



Sermon – 12/04/2022  
Phillip Bethancourt

**Verses Covered**

*Matthew 1:1 – 17*

*Philippians 3:18 – 19*

*Jeremiah 23:5*

And as you grab a seat, won't you thank our worship team for leading us this morning so well. I want to invite you to open your Bibles with me to Matthew chapter 1, Matthew 1. And for the next several weeks as we head toward Christmas, we're going to spend our time in the Christmas story as told by Matthew. And as you settle in there and turn in your Bibles, I just want to say a word to you that might be guests in the room, whether you're catching us here or watching online, welcome home. This Sunday is a great Sunday to connect with us. We're starting our Christmas series. We're also going to be celebrating the Lord's Supper. One of the things you may notice during the response song as you come and get your elements, is in addition to the prepackaged thing that has that little cracker that kind of feels like bread when you put it in your mouth. We've got some actual real bread here this morning. Anybody excited about real bread instead of that? And so, we're going to introduce that and test it because over the next three weeks, this week and the next two Sundays leading up to Christmas, we're going to recognize the Lord's Supper each of those Sundays. And just ready our hearts this Advent season to turn towards what God is doing in the Christmas story. Now, this Christmas series we're starting is called The Weary World Rejoices. And you know those lyrics. They come from the song, Oh Holy Night. And they're something that captures the essence of the culture we live in. We live in a weary culture, a culture that's trying to keep up with the holiday season. The culture that's trying to keep up with the latest controversies and the next work project and the next kids event. That's the reason why when you ask somebody, "Hey, how you doing?" One of the most common answers you get, whether it's the college student heading in the finals or the single mom or the business executive even the retiree the answer they'll give you is, "I'm tired. We're weary." And what Christmas does for us is it takes that weariness, it takes that tired sense that we have and it transforms it. It reshapes it and it replaces it with a sense of joy that surpasses all understanding. Now, normally at this moment in the message, we'd be pulling open God's word and I would be reading the text to you. But we're going to do things a little differently this morning. Instead of me reading it, we're going to enjoy a musical experience around it. So, the song we just sang, Is He Worthy, was written by Andrew Peterson. Andrew Peterson's the one coming in concert this coming Friday night here at Central for his Behold the Lamb of God concert. Now, I hope you'll come and join us. It's going

to be an amazing time. I can't wait to bring my family. But one of the songs that he will sing is a lyrical version of him singing this genealogy that we find right here at the beginning of the book of Matthew. It's called Matthew's Begets. And the reason he calls it begets is because some of you remember the King James version when it goes through this. It talks about this person beget that person and that person beget this person. And so, rather than me, read these words to you, we're going to hear him sing him over us and then we'll start our time with a word of prayer. Let's check out the video right now.

Abraham had Isaac  
Isaac, he had Jacob  
Jacob, he had Judah and his kin  
Then Perez and Zerah  
Came from Judah's woman, Tamar  
Perez, he brought Hezron up  
And then came  
Aram, then Amminadab  
Then Nahshon, who was then the dad of Salmon  
Who with Rahab fathered Boaz  
Ruth, she married Boaz who had Obed  
Who had Jesse  
Jesse, he had David who we know as king  
David, he had Solomon by dead Uriah's wife  
Solomon, well you all know him  
He had good old Rehoboam  
Followed by Abijah who had Asa  
Asa had Jehoshaphat had Joram had Uzziah  
Who had Jotham then Ahaz then Hezekiah  
Followed by Manasseh who had Amon  
Who was a man  
Who was father of a good boy named Josiah  
Who grandfathered Jehoiachin  
Who caused the Babylonian captivity  
Because he was a liar  
Then he had Shealtiel, who begat Zerubbabel  
Who had Abiud who had Eliakim  
Eliakim had Azor who had Zadok who had Akim  
Akim was the father of Eliud then  
He had Eleazar who had Matthan who had Jacob  
Now, listen very closely  
I don't want to sing this twice  
Jacob was the father of Joseph  
The husband of Mary  
The mother of Christ

Man, he did a way better job than I would have done stumbling through those words. But I want you to catch the one part he didn't read down in verse 17. At the end, it says,

<sup>17</sup>So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation of Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations.

