

God's Plan for His Son

God's Plan for Messiah

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One of this month's more curious events is what occurred at the funeral of former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. It was rightfully an occasion that captured the attention of the entire world because of Mandela's incredible journey from long-term imprisonment to being the leader who was most responsible for the end of apartheid in their country so dignitaries from many nations were in attendance including our country's President and our country's First Lady. To be sure that everyone was included, an interpreter was hired to sign each speaker's remarks for those who were hearing impaired. This gentleman was appropriately dressed, seemed to be very passionate about his task, proficient in his duties. If you watch him closely, there was a lot of repetition in his movements but he certainly would have fooled me. No question about that.

Immediately after the images were broadcast to the outside world, reports started coming in that the man was a fraud. Sign language experts said that while there are apparently several different sign languages, he wasn't doing any of them. By anybody's standard, this was just gibberish. What's amazing was that this isn't the first time he had been hired for a major event and had gotten away with it and I won't get into his explanation for what was occurring, it just makes the story more bizarre. But here's a person who is supposed to be making sense of somebody else's speech to those who can't understand it by themselves but instead is making absolutely no sense at all.

Now, here's why I raise that illustration this morning: it's to point out that that's the way you and I sound to some people around us when we start talking about the meaning of Christmas. Friends, it sounds like gibberish. It sounds like foolishness. It's like unintelligible speech like fairy tales, in the same category as Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. It's like, "Huh? What are you talking about?" Well, is that what it is? Meaningless motions we've learned over the course of our lives that we repeat this time of year whether they make any sense or not?

Of course, that's not what we believe and here's one of the many reasons why: it's because our belief is grounded in the significance and importance of fulfilled prophecy believing that the events of the Christmas story were predicted hundreds and in some cases, thousands of years before they occurred in precise exact detail. And that fact, not an opinion. We're not talking about an opinion, it's simply a matter of comparing what

was said by particular people at a particular period of time to what subsequently occurred. That fact has been a cornerstone of the Christian faith.

For example: the Apostle Paul opened what is clearly the most doctrinally robust book in the New Testament, that is the book of Romans, with a discussion of the significance of fulfilled prophecy. He said in Romans 1:1, “Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,” now hear this, “which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son,” now listen carefully, “who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness,” and yes, if you’re familiar with the book of Romans, his readers still had to listen and then make a decision about whether they were going to come to a point of repentance of their sin and faith in Christ. But it wasn’t a request to exercise blind faith or baseless faith. That’s why he later said, “Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of Christ.”

So, you’re placing your faith in facts. You’re placing your faith in evidence, in God’s word including prophecies made and prophecies fulfilled. That’s why Peter would also make that exact same case in 2 Peter 1, “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased’ and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.’ So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”

So, one of the reasons we love Christmas is because it represents a clear fulfillment of God’s plan in ways that are unmistakably divine. Unmistakably divine. With that in mind, open your Bible this morning, please, to Isaiah 9. If you don’t have a Bible with you, just pull out that one from under the chair in front of you and turn to the front section, to the Old Testament, to page 492.

This Christmas season we have been thinking about that very issue: fulfilled prophecy; God’s plan for the Messiah. We thought that was a logical conclusion to this year because we’ve been especially emphasizing all year long the matter of planning. I know some of you are very disappointed that this year is coming to an end and you’re not going to hear me talk as much about planning in the days ahead but that’s what this whole year has been about: planning to grow. So at Christmas time, the thought was let’s think about some of the ways that the events surrounding Christmas were specifically predicted by our God in ways that only he could have done.

And maybe it would be wise for us just to push the pause button for a moment and think about how unusual that is. Do you know, honestly, of anybody else in your life or in your sphere of knowledge who has the ability to predict the future? For example: if you had a friend who could predict the future and he could have told you that the winning numbers in the Mega Millions drawing this week, he would have been like your best friend, huh? No question about that and you realize even there we would talk about predicting the future a few days before it occurred and boom. That would have been something miraculous but we're not talking about that. We're talking about hundreds and in some cases, thousands of years before the event occurs. Also this: much of what God had to predict, to prophesy, was entirely unusual, was entirely unexpected. This isn't like, "Well, I predict that the sun is gonna come up tomorrow."

No, we're not talking about that. These are details you would never expect and studying them gives us insight into the person and character of our God. He is worthy of our trust. He really is. Isaiah 9, beginning in verse 1,

"But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land," and note this, it's going to come up later in the New Testament, "the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them. You shall multiply the nation, You shall increase their gladness; They will be glad in Your presence As with the gladness of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian. For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult, And cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire. For," here it is, "a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this."

