

# Prepare The Way

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Preacher: Pastor Tom Kraft

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Music Hello, welcome to Pendleton Center Church.

That's Joan Kirkland, sitting where she usually sits for worship. And here she is, sitting in a completely different part of the sanctuary, so she has a chance to meet some new people that sit around her.

She would like to invite everyone to do the same thing for the next couple of weeks, to meet some new people, and to really confuse the pastors. For first-time visitors, we hope you'll pick up one of our welcome bags at the connection site at the rear of the sanctuary, or out at the welcome and information desk.

We would like everyone to please put your name on a friendship card so we know you are here. And if you would like to receive our newsletter or need to update information, you can fill that out on the front as well.

On the back, you can list prayer concerns, blessings, or notes to the staff. Enjoy your service. Pay no attention to that video.

[ 1 : 4 0 ] Stay in your seats where you belong, and don't be moving around the sanctuary to confuse the pastors. Good morning. This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

This is the day that the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day that the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day that the Lord has made.

Will you pray with me? Dear God in heaven, we pray that your Holy Spirit would come into this place to touch us and move us and fill us and help us to experience the power of God and help us to worship you.

[ 2 : 5 0 ] Be a blessing as we gather with you in Jesus' name. Amen. As we light our Advent candle this morning, hear these words from the Gospel of Mark, chapter 1, verses 1 through 8.

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet. I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way, a voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him.

Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist and he ate locusts and wild honey.

And this was his message. After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

[ 3 : 58 ] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. I'd like to invite you, if you're able, to stand as we're going to sing together. Lift up your heads, be mighty gates. Lift up your heads, be mighty gates.

Behold, the King of glory reigns. The King of kings is drawing near.

The Savior of the world is here. Fling by the portals on your heart.

Make it a temple set apart. From earthly years, for heavens and a boy.

Adored with prayer and love and joy. Redeemer God, with us of might.

[ 5 : 12 ] Our hearts dearly, we hope and pride. Let us die in the presence filled.

Thy grace and love fill us freely. Thy Holy Spirit leads us on Until our glorious hope is one.

Eternal grace, eternal faith, Be open, Savior to thine name.

The Lord be with you. And also with you. Please be seated. We have a couple of clipboards being sent out this morning. The one is for our ongoing ministry at First United Methodist Church in Niagara Falls for donations of food as well as offering to help and serve in that ministry.

The other one is for Christmas cookies. Because we always need cookies. And so if you're one of those bakers, please sign up to bake a bunch of cookies for us. We use it for all sorts of different activities and events throughout this Advent season.

[ 6 : 25 ] And I'd like to say I'm thankful for this gorgeous decorating in our sanctuary. It's beautiful, isn't it? It's beautiful. And I'm thankful for all the people that helped with that at the Hanging of the Greens.

And just a note with that, because it's Advent, when the kids are coming in with Miss Adrian, they're going to come right down here and put an ornament right on the tree and then be released to you.

And if any other kids are in the sanctuary and they want to come put an ornament on the tree at that time, they would do it at that, they'd just come on up, okay? So I'd love to hear what you all are thankful for today.

What are you thankful for? Judy. Roy is healing perfectly.

Keep on praying. Anyone else? I'm very thankful for Jan coming home from the hospital. And she is 75% better and getting better and stronger every day.

[ 7 : 30 ] Glory to God. Glory to God. Amen. Amen. Is there anyone else who would like to share? I'm very thankful that my friend Nancy came with me today.

Welcome. Welcome, Nancy. Thank you. Anyone else? Well, we know that we are all blessed by God who is so good.

And as we give our gifts, tithes, and offerings, take a moment to reflect on God's goodness in your life and all the many blessings we have received. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.

[ 8 : 47 ] Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Lord, we thank you for your goodness and your many blessings in our lives. And we give this offering to you as a reflection of our love, a reflection of our gratitude, and our willingness to be obedient to your Holy Spirit.