Let's go to Lord in prayer now as we turn our hearts to Him.

Father, we're coming word in this familiar passage during this familiar season. And I pray this morning that You would break through the familiarity and hit our hearts in a way that changes us. God, I pray that as we see the promise of Christmas more clearly that it might equip us to follow You more faithfully. And we ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.

How many y'all have heard either on the radio or in the local store, you've heard some Christmas music playing over the last week or two? Anybody else out there? And so you're driving along on the road or you're walking in the store and you're hoping you can avoid Christmas Shoes, you're probably going to hear something like, All I Want for Christmas is You on repeat in most of the stores you go into. And you're just praying they'll slip in a little Alan Jackson or George Strait along the way to make it more authentic to the Christmas season. Well, things were a little bit different back in 1906 when the first radio station in America launched on the coast of Massachusetts. You see, a Canadian inventor named Reginald Fessenden. He launched this radio station. Prior to that, it was only communication through Morse Code. But he had figured out how to broadcast voice and sound over the radio waves. And he alerted all the ships in the surrounding area, up to miles away, to tune in to his first radio broadcast. The first one ever in the world, Christmas Eve 1906. And do you know what the first song that was played on the radio was? The one that Reginald performed on his violin after reading the Christmas story. It was the song, Oh Holy Night. The song that's at the anchor of our Christmas series. And you can imagine those sailors out there in their ships. They tune the dial in. They're awaiting this experience they ever had. And surrounding them is nothing but wind and waves and hardship. They are immersed in silence. And then out of the silence, a still small voice comes over the radio waves and changes everything. And with that voice, he brings a hope. He brings a promise. And in a very real sense, moments like that in human history are but a mere reflection of what we find right here in Matthew chapter 1. This sense of hope in the midst of darkness. This sense of promise in the midst of uncertainty. See the people of Israel had experienced the silence for much longer than this. There had been hundreds of years since they had heard a word from God. And now a voice breaks in. A word comes. Not the still small voice of a radio operator but a word who became flesh and dwelled among us. So that we could behold his glory. And with that word comes a promise.

See, the entire book of Matthew is a book about the promise of Christmas. It's showing us that what God declared in the Old Testament is coming through in His Son, Jesus Christ. He's writing to this Jewish audience who would have known the promises. They would have been awaiting their fulfillment. And he writes to them in a way that gives them hope. That he shows them even right here in these genealogies that God is a faithful God who keeps His promise, the promise of Christmas. So, what are we going to find here in Matthew chapter 1 as we unpack this promise of Christmas? What we're going to notice is that this passage reveals three dimensions of the promise of Christmas that profoundly impacts who we are and how we're called to live today. And the first one I want you to notice beginning in the back in verse 1 is that the promise of Christmas is made by God. And so, you'll notice that something unusual happens. If you look at all the other Gospels in the New Testament, none of them start the way Matthew does with the genealogy. So,

why does it start with this genealogy? We'll look back at verse 1 when it says there, the book of the genealogy. Do you see that word? Genealogy in the original language, it is the word that would be very familiar to you. The word Genesis. So, in the same way, the Old Testament starts with Genesis. There's a sense in which the New Testament also starts with Genesis. But while the Old Testament begins with how the world was made, the New Testament begins with who made it. This Son, Jesus. And he begins to tell the story of how the Old Testament is coming together in Jesus Christ. And what we find here in these first six verses is it talks about the promise of Christmas made by God. It's like it's weaving several threads of the promise of Christmas together. And each of these threads, these aspects of the promise, speak to areas of deep need or great ability that we feel and experience in a broken world.

