



Sermon – 12/11/2022
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Verses Covered

*Matthew 1:18 -
Luke 1:34 - 35*

Let's open our Bibles together back to the book of Matthew chapter 1. We're going to start in Matthew 1:18 this morning. If you're a guest with us, whether you're in the room or catching us on video, welcome home. We're right in the middle of a series called The Weary World Rejoices. And it doesn't take much convincing to know that the world all around us is weary. I saw some statistics earlier this week that said, coming into the holidays, 41%, 4 out of 10 of you in the room and in our community, say that the holiday season is more stressful than most other times of the year. On top of that, 3 out of 10, 31% said that they feel more stressed, more worry, more weariness this Christmas season than last year. So, do you walk in here feeling weary this morning? Did you show up a bit worried today? Our text has a word for us.

You remember last week, we came to the start of Matthew 1 and we saw that the hope of Christmas is rooted in the promise of Jesus. Now, this week what we're going to find is that the hope of Christmas is rooted in the presence of Jesus and that presence gives us hope in the midst of our hopelessness. That presence offers us rest in the midst of a weary world. So, let's pick up the text now. Starting in verse 18, we're going to work our way down through the end of the chapter and here's what Matthew tells us.

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. ²⁰But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him 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. ²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: ²³"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). 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.

Let's pray together now.

Father, that's what we're doing right now. Calling on the name of Jesus. Asking for You to meet us in this moment and to take this familiar passage and make it fresh to us. Give us a clearer sense of who You are, what You've done for us in Your Son, the way that You have given us His presence as a provision in the of our problems. Lord, I pray that You would clear away the distractions, the deceptions, and all the things that would set themselves up against You so that we can experience the power of Your Spirit in our hearts right now. We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, you know, during the Christmas season, it's as if the Christmas story is all around us. And sometimes it shows up in places you don't expect it at all. And that happened last week in the aftermath of an NBA game during the post-game press conference for the Boston Celtics. You see, Prince, Kate Middleton and Prince William from England had come over to the States and they were visiting Boston and they went to a Boston Celtics game. In fact, the coverage said that they were sitting on the front row. And when the Jumbotron showed their picture on the screen, the host, the fans enchanting USA. USA. But what made the big headlines wasn't what happened on the court or on the front row. But what happened when the Boston Celtics coach, Joe Missoula, was asked about it afterwards. He was asked did you get to meet the royal family? Did you have any interaction with them while they were there at the game? And I want you to turn your attention to the video and just watch the way the coach responds to this question. Let's check out what he said to the reporter.

Did you get a chance to meet with the royal family and if not, how was it like having them there in the building? Jesus, Mary, and Joseph? The prince and princess of Wales. Oh, no. I did not. I'm only familiar with one royal family. I don't know too much about that one. But I'm glad they're, hopefully they're Celtic fans.

I'm only familiar with one royal family. I mean, talk about a mic drop moment. Anytime you get to make a mockery of the British royalty and include Jesus in a post-game press conference, you've succeeded in sharing the story of Jesus during this Christmas season. And he talks about Mary, Joseph, and Jesus as this royal family. But my guess is, in the time period that they lived, if anybody were to look at Joseph and Mary, they would have thought of them as anything but a royal family. Two peasants scraping by to make ends meet. A poor working class family living paycheck to paycheck. Engaged but not yet married. It would not have seemed as if there was the royalty that was there. One of the dangers that can happen in our context as we look at this familiar story is we can assume that Joseph and Mary knew everything about what's happening that we now know. That when they find out the Holy Spirit has come upon Mary that they actually know what the Holy Spirit is. That when Joseph sees her belly starting to show and he asked her about it and she tells him that she's with child that he immediately responds by starting to sing, It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas. We think they've got a sense of the picture here that they don't. They don't understand all that we know in the moment. They're experiencing this in a way that changes them forever. And the source of that change, the cause of that transformation is a miracle rooted in a mystery that brings new meaning. And that meaning changes everything for Mary and Joseph back then and it changes everything for you and I today.