[ 12 : 16 ] We pray that you will bless these gifts, that they may send forth your word and your light into this dark world, revealing who you are in your goodness and your love and your grace.

For it's in Jesus's name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. I'd like to lift up some of our church family for prayer.

We continue to pray for Jan Gertz. And I'd like to suggest we pray for Dick Anderson as well, who's home from the hospital but is experiencing significant health issues.

And pray for Betty Bobzine, which is Debbie King's mom. And she's in rehab right now. As well as for Betty's sister and her entire family as Betty's sister is heading toward the end of her life.

And pray for Kelly Jesse's mom, Judy, who is in intensive care. Also, I'd like to lift up Linda Knudala with significant health issues.

[ 13 : 23 ] And there are many who are homebound within our church congregation. If it's on your heart that you reach out to someone who is home, who is not doing well or is elderly, please let me know and I can get you in contact with someone who may need some visiting or cards or call just to lift some spirits.

Are there any other prayer concerns today? Yeah, Jan. Oh, goodness. Okay, so no car because the car broke down and no car for work.

Anyone else with any prayer concerns? Judy. Diana Joy. And she was just born? Wednesday. Wednesday with heart challenges. So pray for Diana Joy. Anyone else? Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I'm going to have to. Okay.

Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay.

Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay.

[ 14 : 35 ] A Pakistani Christian named Aja Bibi has been in prison under penalty of a death sentence for blasphemy. The Pakistani court a month ago vacated her sentence, but she is in hiding with her husband as mobs are going house to house threatening her life.

her life. The Pakistani government has refused to release her, so I would wish, I wish that we would hold her up in prayer, her and her family. Pray for all of those in areas where there's persecution and oppression, as well as for all of those experiencing the effects of natural disaster.

Anyone else? Let's pray. Gracious and loving Lord, we come to you this day with open hearts to receive you more. We offer up to you our concerns, the burdens on our hearts, knowing that you will take our burdens from us and that your yoke is easy. We pray for the people that have been named and the people in our hearts for physical healing. We pray that your healing touch be upon all of those who are experiencing different types of diseases and pains. We pray for complete healing in the name of Jesus, that your name be praised as bodies are made whole and bodies are made well. We pray for people who are experiencing issues financially, that they may have opportunity and wisdom through you.

Lord, we pray for those who are experiencing many of the stresses and issues in the world, that you will give them your peace and your presence and set them in your light to go in your direction. Give them guidance, Lord. And we pray for people who are experiencing oppression, Lord.

Oppression physically and oppression emotionally, oppression relationally. We pray that oppression will cease in the name of Jesus, that whatever darkness is overshadowing someone's life, that they find your light.

[ 16 : 46 ] We pray, Lord, for relationships that are broken, that you find them to have your healing, that you send your healing upon them, that they may be filled with your love and bind them together, that they may have eyes for you and eyes for one another as broken relationships are healed. We lift up to you, Lord, that you may have your healing. We pray for those who are experiencing mental illness. We place that up for you, Lord. The people struggling with mental illness, we pray for your hand to be upon them, that they will be healed, that they will have clarity, that they will find you, and that we may be a supportive community.

Lord, we pray thanks to you for what you're doing in our lives and what you are doing in the lives of the people we are lifting up this day. We pray for those who do not know you yet, that they may be fertile ground through the presence of your Holy Spirit, and that we may be powerful witnesses, witnesses that reveal your word through what we say in our testimony and with our lives. May your glory shine. We thank you for the healing you're doing. We thank you for the goodness you're sending, and we pray that we will continue to minister and witness in Jesus's name. Amen. Now let's hear from the word of the Lord.

Good morning. Our scripture this morning is from the book of Mark, chapter 1, verses 9 through 11.

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth and Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove, and a voice came from heaven. You are my son whom I love, with you I am well pleased.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. Everywhere I go, take a look at the five and ten.