So, you'll see the first one back there in verse two is that the first thread of the promise is the promise of a new family. That's why verse two tells us, Abraham was the father of Isaac and Isaac, the father of Jacob, and Jacob, the father of Judah and his brothers. You and I know we live in a world full of broken homes, broken families, divorce, abuse, strife. It's all around us. And in the midst of those broken homes, we see here the promise of a new family. That God is speaking, that He's going to raise up a son of Abraham to fulfill the covenant obligations and receive the covenant promises. And what Matthew is showing us is that happens in Jesus through the promise of Christmas. That those who are far off from God are now brought near. We are brought into one family. So, imagine 3 weeks from the day when Christmas season hits, your family more than likely, will be gathered up around the tree. And in the lead up to that, already now, y'all are making Christmas list. You're sharing it with one another so that you can receive gifts that meet needs, that fill gaps, that solve problems for you. And it might be that you open them up and it's another round of socks or a tie. Maybe mom's getting another robe she can hang next to the four that are already in her closet. Maybe it's that video game you really want. I don't know what it will be. But what I know is the sense of longing and desire you have now from when the promise of that gift was written down on your list to when it's fulfilled, there's a sense of longing, a sense of desire. And the joy of the moment happens when a family gathers together and it invests its resources in order to meet the needs and support the flourishing of the family around it. And when Matthew 1:2 is picturing for us this new family we have in Christ, that we are now all sons and daughters of Abraham if we've been bought by the blood of Jesus. It's reminding us of the reality that you and I here at Central have been called into a spiritual family. That we are to invest in one another to build one another up, to pour out gifts for one another, to meet needs, to care, to solve problems, to empower us to flourish in the way that God sees fit. That's one of the reasons why last month, we did our Get in the Game Sunday; to challenge you to get off the sidelines and in the game to use your personal gifts of service for the building up of the body. It's why over the course of December as we come towards the year-end when most people are thinking about how they're going to give financially, we're going to challenge and encourage you to invest financially in this church family to fuel the mission. It's because we want to reflect the reality of the promise of Christmas here, this promise of a new family.

But there's another thread that goes on right beyond that down in verses 3 and 4. We see that the second thread is a promise of victory. That's why it says there in verse 3,

<sup>3</sup>and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron, the father of Ram, <sup>4</sup>and Ram, the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon, the father of Salmon.

You see, we know we live in a world of broken hearts. That sense of failure, that shame, that guilt, that disappointment we have. We all know what that's like. And God speaks to a world full of broken hearts with a promise of a new victory. A victory as it shows us here who will come from the offspring of Judah. And so Matthew's tapping back into Genesis 49 where Israel on his deathbed is pronouncing a blessing over his sons. And he speaks to Judah and tells him, "You will be a lion cub. That you will hold the scepter. You will defeat your enemies." There is this promise of victory that comes to Judah that radiates down to Jesus. The Lion of the tribe of Judah who takes on flesh in order to fulfill the promise. He brings the victory with Him so that all of us who are united to Him by faith can experience what it's like to have victory over the enemies of God. He sets us free from sin. He gives us a pathway to victory over temptation by the power of His Spirit. That's the kind of promise of a new victory that we have here at Christmas.

And that goes hand in hand with the third thread in this part of the passage. When we also see the promise of a new community. So, if you'll notice the way it talks about it in verse 5, it says,

