

# Hope - Christmas Eve

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Date: 24 December 2017

Preacher: Pastor Tom Kraft

- [ 0 : 00 ]     O Holy Night, the stars are brightly shining, It is the night of our dear Savior's birth.  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining, Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices, For yonder praise, a new and glorious joy, Fall on your knees.  
O hear the angels' voices, O night divine, O night.  
When Christ was born, O night divine, O night, O night divine.
- [ 1 : 56 ]     Change shall He break, for the slave is our brother, And in His name all oppression shall cease.  
  
Sweet hymns of joy, in grateful chorus praise we, Let all within us praise His holy name, Christ is the Lord.  
  
Let heaven praise we, Noel, Noel, Noel, O night, O night divine.  
Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel... Noel... Noel...  
O night divine. Noel, Noel, O night, O night divine.
- [ 4 : 01 ]     Thank you.  
Thank you.  
Thank you.  
Thank you. Merry Christmas.  
  
Welcome to the Christmas Eve service here at Pendleton Center Church. I hope especially at this time of year, you are able to experience the wonder and the joy that Christ brings into each of our lives.
- [ 5 : 56 ]     If you would like more information about our church, please feel free to pick up a welcome folder at the back of the sanctuary at the Connection site or from the Welcome and Information desk. For everyone, we would like you to take a friendship card out of your bulletin and put your name on it so we know you were here.  
  
If you would like to receive the newsletter or need to update your information for us, please fill in your address, phone number, and email address. On the back, you can put down joys or concerns or notes for the pastors and staff.  
  
Thank you for being here and have a wonderful and Merry Christmas. Good evening, everybody. Merry Christmas. I'd like to invite you to join us and this is the day that the Lord has made.  
  
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.
- [ 7 : 11 ]     Let us rejoice and be glad in it. This is the day that the Lord has made.  
  
Lord, we pray that you will come and dwell among us, filling us with your presence, with your Holy Spirit, that we will experience you in a powerful way.

May this service of worship be a blessing to you. And may we be blessed with your love. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Angels, we have heard on high.

Amen. Amen. Exercises, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 8 : 10 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Angels we have heard on high, Sweetly singing o'er the plains, And the mountains in reply, Echoing their jolly strains.

Gloria, In excelsis Deo, Gloria, In excelsis Deo, Shepherds' light is to the lead, While your joyous strains prolong, What the gladsome tidings be, Which inspire your heavenly song.

Gloria, In excelsis Deo, Gloria, In excelsis Deo, Come to Bethlehem and see, Christ, whose heavenly angels sing, Come adore unden in me, Christ the Lord, The newborn King.

Gloria, Gloria, In excelsis Deo, Gloria, In excelsis Deo, Gloria, In excelsis Deo, See Him in a major way, Whom the choirs of angels praise, Their angels sing, Glend your aid, While our hearts in love we raise, Gloria, Gloria, In excelsis Deo,

Gloria, In excelsis Deo, The Lord be with you.

[ 11 : 35 ] And also with you. Please be seated. If you have a child from three years old to third grade, we have a program for them that they can go out for a little while and have a children's program, and then they'll be coming back just before communion to join us again.

So if you'd like your child to go out for that program, they can go out with me. I'll take them over myself, but we can meet right in the back of the sanctuary. You guys want to go? And as it is the fourth week of Advent, Christmas Eve, as we prepare for that, we'll be lighting our Advent wreath this evening.

I'd like to invite the Matina family to come forward as we light the Advent candles and read from Isaiah chapter 9. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

On those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has dawned. For to us, a child is born. To us, a son is given.

And the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

[ 12 : 42 ] Of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

And I am thankful for the word of the Lord this evening, aren't you? Yes. What thanksgivings do you have to share this evening? I know you've got some. It's Christmas Eve. How could you not?

What are we thankful for this evening? Family. What else? Granddaughter and great-granddaughter here for Christmas. God bless you.

God bless you. Yes. For who? Yeah. How many of you have got family in from out of town? Or family that isn't usually around who's here?

[ 13 : 44 ] Yes. That is such a blessing, isn't it? Amen. Amen. What other thanksgivings? Amen. Praise God. Yes.

That folks are coming to Christ. What a blessing. What a blessing. What other things do we have to be thankful for this evening? For who? God. God. What did you say?