[ 19 : 31 ] Does anybody know what a five and ten is anymore? For those of you who are younger, a five and ten is the dollar store. That's the new manifestation of the five and ten. When does Christmas season actually begin? Does it begin in September? Maybe August 15th. Some people think it begins the day after Thanksgiving. Christmas season actually begins, anybody know? December 25th.

December 25th. So we get into kind of this struggle. Pastor Sherry tries to pick out the music in the right way in which we honor your desire to sing Christmas songs even though we're not really supposed to sing them until after the 25th of December when you're so tired of Christmas songs you don't want to sing them anymore. It's confusing. Now for some of us, the music and the lights and the festivity and seeing the eggnog back on the shelf in the store. Oh no, no, no, no.

Helps us to think of Jesus. For others, they feel like somehow it isn't right to Jesus. It's sort of almost an insult that we get into the commercialization so early. This is actually the season of Advent.

Advent. Over the next few months, we're going to actually talk about the life of Jesus. Who he was, what he did, and what that means for us. We're going to learn about Jesus. Which to me makes a lot of sense considering we call ourselves Christians. We should learn who this person is, right? But before we go too quickly to Jesus, we want to start with John the Baptist. John the Baptist was Jesus' cousin.

They actually grew up somewhat together. They were only a few months apart. And we have this passage from the book of Mark that says that John is coming, a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way for the Lord. He's the one who's getting us ready for Jesus. So before we get to Christmas, we have Advent. And before we get to Jesus, we're going to talk a little bit about his cousin, John. John called us to a wilderness place. A voice crying in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight paths for him. Wilderness is a place where we don't have the distractions. We don't have all the confusion. We don't have all the noise. We can just focus on God. And John calls us to prepare our lives. In Romans chapter 12, it tells us, don't be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is. His good, pleasing, and perfect will. So God calls us to be transformed, to be changed, to prepare our lives for Jesus to come. What would you think would be some ways we could do that? We could read the Bible. That's a good one. Pray. That's something we could do. We could do what we're doing right now. We could worship God, right? Actually, the Bible even calls us to something called fasting. You know what that is? That's when you don't eat food intentionally as a spiritual discipline to God. Now, you could give something else up, by the way, like eggnog or something. All right? But this isn't a diet. This is a way of proving to ourselves that God is more important than anything. These are great ways we can prepare for the coming of God. And I suspect John did a lot of that. He lived in the wilderness. He probably didn't have his parents around anymore.

[ 23 : 35 ] They were quite old when he was born. He would be about 30 years old, same age as Jesus. The difference is Jesus was the son of a carpenter. John was the son of a priest, a high priest, Zechariah. So he had a little more of a sense about him of being holy from birth. He dressed a little weird. He wore camel hair with a big belt wrapped around his waist. That always kind of bothered me.

I figured camel hair would be kind of itchy, you know, don't you? But then I realized this is a camel hair jacket. It's soft. So maybe I've got that wrong. Maybe it's actually kind of pleasant for all I know. He wore camel hair with a big belt around his waist. And the reason was because that was what the prophet Elijah, the greatest prophet in the Old Testament wore. Or in other words, he dressed like a prophet. Not just any prophet, but the greatest of prophets calling people to turn their lives around, just as Elijah did. Or the word we use in the church is to repent, to change their lives.

He did eat bugs and honey. I thought that was a strange diet. I don't know. Maybe it's good for you. I have no idea. And he was doing this new custom. He was baptizing people. Baptizing them as a sign of a new life, a changed life. We're going to wash away the old and live for the new. We're going to wash away the darkness and the sin and the brokenness, and we're going to live towards God.

He was a messenger to prepare the way for Christ, to make the way straight. John called us to repent, to be baptized for a change, to be called to forgiveness.

And repentance is the entrance to faith, which is why it's so important to look at John. He calls us to consider God and be prepared. What would happen if you had Christmas without any preparations?