<sup>5</sup>and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse,

You see, the text knows that we live in a world of broken relationships. There's drama all around us. There's drama at home. There's drama with our friends. There's drama at work. There is the constant pull away in broken relationships. And God meets us in that brokenness with the promise of a new community. And where do we find that here in verse 5? We find it in some unusual inclusions. Because when you look back there, you see Matthew mentioned two women, both Rahab and Ruth. They are two of the four women mentioned in this passage. And everyone of them has a complicated story. So, Rahab, a woman of the night. Tamar, an abuse survivor. Ruth, a rejected outsider. Bathsheba, a mourning widow turned queen. They're complicated. But what's even more unexpected is back in ancient cultures like this, it would have been unusual to even mention a woman at all in a genealogy like this. Much less women with such a checkered past, with such a complicated history. But what this does is it reminds us of the way that God is at work in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That what he is doing is taking those with complicated past, and transforming their future by bringing us together in a new community that is grounded in the of Christmas. See, this text is showing us that no matter who we are, we're not defined by our past. That our shame doesn't get the last word on our identity. It's showing us even in the fact that three out of the four of them weren't even Israelites. That people from all nations, with all backgrounds, in all walks of life, can be transformed by the wonder working power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And the call on a church like ours is to reflect that reality, to embody it in the way that we pursue community, in the way that we reach out to those on the margin, the way that we, even during this Christmas season. When people are more open than any time in the year, we invite them in to the Gospel story. To that awkward conversation across the coffee shop table. We're inviting them to join us on Christmas Eve at 5 o'clock for our candlelight Christmas Eve service. Whatever that looks like, we see these people included in this passage. And it reminds us no one is too far gone for the Gospel. That's the promise of Christmas for you and for me.

And this promise that God gives us has one final thread here down in verse 6. It is the thread of the promise of a kingdom. And we see that kingdom in a familiar name. If you'll look back in verse 6, and it says,

<sup>6</sup>and Jesse the father of David the king.

You know, you and I live in a world full of broken hopes, unmet expectations, disappointment that leads to bitterness, or even to cynicism. And in the midst of those broken dreams, those broken hopes, God speaks a word of hope to us in the promise of a new kingdom. A kingdom that comes, as a text tells us here, through this man named David. You'll notice right there in the middle of verse 6, it refers to him as David the king. You see it use that word king there? It's interesting man includes that because throughout this genealogy, there's king after king after king after king. So, why is it that he calls specific attention to the fact that David is king? It's because with David, there is this transformative promise of the kingdom back in 2 Samuel 7 in which he is declaring that one day, an offspring of David will come, whose throne will last forever, whose kingdom shall know no end. And Matthew is reminding us of the reality that that is coming true through the promise of Christmas in Jesus Christ. He meets our sorrows with salvation. He meets our worries with victory. He fills us with a new hope rooted in a new kingdom. Now, when you look at a genealogy like this, it's different from most that you'll see in the ancient literature. Because usually what happens in the genealogies, it starts with the patriarch, a first born, who is the centerpiece of the genealogy. And then it works its way down to those who are less significant as it goes. But in case, you see the exact reversal of that. That instead, as it tells the story of Abraham and Isaac, and Jacob, and David, and Solomon, and all of them, it is building in its crescendo towards its culmination in Jesus Christ. That every person on this list finds their significance before God because of their connection to the Christ. Because of their relationship with the one who brings the promise of Christmas. That's why for you men, I'm so excited that here in just a few weeks in late January, we're going to be doing our next Central Men's Retreat. And we've got Greg Mott coming to join us as well as Marcus Hayes coming back and Oren Martin are going to be with us on the theme of knowing God. And the heart of that weekend is going to be to equip us as men to understand who we are in Christ. That the same reality we see in this genealogy is true for you and for me. That our significance is not defined by our worldly achievement, our status, our sense of accomplishments. It's related and connected and derived from our relationship with Jesus. How He shapes us? How He changes us. And how he welcomes us into a new kingdom. And so you find here at the start of this genealogy, this unfathomable promise by God.

But then starting in the second half of verse 6 and moving on, we see in second reality of the promise of Christmas we don't want to miss. And it's this. The promise of Christmas is broken by sin. So that promises made by God, it is broken by sin. And when you think about your own family tree, you look back at your family line and history. There are mostly people who lived and died without much significance or notoriety. But as we've talked about in the genealogies of Genesis, every family tree has few fruits and nuts. And we find that to be true right here in this genealogy of Jesus in Matthew. Where certain ones stand out for their significance and it's not in the best of ways. These men are men who are marked by sin, who take the promise that God has made and destroy it because of their unfaithful lives as they turn their backs on the expectation of the promise. And that shows up in several ways here that are the exact same ways the enemy works in our hearts today to seek to lead us astray from the promise of Christmas. So, the first one there in verse 6 is with David himself. You see that the promise of Christmas is broken by sinful desires. So, look at what it says there in verse 6.