So, let's begin to work our way through this passage by looking first at the miracle of Christmas. You'll notice it back beginning in verse 18 that this passage unpacks one of the most significant miracles in all of the Bible. The virgin birth of Jesus. And for modern people, this idea that a woman could become with child without another man involved seems crazy. But it would have been just a shocking back in that time period. Unexpected, unexplainable. But that virgin birth is at the heart of the Christian faith. In fact, I love the way that a British pastor named Glenn Scribner puts it. He says, "Christians believe in the virgin birth of Jesus. Atheists believe in the virgin birth of the universe. Choose your miracle." Choose your miracle. We see a miracle on display right here. A miracle that changes everything for us. And you'll notice that when we look through the text, this miracle of Christmas overcomes our sin. That's why verse 18 tells us that Joseph and Mary are betrothed. They're engaged. It's like he went down to the local mall. He bought the ring. He dropped the knee. They had the engagement party. They posted the pictures on Instagram. They're in that moment. The marriage is coming. But then he is hit with a shocking reality. Look back at the end of verse 18. It says,

¹⁸....before they came together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

And there's not a lot of detail about how this process works. But I want you to see on the screen the way that Luke describes this in Luke chapter 1, beginning in verse 34. Here's the way he talks about what takes place.

³⁴And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child will be born will be called holy – the Son of God.

So, we don't know exactly how it happens but we know that the text tells us that Holy Spirit will overshadow or come upon to eclipse and that is the source of this miraculous conception. And what happens is the super new, supernatural movement of God breaks into the natural world and it changes everything. That's what the miracle of Christmas is all about. So, why this miracle? Why did we need a virgin birth? Well, God sends His Son through the Virgin Mary in order to confront our deepest need. Our greatest problem. And what is that? It's our sin. That our sin has separated us from God. It's brought us judgement that we deserve. And in the miracle of Christmas, God makes a way for you and for me. And this miracle that he performs through the virgin birth creates a pathway for our salvation in several ways. For one, it ensures a sinless Savior. You see, if Jesus was born of man, then that original sin that started with Adam and Eve in the garden that's been passed down for every generation since then would have affected him as well. He couldn't be born of man in order to beat sin. He would have had a sinful nature. But it's not just that He's a sinless Savior, But that He's a sufficient Savior. He is both fully man and fully God. And that's accomplished through this virgin birth. The fact that He is born of a woman shows that He's fully man. The fact that He is conceived by the Holy Spirit shows that He is fully God. And unless He was fully God and fully man, He would not be a sufficient Savior. But it also shows us He's a sovereign Savior. I mean, just think about it. The God of the universe could have brought redemption from sin in any way he wanted. He could have sent forth His Son by any means He chose. He could've made Him the son of the most prominent king and queen in the land. He could have brought him back like he will at his second coming on a white horse in victory. But instead the new creation dawns in the womb of a peasant. By God's intention, God's design, He brings about the new creation by His Spirit. Why? Because how Jesus came into the

world, then, reminds us of how He comes into our hearts today. By the power of the Spirit, he makes us a new creation. What was empty is now filled and made new. That is the reason for the miracle of Christmas. It overcomes our sin.

But verse 19 also shows us that the miracle of Christmas overcomes our shame. So pick back up in the text there with me when it says,

¹⁹And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly.

Now, put yourself in Joseph's shoes for a minute here. Everything is moving along great in your relationship. You're headed towards marriage. And all of a sudden, you learn that she is with child and wouldn't you be undone? You would have every reason to assume that she has been unfaithful to you. And therefore, she is worthy of deep shame and scorn. But the text tells us there, he is a just man. He determines that he's going to divorce her but he's going to do it quietly. Normally, in that time period, betrothal was a legally binding commitment and it could only be dissolved by going to the courts and putting someone to public shame. But he doesn't want to do that. He knows that there's another more private way to end it before two witnesses. But you can just imagine he's, maybe he made a list of pros and cons, should I stay or should I go? Maybe talked about it with family and friends. I don't know all the reasons that are there, but he ultimately reaches conclusion. She needs to head to the transfer portal. She's not fit for this marriage. And for a moment through his decision as a just man to release her quietly, he covers over her shame for a short period of time. And in that small glimpse, we get a greater picture of what the son of Joseph, Jesus himself would do for you and me. That in the cross of Jesus Christ, He doesn't just cover our shame for a moment but for a lifetime. That guilt that wrecks us from our secret sin, from the ways we've fallen short, from all the pain we know we've caused to others and to ourselves, He takes that shame and replaces it with His salvation. And He does it through the same type of miracle we see at work right here at Christmas. But you'll notice as the text keeps going, down in verse 20, that the miracle of Christmas doesn't just overcome our sin and our shame. It also overcomes our suspicion. We see that overcoming of suspicion down in verse 20 when it tells us,