[ 25 : 53 ] You didn't get any food. You didn't decorate any trees or anything else in the house. You didn't buy any gifts. You did nothing, and Christmas Day arrived. It wouldn't feel the same, would it?

Because the preparation is a big part of what makes Christmas, Christmas and our preparation is what big part of which makes our faith work with Jesus. So John shows up, not just in the gospel of Mark, but in Mark, in Matthew, in Luke, and in John. And do you know why he shows up in all four gospels?

Because John was the most famous, the most well-known, the most respected religious figure of his day. Not Jesus. Compared to John, Jesus was just a minor character along the way. Everybody knew about John. Everybody knew that John was a faithful man of God. And it was a huge happening. Thousands of people were going out to the desert to see John. They were traveling an inconvenient journey out into the middle of nowhere to hear what this man had to say. And he invited them to confess and to see their sin.

In another gospel, the gospel of Luke, he says to the people coming, you bunch of snakes! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

Do what you're supposed to do. Anybody like their sins being pointed out? No, I don't either. You know, I was with a group of people this week, and we were talking about some things, and I thought these actually were all pastors. And I thought I would say something profound, you know. And so I said something about how the experience that day had touched me. And one of my colleagues said, yeah, it's all about you, isn't it, Tom?

[ 28 : 02 ] Oh, jeez. Now, I know they were being funny. And I said, well, yeah, it is. But it cut. Do you know what I mean? It cut. Sometimes people don't realize that their comments they make, half-joking, can take us right to the heart. Nobody likes to have their sins pointed out. John is pointing out his sins. But we need that to happen. Because if we don't know what's wrong with us, we can't fix what's wrong with us. Amen? If you go to the doctor and say, eh, you know, I got some problems, but I'm not going to tell you what they are. You're not going to get very far.

In this passage, in the 11th verse, it actually has the voice coming from heaven, you are my son whom I love, and with I am well pleased. And in the verse before, it has the Holy Spirit descending like a dove. So we have with Jesus an image of the Holy Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, right? It's kind of an interesting thing that they show up together.

The Father is the judge, the creator of all things. He's the one who lays down the laws. He gave the laws on the mountain. He gives the laws to us so we'll know what we're supposed to do.

Because without the laws, we can't improve ourselves. In Philippians chapter 2, it says that we need to work out our salvation in fear and trembling. We're supposed to be working on our lives to improve it. We're supposed to be a better person today than we were yesterday, and look forward to being a better person tomorrow than we are today, right? Working on our lives.

But then the Holy Spirit comes and convicts us. It points out our need for grace. It shows us that we're broken. In John chapter 16, it says about the Holy Spirit, when he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment. He will convict our heart. There are times when I pay no attention to what people say about me. We have to, right?

[ 30 : 26 ] If we're going to go through life, sometimes we have to ignore all the comments, all the opinions, all the ideas, and move in the direction we think we need to go. But there's a time when the criticisms strike, and we know they're real. And they really are about what's wrong with us.

And we feel it. Not because people are trying to hurt us, but because the Holy Spirit is trying to convict us. Just being confident that we're always right and that we never do anything wrong doesn't help us. Sometimes we need to question, we need to even doubt whether or not we're on the right track. That's how we learn. And that's how we grow. It's painful. But it's helpful.

Did I make a mistake today? That's why in the course of each worship service, we take a time to actually confess our sins to God. Because confession and repentance are the entranceway to grace. So I'm going to invite you, if you'd like to, today, to pray with me now. Dear God in heaven, I have sinned. You know what I've done wrong. And I know a lot of it.

What I don't know, please point out to me. And help me to be a better person. Forgive my sins.

And move me towards the person you want me to be. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[ 32 : 10 ] And you know the words, because you've heard them before, most of you. That God has said that if we're faithful and if we confess our sins and repent of our sins, He will forgive us. And so I can say, in the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven.