Friends, we're talking this morning about God's plan for his Son and with the time we have remaining, let's organize our thoughts especially around verse 6. There is so much that we could talk about but especially around verse 6 and think about four reasons Jesus had to be born as a baby. Clearly, what is unusual about this prophesy is the emphasis on the Messiah being a child who will be born to us or a Son who will be given. That is not normally what you would expect to hear about a future leader. I mean, of course he's going to start out as a child. Of course, he's going to be somebody's son. Why would that be the emphasis of this prophesy and why was what occurred in the manger in Bethlehem so important to our faith?

You see, we're talking about the significance of the Incarnation of Christ. We're talking about why it was so important that God became a man. Four of many reasons we could cite: one is that God would be able, then, to prove that he could keep his promises. So that God could keep the promises that he made. Please remember that whenever we study the Bible, we always want to think about it in light of its historical context, right? In other words, what was this, what we just read, meant to convey to the original audience or how would this have impacted the people to whom it was initially given? If we don't get that right, what was the point of the text of the original audience, the likelihood that we're going to properly apply it to ourselves in this day and age is not very high.

Well, little question when you think about it, that the Jewish recipients were facing significant hardship because of the pending invasion of Assyria at the time that Isaiah is writing these words, would have thought as they heard about this Son, the Messiah being a child who was going to be born or a Son who was going to be given. No question about the fact that from their historical frame of reference, they would have thought of two passages of Scripture especially. One was the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7:14 and I realize you might hear that and say, "Now you're sounding like you're talking gibberish." No. There are certain texts and principles that you just have to know if you're going to understand the word of God and you want to understand the word of God, right? You have zero interest in being force-fed by some preacher, you want to understand it yourself.

Well, the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7 is a truly seminal text in all the Bible. You need to know it. Here's what happens: King David wants to build God a house, a temple, a permanent dwelling place for the Ark of the Covenant and initially when he gives that desire to the prophet Nathan, Nathan thinks, "Well, that's a great idea," but then God tells Nathan he doesn't want David to do that for a variety of reasons outside of the purpose of what we're talking about this morning. But, that's not the end of the story because God in that setting, tells Nathan to give King David an incredible promise about the coming Messiah. Part of this is clearly a reference to his coming son, Solomon. That's the near fulfillment of the prophesy but part of it clearly looks much further into the future.

Here's what the text says in part, 2 Samuel 7:12, "When your days," God says, "are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne," we get that until we get to this, "of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me." That's why, by the way, it's so important for Joseph, the husband of Mary, the human mother of Jesus, for Joseph to be of the house and lineage of David.

But when this prophecy is given in David's day about 1,000 BC, people would have surely scratched their heads and asked in part, "How in the world is God going to have a Son?" Then, when this idea is repeated in Isaiah 9:6, 300 years later, now we're at 700 BC, this nation that's in decline because of their sin and facing political leaders making unwise choices and the pressure of the ruthless nation, Assyria, upon them. Their ears would have been immediately pricked when Isaiah 2 says that a "child" is going to be

born and a “son” is going to be given. The focus is not first on him as an adult, it’s on him at his birth and they would have known that Isaiah was talking in 700 BC about the fulfillment of a prophecy that had first been given to David in 1,000 BC.

It doesn’t end there. There is also Psalm 2 which students of Scripture refer to as a royal Psalm or a Messianic Psalm. But this, too, would have made people in that day scratch their heads for sure. Here’s a little bit of it, Psalm 2:7, “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son,’” there is a conversation going on in this Psalm between God and his Son. “You are my Son. Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware. Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling. Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!”

Obviously, that’s a royal Psalm; it’s a Messianic Psalm. But God is talking to his Son. How in the world does God have a Son? And in what sense would he be begotten and rule on the earth just like the Davidic Covenant said that he would? That’s the same emphasis given in our key text in Isaiah. “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given.” And what this means in part is this: when followers of Jesus Christ look into the manger, we don’t just get a warm fuzzy feeling similar to watching a holiday movie on the Hallmark Channel. Friends, our mouths hang open in awe of a God who predicts something 1,000 years in advance and brings his word to pass in stunning detail. God said he would give us his Son. Then, as Paul would later write, “when the fullness of time came,” God did it. “God sent forth his Son born of a woman.” Lesson: God keeps his promises. God keeps his promises and I wonder if I’m talking to anyone here today who is living between a promise of God made and a promise of God kept. And is there any one of us in this room who is not living there in many, many ways? In between the promise of God made and a promise of God kept.