²⁰But as Joseph considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him 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.

You see, Joseph would've had every reason in the world to be suspicious. When she says, "No, no, no, no, let me explain. It's not what you think." He wasn't buying what she was selling. But the text tells us here, it uses this word right in the middle of verse 20. Do you see it there? It's called behold. This word behold, Matthew uses over 60 times in his Gospel. And each time it shows up, it should cause us to pause because it's like a spotlight focusing our attention on what's about to take place. And what takes place here is that this angel of the Lord shows up and he confronts Joseph in his suspicion and he points him in a different direction. You see, Joseph was seeing his situation from his own perspective, not from God's perspective. And what happens is we get caught up in suspicion about how the world works when we see things the way that we see from our perspective instead of seeing it the way we should see it from God's perspective. And the angel who opens his eyes, he shows him that this child was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And

in that moment, he embraces the miracle of Christmas and it changes everything. It helps them to see the way that Christmas sets us free from our sin, from our shame, from our suspicion.

But the only reason that the miracle of Christmas can change us in that way is because of the second reality we see in the text picking up in verse 21. We'll notice next. The second big idea in the text is the mystery of Christmas. And we see that mystery on display beginning in verse 21. You see this passage doesn't just talk about the miracle of Christmas. It talks about the mystery of Christmas. That what was hidden is now revealed. What was unclear is now made clear. The longing that Israel had for hundreds of years; that God would raise up a Savior, a deliverer, a Messiah, a King. It's now coming true. In this child embedded in the womb of this woman. And right here in verses 21 through 23, we see a couple of dimensions about this mystery. You'll notice to begin with it, Christmas reveals the mystery that God is for us. That's why verse 21 tells us

²¹She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save his people from their sins.

So, last week, when we were going through the genealogy, we heard name after name after name after name from that time period. And for outsiders that might have looked at the naming of Jesus and just that Joseph and Mary were two doting parents thumbing their way through an ancient baby name book. Should it be Adam? Uh. Noah. Jehoshaphat, Ahaz, Josiah. How about Jesus? Jesus has a good ring to it. No. Why is His name to be Jesus? The text tells us there's a purpose behind the mystery. And the purpose as you'll see there at the end of verse 21 is He will save His people from their sin. In other words, even in the name of this miracle child, it's a declaration of the mystery that's been revealed. That God is for us. The one who has every reason to be against us, to bring judgement upon us, because our sins have fallen short of His glory. Instead, sends His Son to us to make a way for us. Maybe that's what you need to hear this morning. That the God of the universe is not against you today. You look around your life. The disappointments the bitterness, the cynicism, the unmet expectations, the failures. All of these things packaged together and you look at your life and you say, if there's a God out there, he must not be for me. Because my life would be different. But God meets that type of skepticism with the promise. A promise of deliverance. A promise that His Son is for us and that that sense of promise that He is for us gives us hope in the midst of our hardship. It gives us purpose in the midst of our pain. And that reality that God is for us as expressed here in the revealing of this mystery goes hand in hand with another reality about that mystery we see in verse 22. Because what we find is not just a God is for us but beginning in verse 22, we also see that God is with us. It reveals that mystery to us. Look back at how it says it there.

²²All this took place to fulfill what the Lord has spoken by the prophet. ²³Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means God with us).