Glory to God. Amen. Doesn't it feel better? See, because you're all perfect right now. See if you can hold on to that until the end of my sermon. Right? It's a fascinating thing that we go through this.

But it's an important thing. Because when we start to examine our lives and question things, we can find our way towards a healthier faith life. But the difficulty is, is the doubt can also hurt our faith.

It can be too much and overwhelming to the point where we start to even question what we know we know. We start to wonder, am I right? Is there really a God? Can I trust that I have faith?

Do I believe that I've been forgiven? You have been forgiven. The doubts can cause the greatest people of faith to question. John is in prison.

[ 33 : 21 ] And in Matthew it says to us, He heard about the deeds of Jesus and he sent his disciples to him and said, Are you the one who is to come or should we expect someone else?

This is the same John who said about Jesus that he's greater than him. He's not even worthy to untie his sandals. He pointed to Jesus and now he questions.

Because doubts can get us stuck in repentance. And repentance is good, but not by itself.

One of the shortest sermons I ever heard, and it was quite effective actually, was delivered in our sanctuary by a local priest by the name of Father Belzer.

And he got up and he said, You might have heard the story about the rich man and Lazarus. He said, You know, maybe you're like Lazarus. He said he had sores all over his body, didn't have enough food to eat.

[ 34 : 20 ] He was kind of struggling all the time in a real bad way. Seemed to have no friends except maybe a couple dogs that licked his wounds. Maybe you're like Lazarus. He said, But I suspect a lot of us are more like the rich man.

He had a comfortable life. And he was generous. He had invited his friends in for parties and gatherings. And he cared about his family and his brothers and he was worried about them.

And he tried to be giving to all the people that he knew and cared about. He said, But you should know that Lazarus went to glory while the rich man went to hell.

And then he sat down. I've got a big question for you. Who is Jesus? The Son of God! You said that with passion. I like that.

What do you think? So why do we need Jesus then? So, because he protects us. So you can stay alive? Yeah, and to protect us. What would we need protecting you from?

[ 35 : 24 ] Giant lobsters? Dragons. I just got chills when you said that. I bet he wouldn't be scared of pretty unicorns. Yeah, I like... I think I would be pretty scared of pretty unicorns.

But they're not scary. It's a thing. It's a thing. So he can protect us from sharks. Ah! I'm scared of sharks. So we need Jesus so he can save us from sharks. Oh, and from sinking in the water.

But that's mostly what life jackets, guards... You should always wear a life jacket. Jobs are. Because sharks are dangerous. So thank goodness for Jesus. Why don't we pray about him?

Let's pray! Okay, we should pray that he protects us from all the sharks. And Jesus, we can serve you for our food. Please help you to protect me in case I fall upside down with the knee.

If you're not wearing my life jacket, please bring me up. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. So, who is Jesus?

[ 36 : 21 ] Jesus, he's not just a guy we talk about. He's not just John who convicts us. He's something more than that.

John offered religion. Jesus offers grace. The law points to our need for grace. Repentance is good, but grace is better.

Who is Jesus? Jesus. He protects us from sharks and being upside down in a canoe. And dragons. Really, dragons are important.

You need to find out what a dragon is. But more so, he protects us from getting stuck in repentance. John is a great, this religious figure of his day.

He's the Billy Graham of his day. And he points to Jesus. He says that I baptize with water, but the one to come is more important than me. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.

[ 37 : 26 ] And with fire. No one is as great as Jesus. He's the Messiah. The Son of God. The Father gives the law.

The Holy Spirit convicts. But Jesus offers grace. So why is it important to look to John? Because John gives us the entrance to our faith.

He convicts us of our sin. He tells us of our brokenness and our need. But just empty religion without grace would be harsh and hurtful. And we don't have to live there.

We have a Messiah. The message of salvation. It says that this is the gospel, the good news about Jesus.