<sup>6</sup>and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.

So, right after Matthew celebrates him as king, he documents his fall from grace with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. Solomon is born under these circumstances of sin and shame. And what drove David, this one that the Bible describes as a man after God's own heart, is turned away from God's plan for his life through sinful desire. He looks on the rooftop and he sees her and he covets. He wants what he can't have regardless of what it costs. I mean, he does whatever it takes to get it. Even to the point of sending her own husband out to die so that he can take her into his home, marry her. And then God in His providence allows for a son named Solomon to be born. Unless you and I sit here and think that we should assume that victory over the temptation that affects us should be easy. Let's be reminded of the fact that even David, this one after God's own heart, he turned away because of sinful desires. He turned his back on God's design for his life for the fleeting pleasures of this world. There's a warning to each of us there.

But there's also a warning as we keep going in verse 7 with Solomon. The promise of Christmas is also broken by sinful power. That's what we see in Solomon's life when it says,

<sup>7</sup>Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph,

So, if David shows us the danger of sinful desire, Solomon shows us the danger of sinful power. Drunk on his own ambition. This man who had abundant wisdom ended up with abundant wives, abundant warriors, abundant possessions. It was for the amassing of power and that amassing of power, what we find as Solomon's life plays out, is not for the benefit of the people but for the benefit of the king. He turns the ambition and power and success that he could use to honor God and instead uses it to honor himself. And as Solomon goes, so goes the line. Where king after king listed right here in Matthew 1, follow that same pull of sinful power, that same pull towards significance and success that can show up leading you astray today.

There's one other way that this promise of Christmas is broken here in the passage by sin. We'll see it down in verse 11. That the promise of Christmas is broken by sinful idols. You see, the text builds towards this crescendo when it says,

<sup>11</sup>and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

You see, these sinful desires and this sinful power are just too symptoms of a deeper root issue. The issue that is at play in each one of our hearts, even today. The fact that we are pulled away from the worship of the true God by serving sinful idols. You see, Israel kept moving further and further away from God. Turning their back on Him 'til at last, He gives them over in judgement through the exile. They are cast out of the land. They are forsaken. They are no longer guaranteed to receive the promise. There's a judgment that befalls them. You see, what happens is Israel removes God from their hearts through sin and then God follows that in judgement by removing Israel from the land. There is judgement to come for that pull towards sinful idols. And maybe you see this and it speaks about this deportation, this exile to Babylon. You say, "Well, that's not my thing. I don't struggle with that. I'm not going to bow down and worship Baal anytime soon.

I don't wrestle with keeping figurines on the shelf in our closet to bow down and worship to each Sunday." But let me remind you what the apostle Paul says in Philippians 3 in verses 18 and 19. That the same types of idols that they encountered then show up in new ways today. This is how he says it in Philippians 3:18.

<sup>18</sup>For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup>Their end is destruction, and here's the key, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.

You see that phrase there? Their god is their belly. In other words, their desires, their appetites are their idols. That's why one of the reformation theologians told us that our hearts are all idle factories. And we may not long for the ancient idols of Israel but we long for success and satisfaction and significance and status in the eyes of the world. And we give our worship, our effort, our desire to that instead of to God. And when that sin comes into our hearts, it breaks the promise of Christmas in our lives. But here's the beauty of this text. I mean, just think about this for a minute. You would imagine that if God was going to send His own Son into the world, and He was going to provide Him a line to come from. They would be the most prestigious, God-honoring people in the world. But that's not what we find here in the text. We see that this family is a mess just like you and me. Why is that significant? It's because Matthew is reminding us of the reality that who Jesus came from reflects who He came for. He comes from a line of failures, sinners, outcasts, rejects overwhelmed by shame, guilt, humiliation, deserving judgment. He comes from them so that He can come for them. Look, I don't know what you're experiencing in your life this Christmas season. Maybe it's the sorrow of the reality that at the lunch table on Christmas day, that loved one you're used to sitting next to won't be there. Or that relationship that you thought was going to go the distance is now over. That the job that you thought was certain is now gone. Or you find yourself overwhelmed by the guilt of secret sin and shame. Matthew 1 is telling us that even though we are promise breakers, there is a promise keeper that comes for us. Who makes a way for you and for me.

