conversation **before** the Incarnation. This is Jesus' understanding on the **reason** for what He is about to undertake in becoming one of us.

Look carefully at that fifth verse of Hebrews 10 - "**....a *body you have prepared for me....***" "**Behold**" those words carefully. Jesus **needed a body to offer Himself as a sacrifice for my sin - and your sin.** You can't pound nails through a spirit. Only a physical body can bleed and die. Only an Incarnate Savior can redeem mankind.

Over a hundred years before "**O Come, All Ye Faithful**" another hymn writer, **Issac Watts**, caught the same thought in "**When I Survey The Wondrous Cross**" It's that word, "**survey**" that bids attention. It's another "**behold**" word. You've seen a surveyor at work. They examine everything from every angle. They take measurements. They write down recordings.

That's the call of **beholding**. When you look carefully at Jesus this is what you will see - **the one who came down from heaven to die for your sins**. This world really is called to think Christmas through. What are we going to do with this Jesus?

- 3) **"ADORE"** - The plea to **come** addresses **my feet**. The plea to **behold** addresses **my mind**. The plea to **adore** cries out to **my heart**. This baby isn't sent to dress up Christmas cards or satisfy curiosity. **We are to end up on our knees**. We must end up just where those three Wise Men ended up - **bowing in wonder and worship**. We are to surrender our wills and our hearts and our lives.

To those who **come** and **behold** and **adore** Him as Lord the hymn writer very insightfully marks out **two distinguishing characteristics: "O Come, all ye faithful, JOYFUL and TRIUMPHANT."**

- a) **Their lives are marked by JOY** - They found more than just another baby in that manger. They found what they themselves were created for. They discovered their heart's desire, though they probably never imagined it could be so before they came.
- b) **They are called TRIUMPHANT** - I don't think this means they never had another sorrow or trial or problem. Life still has to be lived in this real world.

But two unbeatable enemies were finally defeated - two great robbers of joy were overcome. For those who would come and behold and adore the inward, muffled haunt of guilt was gone. And the unescapable end of death was vanquished.

Blessed are those who don't need more wispy, empty wishes for better world. We have a truly triumphant Redeemer and Lord. He alone can bring meaning to the words, for as long as we're still allowed to say them, "Merry Christmas!"