One of the lessons of the manger is: wise is the person who chooses to exercise biblical faith in the in-between time. The writer of Hebrews said, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen for by it the men of old gained approval.” God can keep his promises. As outrageous as they might sound at the time. The manger proves that.

Now, why else did Christ have to be born as a baby? Here’s an answer: so that he could legitimately atone for our sin. We’ve been talking about the broader context of this passage, in other words, how does this fit together with the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7 or the Messianic Psalm, Psalm 2? Now let’s tighten our focus up a bit because if you know the book of Isaiah, you know that Isaiah is in an extended discussion about the Messiah and this is not the first thing he’s had to say about the nature of God’s Son. We also have Isaiah 7:14, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”

I realize someone might say, “Well, in this sophisticated day in which we live, surely we don’t still believe in the virgin birth, do we?” What’s the answer? Of course we believe in the virgin birth. We believe in the virgin birth because that’s exactly what the word of God said would happen and we believe in the virgin birth because our salvation hangs on whether or not God is powerful enough to actually keep that promise. So, understand the child or the Son of Isaiah 9:6 has to be understood through the theological grid of what has already been communicated about the child or the Son of Isaiah 7:14.

Well, why was it so important that this Son be born of a virgin? And the answer is: so there would be no transmission of the sin nature and, therefore, Jesus could be the perfect Lamb of God. I don’t know how well you can see this picture from where you might be seated today but it’s a beautiful picture of Mary in one arm holding baby Jesus and in the other arm holding a lamb. That’s why we begin our Living Nativity in the Garden of Eden because there’s a sense in which the manger should not only conjure up thoughts that are warm and fuzzy, they should also remind us of our sin. It should create a recognition that because of our sin, there was absolutely no other way for our salvation to be secured other than Jesus being born of a virgin and then being willing to die an atoning death in our place.

We talked about this verse several weeks ago, the first Christmas prophecy. Genesis 3:15 where God said to Satan, “And I will put enmity between you,” Satan, “and the woman, and between your seed and,” ah-ha, the Messiah, “her seed. He,” Satan, here’s a news flash, “is going to bruise you on the head.” That day is going to come “but you shall bruise him on the heel.” And in order for the bruise on Christ’s heel to be efficacious, he had to be the perfect Son of God so he could legitimately die in our place which is why Paul said, “For what the law could not do, weak as it was to the flesh, God did sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.” Not sinful flesh, but in the likeness of sinful flesh. “And as an offering for sin he condemned sin in the flesh.”

Think about what that tells us about the surety of God’s plan. He was talking about that in the Garden of Eden. He was talking about that in the days of David. He was talking about that in the days of Isaiah. This has been part of God’s plan since the beginning of human history where a Savior, the precious Son of God born of a virgin, would one day hang between heaven and hell and die in our place. How? By a child being born to us. By a Son being given.

Paul would later say, “He made him who knew no sin,” the virgin birth, “to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” And I realize you might say, “Pastor Viars, I can’t believe you’re talking about our sin on Christmas.” Seriously? I talk about your sin every Sunday and mine too. When we stop sinning, I’ll stop talking about it. By the way, we’re not going to talk about everybody else’s, we’ve got enough of our own to talk about, thank you very much.

This week a group of religious leaders made a joint statement in our local paper interesting for dozens of reasons beyond our focus today. It’s even being praised in the newspaper again this morning by one of the editors. Part of what they said was

fascinating. Well, all of what they said was fascinating but let me just quote a part of it, they said: Our various religious traditions teach us to engage in the slow and demanding work of transformation. Day by day, we're called to make ourselves and the world around us a little bit better, a more loving, more hopeful and authentic place where all of God's children have a chance to flourish. Really? What's missing in all of that is the existence of our sin and our utter inability to transform ourselves apart from the redemptive work of Christ. We are not all God's children and I realize you might say, "But my Grandma said we were." I'm sorry, your Grandma was probably a great cook, she was a terrible theologian. We're not all God's children. We don't simply transform ourselves by the collective wisdom of man. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin.