So, just think about how Joseph would have reacted as this angel speaks to him in this dream. I mean, he had likely heard this prophecy from Isaiah 7 repeated time and time again in his life. And as the angel recounts it to him in this moment, the promise he has been longing to finally become true, he now realizes he's going to come to reality through his own son. Would have blown him away, shocked him, amazed him with this reality. And this reality, the text tells us at the start of verse 22, is rooted in fulfillment. Do you see that word there in the beginning of verse 22? All

this took place to fulfill. See, the book of Matthew uses that word fulfill almost a dozen times. And the reason it's doing that is because all along in the Gospel of Matthew, he is showing how the promises of the Old Testament find their yes in Jesus Christ. That nothing fails. That God accomplishes what He sets out to do and He does it through His Son. And what is it that the prophet Isaiah promises in this prophecy quoted here from Isaiah 7? This ancient prophecy from hundreds of years before us. It's that the Messiah will come. This son will come. And it's not just that He will be born of a virgin. That would be shocking enough. But the other piece that would have shocked someone like Joseph is this reminder of the declaration that this child will be called Emmanuel. And you see what that means there at the verse, at the end of verse 23 don't you? Emmanuel means God with us. The God of the universe is not some distant god who's set the world in motion and is disinterested. He's like the cosmic clock maker who winds it all up and lets it all go. There is a God of the universe who longs to know you. Who has come for you. Who the text tells us will be with you. That's the promise of Emmanuel, this shocking promise that Joseph and the rest of Israel would have been blown away by because they knew they didn't deserve it. Because all way back in the beginning of the Scripture to the Garden of Eden, we see time and time again where the people of God turn away from God in their sin. And what happens? They're separated from God. He is no longer with them. It happens when Adam and Eve are cast out of the garden. And after the Exodus, it happens again in the wilderness as the people are held back from the promised land. And the high point of that in the Old Testament is in the exile when the people are cast out of the land. And all Israel has known for the hundreds of years leading up to this moment with Joseph is exile, silence, separation. So, when the angel appears to Joseph and reminds him of the promise that this one who is coming in your future wife's womb will be Emmanuel, he is blown away by this reality that God is with us. That God is for us. And in the midst of this promise is this reminder that the fact that His name is Jesus and His name is Emmanuel go hand in hand. If he's not Emmanuel, he can't be Jesus. Because if he's not with us, he can't be for us. But the reverse is true. If he's not Jesus, he can't be Emmanuel. If he's not for us, then he cannot be with us. But what this text tells us, is that the God of the universe sends His only Son to make a way for you and me to find the forgiveness that we could never find on our own. The separation that our sin created between us and God can now be restored. Reconciled Redeemed.

So, I'm just curious about your hands. How many of you in the room are in a family that uses a Christmas tree in your home to celebrate Christmas. Let's hold those hands up high just so I can see you. I admire your diligence and commitment. Because while you're spending hours going to the Christmas tree lot or the Christmas tree farm or channeling your inner Clark Griswold to go out into the wilderness to cut one down yourself, the rest of us are sitting at home. We've got the tree up in 15 minutes. We've got the lights pre strung and we're taking a nap as you come back. You think about a Christmas tree. One of these real ones. It's an evergreen. And out in the wild, it doesn't matter the circumstances in any type of environment. It creates the appearance of health. It's always green. It's always flourishing because it is anchored to a strong root system. It is being fed by light. It's being fed by nutrients. But in order to end up in your home, that tree has to be cut off at the root. It's separated from its source of life. It's hauled over on a truck. It's loaded into that Christmas tree lot. You pick it up, you take it home, and then what happens? When you get it back to your house, you stand it up, you set that base in a trough of water in order to try to feed it some water to nourish it, to sustain it. And you surround it in those lights and you surround it with those ornaments. And as it stands in the middle of your home, to most people when they come to look at it, they see a sign of life. It's still healthy. It's still standing. It has all the