God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. Yay. God. God. God.  
God. God. God. God. God. God.

God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. God. Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 15 : 35 ] Welcome, holy child. You don't mind our manger.

How I wish we would have known. One love awaited. Holy stranger. Make yourself at home.

Please make yourself at home. Bring your peace into our violence.

May our hungry souls be filled. Word now breaking, heaven's silence. Welcome to our world.

Welcome to our world. Fragile fingers set to heal us.

[ 16 : 43 ] Tender brow prepared for thorn. Dill any ours whose blood will save us. Unto us is born.

Unto us is born. So wrap our injured flesh around you.

Bring our air and walk our side. Rub our sin and make us holy. Perfect son of God.

Perfect son of God. Welcome to our world.

Welcome to our world. amen. More heart again. Good saiyah. Thank you.

[ 17 : 52 ] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Amen. Amen.

Dear Heavenly Father, we give you thanks and praise for this evening, for this wonderful night, when we can gather together to worship you, to give you thanks and praise for sending your Son to us.

Lord God, we offer back just a small portion of all that you have so richly blessed us with. Bless it, Lord. Give us wisdom to know how to best use it for the furtherance of your kingdom that many would come to know your Son, Jesus Christ, and be saved.

It is in his name that we pray. Amen. Please be seated. Now we come to the time in our worship when we lift up our petitions before God, those things that we know that God will hear from our hearts so that God can come in and answer our prayers.

How is it that you would have us pray this evening? I know there are many people who are dealing with cancers, who are being treated for cancers. There are many people who are recovering from surgeries.

[ 19 : 42 ] What other concerns do we have this evening? Karen. Yeah. Oh.

Yes. Okay. All right. Les Deek's mom is becoming very frail and Amy is worn out with caring for him.

What other concerns do we have this evening to lift up? Yes. Traveling mercies. Yes. For all of those people who are coming and going at this time. Yeah.

Oh my goodness. Friends who have lost loved ones this close, this time of year, how difficult it is.

And we know that there are folks also who are remembering loved ones, this being their first Christmas, without that loved one that they've lost this year.

[ 20 : 52 ] We need to keep all of those folks in our prayers. Are there any others? All right then. Will you turn your hearts and your prayers and mix them with mine and let's turn to the Lord in prayer.

Dear God in heaven, this night of all nights that we celebrate the birth of your son, Lord, we have mixed emotions.

There are so many things that we are joyful over, so many things that we celebrate. And yet we know that there are many things in this broken world that need healing.

Lord, we know, Lord God, that you sent Jesus to be the one who would bring healing to our broken world. Lord, we pray now in his name for all of those who are sick and infirm, that they would be comforted, that those who are caring for them would have patience, would have your grace, would have wisdom to know how best to handle all of these situations.

we pray, Father, for those who are nearing the end of life, that you would be with them by your spirit, that they would know your presence, that they would draw near to you.

[ 22 : 39 ] ease the discomfort and the pain of those who are with their loved ones during this time.

We pray, Lord God, for those who are grieving losses. We just ask, Lord God, that you would touch them, help them to recover and recall memories of joyful times together, and to be at peace knowing that they have the hope of eternal life with you, the hope of salvation.

Lord God, be with those who are traveling from here to there, who may be encountering weather conditions or other problems on the road.

We just ask that you would be with them. Let them come and go safely. Lord God, by your grace and mercy, keep those off the road who should not be there.

Give people the courage to speak out and say, no, you're not getting in the car now. Someone else will take you home.

[ 23 : 58 ] Lord, we pray that we, your people, would have born in our hearts this night Jesus Christ once again.

So many, many years ago, born in a manger and walking on this earth with the people who were there. let us remember in our hearts in ways that only you can make happen who he is and how he has called us to be like him.

Let us be that light in a dark world that he has been to us in our lives. let us shine in dark places and be that witness for the great love and mercy of our God and Savior.

And now, Lord, as we hear your word, as we continue in worship, let the songs we sing and the scripture we hear wash over us and transform us to make us burn brighter than ever before as that light for you be with Pastor Tom as he delivers the message you have given him for us this night.

Let it be a blessing to him and to us. Lord, make all of our worship to be a blessing to you this night. In Jesus' name we pray.

[ 25 : 36 ] Amen. Shall we hear from the word of the Lord? Good evening.