And the birth of that child, that perfect Son, has been part of God's plan from the very beginning of recorded human history and thank God that it was. And the beauty is that God is still drawing men and women to himself. Scripture tells us in another great Incarnation passage, John 1, "He came to his own and those who were his own did not receive him but as many as received him," there has to be a choice, a decision, placing your faith in. "As many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God." Do you hear that? You don't start that way, you have to accept the gift of Christ. "Even those who believe in his name who are born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God."

Which is why if you're here this morning and you've never repented of your sin and placed your faith and trust in what the baby Jesus grew up and did on the cross for you, we would invite you, we would urge you, to make that decision today. To make that decision today and by God's grace we have seen more people join this church this year, more people be baptized in that baptismal behind me if you're hearing this at Faith East, more people than ever before in a 12 month period of time. But if you start peeling back those stories and find out how was it that that person came to a place of repentance and belief, here's what you'll find out many times, you'll hear about a person or a group of people who love that individual so much that they wanted to live out the gospel before them and then they wanted to passionately proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to that person, believing that there really is a heaven to be gained and a hell to be shunned.

Why would so many men and women who are part of this congregation have that kind of passionate love for the people who live around them? The answer is: because we don't think Christmas is a fable. We don't think this is some fuzzy story to make us feel good. We have deep and abiding confidence in the truth of the gospel in part because it fulfills prophecy given to us by our God that is miraculous in nature. And that's why the Apostle Paul, after talking about prophecy in the beginning of Romans 1, went on in Romans 1 to make a crucial statement where he said, "I am not ashamed. I'm not ashamed of the gospel of God. It is the power of God unto salvation to those who will believe." And I would just ask you this morning: do you have that level of confidence in the power of the gospel in part because it is rooted in predictive prophecy of God?

Now, a third reason why Jesus had to be born as a baby. It's a great one. It's that our relationship with him could be personal. It could be personal. Remember, just a couple of chapters before, Isaiah had predicted that this virgin born Son would be called Immanuel. "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son," hear this, "and she will call His name Immanuel." That's one of the great differences between Christianity and so many other religions of the world. In other belief systems man is reaching up to God by human effort to attain salvation through works and many times God is aloof and distant and unknowable. But in biblical Christianity, God reaches down because he wants to have a personal relationship with us. That emphasis is in John as well. "The word became flesh and dwelt among us." The word "dwelt" is the Greek word *skenoō*. Jesus was willing to come live in a tent. Immanuel, to be with you.

I saw this on Facebook this week and maybe this especially needs to be said in Purdue country: More significant than man walking on the moon was Jesus walking on the earth. Amen. Amen. And Amen.

We see this emphasis, too, repeatedly in our key verse: it's a gift given for us. A child will be born *to* us, a Son will be given *to* us. Note the personal nature of all of that. Once your sin has been addressed by the payment of the perfect Lamb of God, you can have a personal relationship with him that is characterized by fellowship and intimacy. He can be your Immanuel.

That also means that he can be your sympathetic High Priest. It's amazing even to think about this but the Bible tells us that Jesus learned certain things because he had a body. Is that true? Absolutely. Hebrews 5:8, "Although he was a Son he learned obedience from the things which he suffered." That doesn't mean that his knowledge was ever incomplete but because he possessed a body, he learned experientially what it felt like to be tempted when he suffered. Which is why the writer of Hebrews also said, "We don't have a high priest who can't sympathize with our weakness but one who has been tempted in all things as we are yet without sin." You see, Jesus being born as a man makes that possible in an entirely different way.

Can I ask you this? You know, there is a lot of talk right now about whether 2013 was a good year for this person or this person and this person. You can have those discussions at some other time. I'm asking you: was 2013 a good year for you? Especially in your relationship with the Lord? Because Christmas teaches us that by God being willing to become a man and tabernacle among us, it's possible to have a living, vibrant relationship with him that is authentic if we cultivate it. We said at the beginning of the year that we were planning to grow. Well, God clearly keeps his plans, huh? The question is whether or not we kept ours and the beauty is it can sustain you through the hardest of times. I realize there are people right here, right now, who are going through significantly difficult times. You're being sustained in part by God being with you.

My wife, Chris, one of her pastors when she was just a girl was Ivan French. That was up in the Elkhart area and then Pastor French and his wife moved down to Warsaw and he pastored there faithfully for many years and was also a professor when I went to school in

Grace Seminary. Pastor French's health has been declining recently and he died about a week ago and his funeral was this week and his dear wife said this during his funeral. She said, "Ivan is with the Lord and the Lord is with me." That's it. Immanuel. A child was born to us. A Son was given. We're not talking about religion here. We're not talking about ritual. We're not talking about rules. We're talking about a personal relationship with a living God. Ivan is with the Lord and the Lord is with me.