appearance as if everything is fine. But those ornaments, those lights, that water are just masking the reality that this tree is dead. And the reason it's dead is because it's been separated from its source of life. And so, you see those needles begin to fall to the ground. You see those branches begin to droop. And there's nothing you can do in the dressing up of that Christmas tree that's going to bring it back to life. It doesn't matter what you put on it. It doesn't matter what nutrients you feed it. It's been separated from the root and it is dead. And when we see this promise that a Savior is coming who will save us from our sins whose name is Emmanuel, it's reminding us of the reality that each of us have a similar spiritual condition. That we've been separated from the root because of our sin. We've been cut off. And we can dress the tree of our life with all the good works we want to. All the right behavior. All the practices of showing up to church or appearing better than others. But it's just masking the same spiritual reality. Dead in our sins. Cut off from God. And that is the glory of this mystery of Christmas. That what we couldn't do on our own God did for us in His Son. He grafted us back into the tree. He brought forth a root of Jesse, a stump, a vine. And when we put our trust in Jesus Christ, we are welcomed home. He is with us and he is for us. And once we realize that reality, it changes everything about the Christmas season for us. I know it did with Joseph and Mary.

That's why you'll find at the end of this passage in verses 24 and 25 one last thing we need to see here. And it's the meaning of Christmas. We've talked about the miracle. We've seen the mystery. But let's think about the meaning of Christmas that this passage reveals to us. You'll notice in verse 24 that Christmas gives meaning to our mess. That's why it says there,

²⁴When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him:

So, think about this. Joseph likely fell asleep while wrestling with what to do in this situation with Mary. And he had finally made up his mind. He was going to divorce her. This was the end of the road. They had reached the path of no return. That point of no return, but now he awakens from this dream and everything's changed. He returns to the point that he thought was a point of no return. He recommits himself to her in this situation. And I can only imagine how messy that was. Mary knew what was coming. She knew it was over. It was just a matter of time. And you think he called, texted her that morning and says, "Are you up? We need to talk." And he has that conversation with her. Or think about the family and friends that he'd been bouncing ideas off. Even the witnesses he was planning to get together soon to have the divorce officially ended. Whoever it might have been. They're saying, "What happened? An angel? He said, what? How could this be?" This was messy. There's nothing simple about it. And it's just one of those realities that foreshadows the truth that is a reality for all of us. That when God steps into our lives, it brings meaning to the mess. And perhaps there's no more encouraging words some of you need right now as we step into this holiday season. So, for some of you, you just can't wait for Christmas to get here. You're at a spot where you're finally going to get off to school or you get to slow down at work or you're excited to see family and friends. You can't wait to get those gifts that are on your list. But for others of you, you're dreading it. You just want to survive the holidays. And this text, this truth brings us a sense of hope in that moment. You see, the danger we can have going into the holidays is we spend all our time preparing for gifts and gatherings rather than preparing our hearts. And this text prepares our hearts for these hard moments. When it shows us of the way that God meets us in our mess, it is reminding us of the reality that if God is with us and for us through His Son, it changes everything about the messy situation you're about to walk into at Christmas. So, many of you are familiar with Romans 8 when the apostle Paul raises the

question, if God is for us, who can be against us? And he goes on to recite all of these different things that might stand against the love of God in Christ Jesus. And I just want you to try a holiday version of that reality. You see, this passage is reminding us that neither cynical cousins, nor complaining kids, nor unmet expectations, nor mediocre ham, nor political arguments, nor gridlock traffic, nor besetting sins, nor missing loved ones, nor chronic suffering can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. He meets us in the mess. He walks with us in the hardship.

But you'll notice at the end of the verse that this text doesn't just give meaning to our mess, it also gives meaning to our lives. That's why you'll notice right at the end of verse 24, what it is that Joseph does, the text tells us,

²⁴...he took his wife, ²⁵but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