And that's what we find in the last part of this passage. The third key thing we're going to notice here about the promise of Christmas is that the promise of Christmas is kept by Jesus. You know, through these last few verses, verse 12 and onward, it recounts person after person who turned their back on God as they move further and further away from God's design and move deeper and deeper into judgement. And during the middle of this time, there were prophets like the prophet of Jeremiah who shouted to the people in Jeremiah 23 these words that we need to remember this Christmas season. This word of hope even in the midst of the broken promise of Christmas that comes from our sin. Jeremiah 23:5 says it like this,

<sup>5</sup>"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

You see, there was this promise placed in front of the people but none of them saw that reality come to fulfillment. But then, here Matthew is telling us, Jesus shows up during that first Christmas season and changes everything. The promise that was made by God, the promise that was broken by sin is now kept by a Son. And in this Christmas story that we are so familiar with,

it reminds us of how it is that Jesus keeps that promise. You'll see there down in verse 16 at the start that the birth of Christ keeps the promise of Christmas. That's why it says there

<sup>16</sup>and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born,

If you were to read right back through this genealogy in the original language, the same word is used 40 times. It's the word that is translated there was the father of, or he fathered this person and that person. And each it's in the active voice, saying that a father actively created a son. Active. Active. Active. 39 straight times until you get here to verse 16. And then in the original language, instead of using the active voice for a father bringing into this world his own son, it now shifts to the passive voice. Not what they have done, but what's been done by someone else. And the reason that happens, when it mentions there of whom Jesus was born, is it's showing us that the son of God comes. Jesus comes not as the son of Joseph but as the son of God. That in Christmas, God is doing a miracle that we can't even fathom. He breaks the script so that He can break the curse. That's the promise of Christmas that Jesus kept. I remember leading a Bible study through the book of Matthew and it was designed to go verse by verse through the entire book in a small group format. But when I opened it up and I got ready to teach week one and I looked at the table of contents, it didn't start until Matthew 1:18. I guess they figured the average Christian wouldn't get much out of this genealogy. And perhaps when you come to verses 1 through 17, you feel the same way. Who cares? What difference does it make? But what Matthew knows is that this genealogy changes everything. He is showing us how God keeps His promise in His Son. This promise to Abraham, this promise to David, this promise of restoration from the exile now finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. In other words, we can't understand the significance of Christmas without this family line.

The last thing we need to notice here as we look at the second half of verse 16 is it's not just the birth of Christ that keeps the promise of Christmas. It's also the love of Christ that keeps the promise of Christmas. That's why it says there in verse 16,

<sup>16</sup>Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, now don't miss this, who is called the Christ.

There is no greater display of someone's love than that they keep their promises to those they made it. And that's precisely what we see. The love of God poured out through the sending of His Son. That God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son so that the promise of Christmas might be kept. And that Son that comes, Matthew here at the end of verse 16, describes as the Christ. This word for Messiah or anointed one. You remember in the life of the shepherd David when he's out in the fields and he's called back by Samuel. He anoints his head with oil and from that radiates this promised hope of a coming anointed one who will be the shepherd of God's people. Who will be the hope of salvation. Who will fulfill the promise of Christmas. And that's the danger as we step back into the Christmas season, isn't it? That we're surrounded by sentimentality in the culture when it comes to Christmas. We are so familiar with this that we can almost become numb to its significance. But what Matthew is showing us is the deep, deep love of Jesus. That God in his kindness sent His only Son to this world. That Jesus, the one born lowly in a manger, lives a sinless life, resisting all the pulls to break the promise of Christmas that you and I have already broken. And in His sinless life, He goes to the cross to fulfill what Romans 5:8 tells us, that God shows His love for us in this, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