Because Jesus is good news. That's what gospel means, good news. And so when John sent his doubts to Jesus, Jesus replied, Nope.

[ 38 : 29 ] Matthew 11. There it is. Jesus replied, Go back and report to John what you hear and see. The blind receive their sight. The lame walk. Those who have leprosy are cleansed.

The deaf hear. The dead are raised. And the good news is proclaimed to the poor. With Jesus, we have a world that's turned upside down. And our brokenness is made whole.

And our sin is made good. And our lives are transformed. Repentance is good. Grace is better.

You see, we sometimes get stuck in repentance. Because if we can push other people down, we don't feel so bad about ourselves. If we can find things wrong with everybody else, we don't feel quite so bad about the brokenness in us.

But grace offers us the opportunity to not only make ourselves whole, but bring healing to everyone. So that we can all end up in a good place.

[ 39 : 30 ] What would Christmas be like if we had no preparations? It's a good question. But what would it be like if we did all the preparations and had no Christmas?



Now that will be the greatest tragedy. What would life be like if we had no Jesus, no grace? Yes. So our religion needs to remind us of our need for God.

But our faith gives us that God. And when you're looking at a place where you need to offer criticism and concern and construction and try to fix somebody who's broken, look at yourself.

Live inside out. I could turn it inside out, you know, but I'm not going to today. Because the idea behind the inside out is that the soft part is turned outside to the people around you.

And the difficult, the hard part comes towards us. But this is soft on both sides. Maybe that's what we need to be. Maybe we need to find a soft way to help people find out how they need to grow and find out how we need to grow.

[ 40 : 37 ] And certainly we need to offer grace to the world. Because in John 3, 16, and you know this, it says that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

But we usually don't read the next verse which says, For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but what? Do you see that?

God didn't come here to tell us how broken we are. He knows that. And he knows we're good at telling each other how broken we are. What we need is we need someone to tell us how we can be made whole.

Amen? My wife and I were watching TV. Well, it was just on. You know how you do that sometimes? You're in a room and we're visiting and we're talking and it was on. And it was on one of these news channels.

Right? And they just started doing what they do. Wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, wah. And I picked up the remote and I wanted to say the clicker. That tells me how old I am, right?

[ 41 : 36 ] I picked up the remote and I shut him off. And it just went peaceful. You know you can turn those guys off. You really do. You can just shut them off.

Especially when they go from trying to help you to learn to just being on the attack, the assault, the anger, the nastiness, the meanness. Just turn it off.

In fact, if you feel religion is hurtful and mean and biting and cutting, turn it off. And turn on Jesus. Because Jesus is good news.

I asked you how you could prepare for Jesus' coming. And we came up with fasting and reading the Bible and worshiping and prayer. When I asked the same question to the people who gather with us for worship on Thursday night in Niagara Falls, the first thing they said is, we could help other people.

Sheesh, didn't think of that one. Right? We could be kind. Oh, oh, that's another one, isn't it? We could offer God's love to one another.

[ 42 : 46 ] Don't you think that's the life God would want to come into? It's time for a new beginning. That's what it means to repent. So that we can proclaim good news.

Good news. It says in Romans, do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you'll be able to test and approve of God's will, his good and pleasing and perfect will, which is to bring love and grace and hope and possibilities, to be a person who's looking for how you can be a force for blessing in this world.

Not angry messengers, but messengers of the good news of Jesus Christ. That's the message we bring.

How do we do it? Well, there's lots of ways we do it this time of year, isn't it? We put lights on our house to remind people of the light of the world. We give gifts to remind people of the grace that God gives to one another.

We sing songs about Jesus. Jesus. And it helps prepare his way. Last Sunday, I was here for the hanging of the green. Some of the rest of you were here. We were doing all kinds of stuff.

[ 44 : 04 ] We were a busy crowd. We were decorating all over the building. We had kids making little crafts and things. Santa arrived on a fire engine, you know, and then the kids went and saw Santa.