So, as we see in the text, God has already placed a new heart in Mary's womb. It's the heart of Jesus. But what we anticipate from this text is that God also puts a new heart in Joseph. He changes his perspective. He changes his reality. He changes his future. And when that happens, it changes his life. Because when we meet Jesus, Jesus changes everything, both at the level of our actions and our attitudes. So, notice the way that this changes his actions. You'll see it there in the beginning of verse 25. It tells us that he knew her not until that son was born. Maybe this was the first example of true love waits. Joseph doesn't partake of the fruits of marriage. Until this child is born. Nobody would do that. Nobody would wait this length of time as a newlywed. But this reality that God has sent His Son and this son is growing in the womb changes him even to the level of his deepest desires. To the actions that he would have most deeply longed to take. You see, when God gets a hold of our hearts, it changes our lives at the level of our actions. But not just at the level of our actions but also our attitudes. That's what you see there at the end of verse 25. When it says, Joseph, that Joseph named him Jesus. You know, in this moment, the reason he gives his name is not because he thought, "Man, this is a family name for us. I'm going to name him after my great grandfather." Or you know, "Mary and I talked about this for months and this is the one that we came up with." No, the reason that name is given as we've said is because the angel commanded it. It came from God and because it came from God, he obeyed. But here's the thing you need to recognize. There's something more going on in the giving of this name. So, after nearly neglecting the child, Joseph names him. But more importantly, after almost abandoning the child, Joseph adopts him. You see, in that ancient culture, when a father gives a name to a son, he is looking at that child and saying, he is mine. Just think about what happens here in the text. God, in Christ, adopts Joseph. Now, Joseph adopts Jesus. It changes everything for him. It changes the way he lives. It gives a new meaning to his life where he was longing to live in a way that pleased the world. Now, he is longing to live in a way that pleases God. That is the meaning of Christmas.

And the meaning of Christmas has been on my heart in a new way this week. I'm just so fired up. Our college ministry helped to lead an event here in town earlier this week called Christmas on the Rooftop. Y'all all know the parking lot at the intersection of Texas and George Bush where Bed, Bath & Beyond and Jason's Deli is. You got the parking lot on ground level but that shopping center is actually built where there's a parking garage on the top of it. For the last 3 years, college students in our community, led by our college men's associate Sam Langebahn, have been planning a student-led Christmas experience for college students to have their hearts fed and set on Jesus

coming in to the final season coming into Christmas. And so my family and I went up there and there were hundreds of students there. In fact, there were so many students there that all the lower level parking spots were filled. And while the event was going on families who were just coming there to eat or shop were having to drive up to that upper level garage and park in order to go down and shop. One of those families that happened to show up was a middle-aged man and his wife, their young daughter who were there. And I don't know if they went down to shop first or this happened before they could even get downstairs. But as they were out of their car, they heard a man speaking and it was Sam proclaiming the Gospel and they stopped to listen in that moment. And God showed up and this woman that had come there in search of Christmas gifts didn't realize that God had brought her there in search of her heart. And He convicted her of sin and right there on the rooftop of this parking garage in College Station, she gave her life to Jesus Christ. That's the miracle of Christmas. That what God did thousands of years ago in the womb of Mary bringing about new life by the power of the Spirit is the same thing He is doing today. And that should fuel our hearts to live on mission this Christmas season. To set aside the consumerism and instead to share that loving message of Jesus Christ with others around us. And to keep pressing on in the midst of the weary world all around us. Because we have experienced the true meaning of Christmas. That's exactly why in just a moment, we're going to come to the Lord's table. You see, in the bread and the cup that we are about to experience, it is that physical reminder to our taste buds of what Christmas is all about. That this child in the womb would go from cradle to cross and from cross to crown. And now we gather as His people to celebrate that reality through this family meal. And you're invited to the table this morning. If you know Jesus and are walking with him in salvation, this meal is for you. And so, in just a moment, I'm going to invite you during our response time to make your way to the table and you can grab the cup and also take a piece of fresh bread with you as well and ready your hearts. But as we do that, I also want you to know that if you have never met Jesus before, we would love to share Him with you. We will have ministers here at the front who can walk with you how to do that. Or if you say the best gift I can give to God during this Christmas season is to commit myself to the local church and going all in with what God is up to at Central. We can start that process today. Or perhaps you show up here weary, worried. You just need someone to pray with you. We'll be here to do that also. In whatever way God is leading us now, let's pause to pray and to respond as His Spirit guides us in this moment.

Father, as we come to You, may our hearts be set on fire for the name of Jesus Christ. The cares of this world, the guilt of sin, our own desires so often cool that fire in our lives. It's nothing but a smoldering wick. Would you reignite us for Your Gospel, for Your Son? Would we forsake everything this world has to offer? And to live out the calling You've placed on our life knowing that as this text tells us You are with us and You are for us. And we ask all these things in Christ's name. Amen.