Good evening. Good evening. Scripture is from Luke, chapter 2, verses 8 to 20. Sorry.

It's Luke 2, verses 1 to 7. In those days, Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem, the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.

[ 26 : 59 ] She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. This is the word of our Lord. Thanks be to God. Do you see, and part for the firstborn Christ?

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Good evening. Merry Christmas.

[ 29 : 27 ] Amen. Amen. Reading from, continuing in Luke, chapter 2, verses 8 through 20.

This will be a sign to you.

You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.

[ 30 : 55 ] And all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. We are like rooms.

Warm. Comfortable. Bright. Playful.

Full of love. Empty. Cold.

Forsaken. Unwanted. But even in the most devastated room, God can be born.

[ 32 : 14 ] Jesus came to earth to restore your broken life. Will you open your heart to him? Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. And it came to pass that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world was to be enrolled.

I know those words by heart. I preached on this passage more than any passage in the Bible. Every year, this is when we talk about it.

And when we hear those words, we go, it's Christmas. It's Christmas. And so we talk about the things associated with Christmas, and oftentimes we use words like love or joy or peace.

But tonight I want to talk to you about one that I think probably leads to all of them, which is hope. Hope is what gives us the sense that we can have love, that there will be faith, that there's possibilities we haven't yet seen.

[ 33 : 26 ] A baby. A baby born in Bethlehem. And why a baby? Because every time we see babies, we think there's hope. They've got their whole life ahead of them.

They've also got their whole life ahead of them. We see it both ways, don't we? The hope that could be. The people living in darkness, Isaiah says, have seen a great light.

Those living in the land of deep darkness, on them a light has dawned. Hope. Which reaches through the darkness of our lives and brings light.

But sometimes hope, hope's a little elusive, a little bit of a struggle. Mary and Joseph had hope. You can see them dreaming about what it's going to be like.

When little baby Jesus is born, they've got the room all appointed and decorated. You know, the nursery in Nazareth. They figure out, will he grow up to be a carpenter like Dad?

[ 34 : 31 ] You know, he's supposed to be a king, but maybe he'll follow after Dad anyways. Will he be a joy? And they're just looking forward to the possibility. And then a decree went out from Caesar Augustus.

They said, everybody's got to take a trip. And so Joseph says to Mary, Mary, we got to go to Bethlehem. And Mary says, Joe, you do know I'm nine months pregnant, right?

Okay, you realize that? A lady who's nine months pregnant doesn't want to go to Bethlehem. Call me an Uber cab. Well, that didn't work, did it?

No Uber cabs. No easy trip. We like to see Mary riding on a donkey, even though the Bible doesn't say so. I've never been pregnant, but I have a feeling riding on a donkey isn't really a whole great deal better than walking.

I'm not sure. I just can't picture that that's a good thing. I hope they put her in a comfortable little cart with pillows all around her. I don't know. And they got her to Bethlehem.

[ 35 : 33 ] And the reservations they had made through Orbitz on the iPhone didn't come through. They were like, what? But, but, but, isn't this the Holiday Inn?

No, I'm sorry. There's a census going on. You don't know how many people are in town right now. We only have two rooms in our inn. They're full. So we do have a stable for you.

Now, ladies, I don't know. I'm not, I've never been pregnant, like I said. I have a feeling, though, that there's not one woman on the face of the earth that ever dreamed of the day they would give birth to their child in a barn and lay them in a feeding trough and had dirty shepherds for their midwives.

Am I right or am I wrong here? Okay. The dreams didn't turn out the way they had hoped. And our life doesn't always turn out the way we hope, does it?

Sometimes when we plan for blessings, we end up with disappointment. Sometimes these things are so bad they can break our hearts. In the last couple weeks, I've talked to people about mysterious diseases they have.

[ 36 : 47 ] They can't figure out what it is. Somebody said to me, that's why doctors practice medicine. Cancer. Cancer, cancer everywhere.

Strokes and death and people with money troubles and just stress. I've always looked at life as being a taste of heaven and a taste of hell. We get a little piece of it, like a commercial, of what each one could be.

Now, some people aren't so convinced that there even is such a place as heaven or a new creation or glory or however you want to call it. I read an article this week where a fellow said, well, heaven is really when you, when you, in your mind, just focus on all the good things and all the happy things and all the joyful and blessed things and don't have any of that broken stuff in your mind.