We had a big feast and a meal. Some people were cleaning up. We were climbing up on things and hanging things and all sorts of stuff. Some people would have come in and said, what's this got to do with Jesus?

Well, around 7 o'clock, it was time for us to come into the sanctuary. We have a little short little service. All we do is sing the first verse of a lot of Christmas songs and read the Christmas story. And as I was walking into the sanctuary with a group of people, I heard a mother say to her child, I don't even know which one it was, she said, hurry up, hurry up.

This is the best part. This is the best part. When we go in the sanctuary, and we had over 100 people in here, and we remember why we're here.

But I wonder if Santa wasn't there, and we didn't have any crafts, and if there wasn't any meal, and there wasn't any decorating to do, and there was nothing to do but just the service, would as many a people have come that night to worship God?

[ 45 : 16 ] Maybe these little things that we do that we wonder about, the things that we somehow feel are not having anything to do with God, I've often thought this, are just God's way of getting people who don't worship Jesus to celebrate his birthday.

You know, even people who belong to other religions celebrate Christmas. Have you ever thought of that? We've got people going around saying Merry Christmas who don't have anything to do with the Christian religion, and God is saying, see, my son's birth will be celebrated.

The whole world's going to have a birthday party, even if they don't follow God. What's the message? The message the world wants to hear, the message the world needs to hear, is not about John.

I'm not going to preach about John for a few months. We're going to preach about Jesus. But John tells us, look at your life, consider it. Where does it need to be fixed so that you can get ready to go on a great journey with God?

And what do we say? We say what God has said to us. Do you hear what I hear? Do you see what I see? Do you know what I know?

[ 46 : 40 ] Tell that to the world, and they'll rejoice with you. Do you see what I see?

Do you see what I see? Way up in the sky, little land. Do you see what I see?

Do you see what I see? A star and star dancing in the night, with a day as big as a kite.

Do you see what I see? Do you see what I see? Do you see what I see? Do you see what I see? And do you see what I see? Do you see what I see?

Do you see what I see? Do you see what I see? Do you see what I see? Do you see the sun before you see? Do you see what I see? Do you see what I see? Laying through the sky, shepherded bow Hear what I hear, hear what I hear A song, oh song, high above the trees With a voice as big as the sea With a voice as big as the sea Send the shepherded boy to a mighty king Do you know what I know?

[ 48 : 23 ] Do you know what I know? In your palace for a mighty king? Do you know what I know?

Do you know what I know? A child, a child, shivers in the cold Let us bring Him silver and gold Let us bring Him silver and gold Send the king to the people everywhere Listen to what I say What I say, bring for peace Listen to what I say A child, a child, sleeping in the night He will bring us goodness and life He will bring us goodness and life Do you see what I see?

Do you hear what I hear? Do you know what I know? If so, then we tell it We tell it We proclaim it from the mountaintop Go tell it on the mountain Over the hills and everywhere Go tell it on the mountain That Jesus Christ is born While shepherds get their watching O silent flocks by night Behold, behold, behold, behold, behold, behold Peel and the heavens There shone a holy light Go tell it on the mountain

Over the hills and everywhere Go tell it on the mountain That Jesus Christ is born The shepherds feared and trembled When low above the earth Rang out the angel chorus That hailed the Savior's birth Go, tell it on the mountain Over the hills and everywhere Go, tell it on the mountain That Jesus Christ is born Down in a lonely manger The humble Christ was born And God sent us salvation That blessed Christmas morn

Go, tell it on the mountain Over the hills and everywhere Go, tell it on the mountains That Jesus Christ is born And now as confident children of God Let's greet one another with the peace of the Holy Spirit If any of the kids would like to come up And put an ornament on the tree They're welcome to come on down The hard ■ When you are watching His next day The loved one Is this removed from Senin scratch Because his surroundings Your hallway I'm here to hear The estoyr The ■ The Easter The description

[ 52 : 46 ] Piano music Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free From our fears and sins, release us, let us find our rest in thee

Israel's strength and consolation, hope above the earth thou art Dear desire of every nation, joy of every loving heart Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king Born to reign in us forever, thou thy gracious kingdom bring By thine own eternal spirit, rule in all our hearts alone

By thine own sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne You know, sharing a meal is a very special and very intimate kind of thing.