That's the message of Christmas. That's the hope of salvation. That's the promise that Jesus keeps right here in the text. If you want to think about it like this, the promise maker becomes a promise breaker. So that He might become a promise keeper for you and for me. That's the story of Christmas.

It's one of the reasons I was filled with so much joy this past Friday night right over here in our kid's wing. We got to host an amazing annual event we do called the Road to Bethlehem. And saw hundreds of kids come through and experience a semblance of what Jesus' life would have been like in that birth story that we tell at Christmas. And they got to see live animals, rabbits, and roosters and even a donkey that I think nearly ate a girl's purse while she was walking through. It's a wild time out there at Road to Bethlehem. But the high point of the moment was whenever they got to encounter Mary and Joseph holding the baby Jesus. And between groups that came through, I was talking to our church member, Joshua Kelly, who was serving as Joseph. And I said, "Hey, what's it like, man?" And he said, "I'll tell you something, Philip. If you had told me five years ago that I'd be standing in this church on a Friday night dressed as Joseph holding my own child as if he's baby Jesus. I wouldn't have believed you." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Because five years ago, I wasn't sure my marriage was even going to make it to where we would even have another kid." You see, Joshua didn't want anything to do with church. He was hiding a secret drug addiction that he'd had since college for more than a decade. But two and a half years ago, God got a hold of his heart right here at Central on a Sunday morning. And it changed everything for him. He came into that week thinking maybe I can beat this addiction on my own. Maybe I can find freedom with God through some other means. But on that Sunday, two and a half years ago, he finally surrendered. He said to God right here in the walls of our church, "I can't do this on my own. I need Your help." And the promise of Christmas became true for a man like him. And he finds himself leading and serving in ways he would have never expected. He's finding lasting victory through the principles he gained through our re:generation, Christ-centered, recovery ministry. He's a changed man because of the truth that we see right here in the book of Matthew. And the question I want to leave us with as we turn our hearts to the Lord's Supper is the question, what's holding you back from making that same decision to surrender to Jesus?

It's fitting we come to the Lord's table this morning as we take the bread and the cup. They're a reminder to us of this promise that Jesus has kept. And so as we do on a regular basis here, we gather for this family meal in order to partake of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus and remember His coming. You're welcome to be a part of this family meal if you know Jesus. If you're following Him faithfully as a baptized believer, this is for you. And in just a moment, I'm going to invite us to stand and respond. And as we do that, you'll come and take of the juice and you'll grab a piece of bread, take that back to your seat, and we will respond in that moment as the Spirit leads us. I also want you to know during that time, we'll have ministers here at the front. And if you want to know more about what it looks like to embrace the promise of Christmas, we want to share with you. We want to pray for you. We want to welcome you to start the membership process. So, in whatever way, God is working in your life right now. Let's celebrate the promise of Christmas as we stand and respond to these truths.

Let's pray together now as we prepare our hearts to respond.

A you stand, as we ready ourselves to pray, just want to invite you to fix your eyes on Jesus in this moment.

Father, we come to you by the power of your spirit and by the blood of Your Son, rejoicing in the gift that You've given us through your Son, Jesus Christ. And I pray in this time as we partake of this broken body and the shed blood, that You will help us to walk more faithfully in the victory that You've called us to. That whatever way we walked in here, with broken hearts, broken spirits, broken dreams, broken relationships, that You would use this Christmas season to bind up the brokenhearted. Lord, You say to us, come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. And I pray even now that we would experience a clearer sense of the rest that You provided for us in Christ through the promise of Christmas. And we ask these things in His name. Amen.