That sounds better than focusing on the bad stuff. But I've got to tell you the truth. Sometimes I'm focused on all the good stuff and the bad stuff happens. Amen? It's the kind of way it works.

And I'm not sure that I really want a world where there's nothing coming afterwards to look forward to. In 1 Corinthians chapter 15, it says, If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, you'll still in your sins.

[ 38 : 11 ] Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, where of all people most to be pitied. If only for this life we have hope.

People talk about the golden years. I can look forward to the wonderful, fantastic time when I will live in a life where I don't have to do anything and life will be good and easy.

They call them the golden years. I think they look like this. The new Amazon Echo has everyone asking Alexa for help. Alyssa, what time is it?

What's wrong with this blasted thing? Amanda! But the latest technology isn't always easy to use for people of a certain age. These kids done bought me a busted machine again.

Oh, I guess it! That's why Amazon partnered with AARP to present the new Amazon Echo Silver, the only smart speaker device designed specifically to be used by the greatest generation.

[ 39 : 11 ] It's super loud and responds to any name even remotely close to Alexa so they can find out the weather. Allegra, what is the weather outside? It is 74 degrees and sunny.

Huh? It is 74 degrees and sunny. Where? Outside. What about it? The temperature outside is 74 degrees and sunny. I don't know about that. The latest in sports.

Clarissa, how many did old Satchel strike out last night? Satchel Paige died in 1982. How many he get? Satchel Paige is dead. He what now? Died.

Who did? Satchel Paige. Oh, I don't know about that. Even local news and pop culture. Manita, what them boys up to across the street?

They are just playing. They what now? They are just playing. You say they just playing now? Yes, they are just playing. I don't know about that. Pair it to smart devices like your thermostat.

[ 40 : 10 ] Alessandra, turn the heat up. The room is already 100 degrees. Are you trying to kill me, Alessandra? It also has a quick scan feature to help them find things. Emilia, where did I put the phone?

The phone is in your right hand. And it has an uh-huh feature for long rambling stories. So then I gave him \$5 and he said, I only gave him \$1. Uh-huh.

I said, I know I gave you a \$5. Uh-huh. Because I only had a \$5 and a \$1 only. Uh-huh. And this is the \$1 right here. Uh-huh. So, I mean, you tell me who's crazy. The golden years are awaiting us.

Oh, man, can't wait to get there. If only for this life we have hope. That's not enough. The good news is in verse 11, the angels told the shepherds that a Messiah, a Savior, Jesus will be born and the glory is waiting and glory is real.

Jesus is the good shepherd. That walks us through the valley of the shadow of death and brings us to the light on the other side. The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

[ 41 : 26 ] And it is God. In the midst of darkness, there were shepherds out in the fields keeping watch over their flocks at night. Now, you know, it was dark back then.

Darker than most of us have ever seen. Because in our world, we've got ambient light everywhere. When we think it's dark, it isn't dark. There's stars you've never seen.

Because we've got lights all around us. We've got lights on airplanes and cars and just lights just coming up everywhere. Back then, they had nothing. No light. They're just sitting there in the dark with a few sheep.

Ah. Kind of spooky, man. All of a sudden, boom! The biggest light they ever saw appears. I'm surprised they didn't say it. And they were blinded. Like, whoa, dude, what's that?

And the angels appeared to them. And they said, glory to God in the highest. Christ, the shepherds, received the light of God.

[ 42 : 27 ] Proclaimed a baby would be born. Christmas. Which means, Emmanuel, God with us. And that's God with us.

Not just in this life, but in the life to come. And I believe in that. I don't know about you. Amen? Amen? Because I want to believe that there's something more after this life. And God tells us there is.

And Emmanuel's not a baby born in Bethlehem. Emmanuel's not just a baby born in eternal life, though. Emmanuel is Jesus born to us.

To you this day in the city of David. A Savior is born. He will be for you. God with you. God alive in us.

God present in us. God giving us hope. God. There are so many things people put hope in. People put hope in their plans, their dreams, their jobs, their education, their family, their friends, their money.

[ 43 : 28 ] But all those things, while they can be very good, can let us down. You know, someone once said that life is like a jar.

You got to decide what you're going to put in it. You got big things like your family and your dreams and how you spend your time at work and some of these important things that come along.