One more piece of this puzzle I'd like to highlight today and that comes from the overall argument of this chapter. In fact, if you still have your Bible open to Isaiah 9, you might want to let your eyes glance up on the previous verses but maybe we could say it like this: Jesus became a baby so that our relationship with him would be transformative. We read chapter 9 at the beginning of our time and it starts out in a gloomy fashion. The kings of both the southern and northern tribes were making unwise alliances, God's people are living in idolatry and darkness and yet this prophecy is given in the midst of all of that. And guess where these verses show up again? In the gospel of Matthew at the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. Here it is, Matthew 4:12, "Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea," surprise, surprise, "in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali." Exactly as it had been prophesied 700 years before and Matthew makes sure we get it. "This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned. From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'"

That means the Son who was given makes it possible for us to be transferred from the kingdom of darkness. He began to preach and say, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And the Apostle Paul picked up that theme in Colossians 1 when he said, "He rescued us from the domain of darkness and he transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of our sins." Friends, believing that all of this, the cross, the resurrection, all of this finds its root in fulfilled prophecy is part of what motivates many of us to live the way that we do.

I want to thank the people from this church family who have served so faithfully during the month of December because you recognize this to be a great time of the year to proclaim the good news of Christ and we've had people serving in Christmas for everyone, we've had people serving in our musical, we've had people serving in the Living Nativity. I recognize this was not the greatest weather year for the Living Nativity. Look, if we're going to plan in Indiana an outdoor evangelistic crusade at Christmas time, some years are going to be better than others. It was cold. It was snowy. It was all kinds of things.

But what was interesting to me, our family served in the second weekend and we were out there toward the exit line greeting folks. When it started snowing on that first Friday night, do you think our people started grumping? They started singing. It was wild out

there when that snow was coming down. You could hear people singing all over the parking lot. Why is that? It's because there are many people around here who really honestly believe the Christmas story is not some fable. It's not some warm fuzzy feeling we get this time of year. It's true. It's true in part because there's no other way you could explain these fulfilled prophecies and when you have belief that is that deep and that authentic, you want to get the good news out in any way you possibly can and you're not going to let a little cold or a little snow get in the way of that.

I was really thankful, I could say a lot about this but I want to be sure I've said this: one of the things that really encouraged me as a pastor was when it can to tear down time, that was one cold night. The tear down was especially populated by young men from this church. Now look, I love all of yas, love all of yas, but we have to have young men and young women who really believe deeply in their hearts that this is true. And I walked away from that particular event and after we tore everything down, it was about midnight, we hauled down to Ihop. They not only can serve well, they can eat well. But we hauled down to Ihop and I just looked around that room of young people who had served well into the night and I thought, "Praise God. Praise God for his Son who can transform us into the kind of people who believe so deeply that serving him and proclaiming his message is a joyful, joyful opportunity."

This Son who was given makes our growth and obedience focused on a person not simply principles. Later on in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus is going to take Peter – in fact, Peter referred to this in 2 Peter 1 when I talked about that earlier – but he takes him up on the Mount of Transfiguration, remember? And gives him a glimpse of his kingdom glory and, of course, as soon as that happens, Peter starts yapping. Then a voice thunders from heaven which says, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." Which is a really kind, polite, heavenly way of saying, "Shut it. Be quiet, Peter. Listen to him."

And as we think about obedience and growth we're not just talking about following principles. Hear that. Not even biblical principles. We're talking fundamentally about following a person. We're talking about letting the Redeemer transform us. The manger was not filled with a book. The manger was filled with a person and while we, of course, love the word of God, it's in the context of loving his Son that we seek to follow his word because if you just take his word apart from a growing relationship with the Redeemer, it will become stale, it will become callous and you will probably end up using it on someone else instead of yourself.

Lastly, the Son who was given personally empowers our steps. Paul said, "I've been crucified with Christ and it's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the," what? "The Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me."

Friends, it's not just a Christmas fairy tale. It's the fulfillment of prophecy that was marvelously and miraculously given thousands of years ago. It's worthy of our confidence. It's worthy of our trust. It's worthy of our joy.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, we stand in awe of you. Lord, I pray that as we enjoy our Christmas time with our families, Lord, I pray that our faith would be deepened by a God who made promises and a God who kept them. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.