When two people sit down to eat together, to break bread together, it's a sign of love, it's a sign of unity, it's a sign of coming together.

And God has given us this meal, this holy communion meal To share with us something very intimate, something very special.

[ 55 : 44 ] God invites us to join together with him in the same supper That he invited his disciples to join him in all those many, many years ago.

The supper he came to earth to share with all creation. You are invited, I am invited. Not because the church says we can come, but because Jesus, God, the King of kings and Lord of lords has said we can come.

And so we come and we share with Christ And we make a commitment all over again, brand new That we're going to let Christ rule and reign in our hearts Just like the song said.

Everyone is welcome. If you love God, repent of your sin And seek to live in peace as a disciple of Jesus Christ You are welcome to come to the table this morning And share in this wonderful meal Share in Christ who is in us So come God calls you The Lord be with you Lift up your hearts Let us give thanks to the Lord our God It is right And a good and joyful thing always and everywhere To give thanks to you, Father Almighty Creator of heaven and earth You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life When we turned away and our love failed Your love remained steadfast You delivered us from captivity Made covenant to be our sovereign God And spoke to us through your prophets Who looked for that day When justice shall roll down like waters

[ 58 : 33 ] And the rich you send empty away Your own Son came among us as a servant To be Emmanuel Your presence with us He humbled himself in obedience to your will And freely accepted death on a cross By the baptism of his suffering Death and resurrection you gave birth to your church Delivered us from slavery to sin and death And made with us a new covenant by water And the Spirit On the night in which he gave himself up for us He took bread and he gave thanks to you He broke the bread and gave it to his disciples He said take and eat This is my body which is given for you Do this in remembrance of me When the supper was over he took the cup

Make us one with Christ And one with each other And one in ministry To all the world Until Christ comes In final victory And we feast at his heavenly banquet Through your son Jesus Christ With the Holy Spirit And your holy church All honor and glory is yours Almighty God Now and forever Amen Shall we pray together The prayer Jesus taught us Our Father Who art in heaven Hallowed be thy name Thy kingdom come Thy will be done On earth as it is in heaven Give us this day our daily bread And forgive us our trespasses As we forgive those who trespass against us And lead us not into temptation But deliver us from evil For thine is the kingdom And the power And the glory Forever and ever Amen Will those who are serving

Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen I'm going to put you with Mark, okay?

Come and join us with the Lord. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[ 67:57 ] Amen. Amen.

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Write your name on it. Put it in the basket up here, and the kids will put it up on the tree in the coming weeks. Second, if you feel the calling from God in your heart to help a child at Christmas with a gift for him, Our angel trees are full of angels that could use some help and assistance.

So take one and help somebody to have a good Christmas this year. I'd like to invite you, if you're able, to stand as we sing together, Joy to the World.

Joy to the World The Lord is come Let earth receive a King Let every heart prepare Him room And heaven and nature sing And heaven and nature sing And heaven and heaven and nature sing No more let sins and sorrows grow Nor thorns infest the ground He comes to make His blessing flow Far as the curse is found

[ 70 : 13 ] Far as the curse is found Far as, far as the curse is found The way we break the curse is with joy.

With the blessings that God has put into our heart to be people of grace that go and share the good news of Jesus Christ. And we need good news today. Amen?

And God has given us good news, not just for now, but forevermore. So go and be Go and be citizens Go and be messengers Go and be ambassadors for the good news of Jesus Christ In His peace and joy. Amen Amen you