Maybe a couple more. Here we go. And then there's other things that are good. You know, like a house or a job or maybe even, maybe even a trip to Disney World, right?

Just all these kind of, kind of good and enjoyable things that we, we put into our lives. And then there's the other stuff.

You know what it is. Stuff. It takes up all kinds of our time. We don't even know why we do it. And two weeks after we've done it, we don't even remember we did it. You know what I'm talking about.

[ 44 : 30 ] Stuff. And then we decide to add God. God. Well, unfortunately, God don't get very far in our life, does he?

So, what happens is is we turn to our faith and he's not really even hardly even in there. So, what we're supposed to do start over here is we start with God.

We put God in at the center and we start to put the things that matter to us, our family and friends and values and dreams and our jobs and we put even some of the other stuff in and we mix them all kind of together.

We've been putting some of this stuff that's, you know, just stuff. Somebody cleans up isn't going to like me very much. I can tell that right now. And you just start filling it and filling it and filling it and what you'll find is there's room for everything you need but you also still have God.

So that throughout your life, whatever you're doing, wherever you're going, man, this is taking a little more than what I thought it would, you know. I even did this before and it didn't work as hard as this is. But in the end, we end up with a life centered on God.

[ 45 : 52 ] The problem is is that we want to put our hope in all the things that really in the end will not be there for us. I mean, I'm not trying to be depressing but even if we focus on the good things and even if we plan our lives right and even if we work our hardest at things and even if we have the right values and even if we go to church, sometimes we still get a glimpse of hell.

I'll have a blue Christmas without you. And I said in a sermon a week or two ago, I said, you know, every week, every week, I don't know why but it seems like death has been coming into my world, my life.

Mostly as a pastor but as a friend and just people I know. So Wednesday, I called up someone who I know was struggling and his wife said, well, you know, it would probably be better if you didn't come.

Just talk to him. I'll put you down by his ear and you can talk to him. He'll still hear you. And so I talked to him and then I had a prayer with him. Now what I didn't know is that his family had been trying to get him to let go because they said, it's time.



It's time. But he wouldn't let go. I ended my prayer with him and his wife said before she hung up the phone, he died.

[ 47 : 16 ] Ever birth somebody into heaven? I do it more than I'd like to. And then, just this week, I think it was Thursday, I got a phone call from Sam and Diana Fritz.

His brother had died. His sister-in-law as well on this bus down in Mexico that was on a tour. And not only is that tragic, but that was his second brother who died.

Because his other brother died a couple years ago. The truth of the matter is, is even if we do everything right, those darn patriots still win the football game.

I don't know what to tell you. It's a blue Christmas, that's for sure. You see, the difficulty is, is life is set up that way.

Some of it's good and some of it's not. Some of it's a glimpse of heaven, some of it's a glimpse of hell. Well, the shepherds, they saw these great things, but really, truthfully, shepherds, they had a grummy life back then.

[ 48 : 24 ] They sat out in the muck and the rain and the cold. They sat in the hottest of sun. They got no coffee breaks. They didn't go home to a nice bed.

And they got paid the lowest wages and they were treated totally with disrespect. And God said today, to you, a Savior is born, a Messiah, hope for the hopeless.

Go down to Bethlehem and check it out. And it says that they went to Bethlehem and they saw the baby and they came home praising God. Because they knew that their hope wasn't in all these things that we worry about, but their hope was in God himself.

Born into their lives. Where do you put your hope? What are you staking your life on? What do you fill your house up with?

We got all kinds of homes. I bet you if I were to take a picture of all your houses, I'd see photographs of all sorts of different things. Some of your houses would be full of stuff.

[ 49 : 32 ] Some of it good, some of it bad. Some of it wouldn't look very well, some of it would be beautiful. I bet you you got houses that have all sorts of things. And then if you walk into a person's house, you could pretty much start to see what they think is the most important thing in their lives.

But I'm going to tell you in western New York what the most important thing in your house is. It's a little fire that looks like that.

You know what it's called? A pilot light. It lives in your house, you know. I know we keep hitting down in the basement in a little metal box.

We don't even think about it. When was the last time you thought about your pilot light, really? You just don't even think about it. But it's burning down there, just that little itty bitty flame. And I'm going to tell you what happens.

If that itty bitty flame goes out, your house isn't worth anything. Really? You can't even live in it. You're going to last about a day or two.

[ 50 : 36 ] And then you'll be burning furniture and everything you think is important. And after that, there's nothing because that pilot light is out. One little light makes that much difference.

That's the way life really is. We don't recognize just how powerful God is. Because it seems like God is not that important of a thing.

But it is. It is. And without it, we have no hope. But with it, we have the hope of the universe.

Mary and Joseph went back to a tough life. They didn't even really get to live in Nazareth. They became refugees in Egypt. living off of somebody else's charity. They were poor.

People spread rumors about them all their lives. The shepherds went back to the muck and the mud in the field. They didn't get a raise. They didn't get no jobs. But they were praising God.

[ 51 : 41 ] Something was different. Mary was treasuring up these things. A child had been born. The angel said to you, to all of you, for all people, a Savior has been born.

Whether you live in a good room or a dark room, whether you're struggling with depression or whether you're living in happiness, whether you've got houses full of stuff or you've got hardly anything, whether you're feeling as if your life is crumbling apart or your life is on easy street, God can make a difference.

And God wants to be a Savior to you. He wants to light up your life. I tried lighting this with the candle. It didn't work.

So I brought the Holy Spirit with me. The difference is without the light, all we got is a bunch of stuff.

But with the light, all of a sudden we have the power of God. I went over to see Sam and Diana Fritz. They asked me to come over as a pastor to give them a word of encouragement and hope.

[ 52 : 57 ] And what they did while I was there was share with me that they weren't concerned about their brother or their sister-in-law because they had such a deep faith. And they knew that God would take care of them and they knew that God was wrapping His love around them and that somehow they would make it through and their parents had a strong faith so they'd be okay.

And I'm thinking, why am I here? Your people are preaching to me. I have hope when everything seems hopeless. The people living in darkness have seen a great light.

And that light, that power, is God. when I get cold at home, you know what I do? I walk right over to the thermostat and I turn it up.

That's all you gotta do. And all of a sudden, this big fire comes on. Did you know that? You probably don't because you keep it hidden down the basement in the metal box.

But the truth of the matter is, if you got that pilot light going, as soon as you call for the heat, bam, a big fire comes on. That's what it's like with God. A lot of times, God just feels like something that's really not all that huge.

[ 54 : 15 ] Just kind of a small, still voice in our heart until we need God, until all of a sudden we feel as if our lives are on the edge and then we call on God, boom, He sends the heat and lights us up.

Because God gives hope. Isaiah also said, to us, a child is born. To us, a son is given. The government will be on his shoulders and he will be called, say it with me, wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, and a prince of peace.

Let me tell you, I could use all of those. I don't know about you. Sometimes I think I need a counselor more than any of it. I certainly need a prince of peace and someone to care for me.

to us, a child is born. What are you doing here tonight? I mean, really, what are you doing here tonight? I bet you if I was to ask some of you, you'd say, well, you're here because it's part of your religion to worship Jesus on Christmas Eve.

Some of you would say that you came because you saw me on AM Buffalo. Hi! Some of you would tell me that you're here because somebody told you you had to be here and that you better be here because it's Christmas Eve, so get to church.

[ 55 : 35 ] You're really not sure other than that why you're here. I know there's people that are here because, well, it's tradition. Maybe you like the music. I'll tell you why God wants you to be here.

because God has decided that you should have a life-transforming experience. God has decided that your life should never be the same again.

God has decided that the brokenness and the pain and the struggle that you're carrying around, even in the midst of good times, can go away. God wants to light a fire in your heart and warm you up just like the furnaces warm up our homes.

to houses and a home until it's filled with warmth, with love, with peace, with joy, and with hope. And God wants us to come home to Him so that we can fill our lives up with the incredible blessing of God.

God is calling tonight saying to you, time to come home. Time to come home and live the life that God knows you can have now and even into eternity.

[ 56 : 51 ] Oh, you are away from home this dark and lonely night.

Tell me what best would help to ease your mind someone to give direction for this unfamiliar road.

Oh, one who says follow me and I will lead you home. how beautiful, how precious the Savior of old to love so completely a lonely soul.

How gently, how tenderly, peace as to one and all. Child, you can follow me and I will lead you home.

Trust me and follow me and I will lead you home. Lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay.

[ 58 : 41 ] Lord, I be forever and of me I pray. Bless all the dear children in thy tender care.

And take us to heaven to live with thee there. Take us to heaven to live with thee there.

God offers us the light, the light of hope and love and peace and joy that we can hold on to from now into eternity and far too often we drift off of that path and some drift very far and need to come on home and all of us who have chosen to not follow God every day we turn our backs on God in some way.

We turn back around, get right on the right path. We recommit our lives. So I invite you as we prepare for the table of grace to participate in a prayer of confession along with me.

Lord, I am a sinner. Lord, I am a sinner. I need your grace. I need your grace. Fill me with your love. Fill me with your love. Set me on the right path.

[ 60 : 12 ] Set me on the right path. Set me on the right path. Set me on the right path. Forgive my sins. Forgive my sins. Help me to be a blessing. Help me to be a blessing. Help me to be a blessing. Thank you, Lord, for your goodness, for your love, and for your mercy.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Hear the good news. Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

This proves God's love for you and for me. So in the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. In the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven.

Glory to God. Amen. And now, as a forgiven body of Christ, I ask you to greet one another with the peace of the Holy Spirit as we prepare for the table of grace.

Thank you.

[ 61 : 42 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[ 64 : 56 ] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. God lives in us. God dwells in us. God gives us hope.

So everyone's invited. It doesn't matter who you are, what you've been, where you come from. If you see Christ in your life and you want God to be your God, you want the hope that can take you through the brokenness of life and give you strength, even when things don't seem good, you're welcome at the table tonight.

We invite you also to the rail for prayers for healing or to light a candle. God invites you to come and join us. The Lord be with you. And also with you.

Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. It is right to give our thanks and praise. It is right and a good and joyful thing always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

[ 66 : 09 ] 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 the prophets. And so with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn.

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest. Holy are you and blessed is your Son, Jesus Christ, born in a stable. As a humble baby, but grew to be a man. A man of wisdom who taught the wonders of God and the love of God.

A man who proclaimed miracles and spread them abroad amongst the people that were broken. A person that brought peace and hope and yet was rejected and assaulted and attacked.

[ 67 : 23 ] And in the midst of it all, he continued to offer hope. On the night in which he was betrayed, he took the bread. He gave thanks to God and he broke the bread. He gave it to his disciples and he said, Take and eat.

This is my body, which is broken for you, for the forgiveness of sins. Eat of this, remembering me. When the supper was over, he took the cup.

He gave thanks to God. And he gave it to his disciples and he said, Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Drink of this, remembering me. And so in remembrance of these mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise.

And in thanksgiving, as a holy and living witness, as Christ gives witness to us. And so we proclaim the mystery of faith. Christ has died.

[ 68 : 31 ] Christ is risen. Christ will come again. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world, the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, 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 in your Holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. Amen. And now, as confident children of God, let us pray as he taught us in saying, 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.

[ 69 : 48 ] Will those who are assisting at the table come forward at this time, please? Amen. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Come and join us at the table at the rail for prayers for healing, to light a candle. Come and be blessed by the Lord. For by the tree, if you need gluten-free. Thank you.

[ 72 : 03 ] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[ 73 : 11 ] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

[ 74 : 48 ] Thank you. Union and you'd like communion brought to where you sit.

Please raise your hand. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Amen. Amen.

[ 77 : 48 ] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. I know that God is here.

Whereas I just felt it. I don't always feel the presence of God every single moment.

Sometimes you can just feel it. God is here.

[ 81 : 45 ] It's not a question of if. It's a question of whether you want that. I would hope and pray that you would make this the day you live for hope. The greatest power in the universe is not Tom Brady.

That's a misunderstanding in New England. The greatest power in the universe is God in our lives. So may God bless you today, tonight, and particularly tomorrow.

May he bless you with absolutely perfect and wonderful meals with nothing wrong with them. And you will say there's nothing wrong with them and they're wonderful. And may God bless you with perfect gifts that were exactly what you wanted.

And you will say they were exactly what you wanted because that's the blessed thing to do. And may God bless you with a wonderful time with people you love.

Where you'll never say anything wrong and leave politics and all that stuff aside for one day. And just bask in the love of the people around you.

[ 82 : 50 ] May God bless you. May God bless you and lift you up and give you peace and grace and joy. But most of all, may he give you hope. Burning in your heart from this day and into eternity.

Go in peace. Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas.