

Christmas Day Service in The Worship Center  
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**Preached On:** Sunday, December 25, 2022

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Let's pray together.

*Heavenly Father, today we confess it's been a busy season, for many of us in this room, it's even been a busy last 24 hours but, Lord, at this moment, we pause to open up your word, Lord, not to focus on the traditions of the season or even the culture of the season, but to actually focus on the real biblical story of the season. So God, today help us to focus on what your word says and, Lord, may you use your Holy Spirit to pierce our hearts with it. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

This morning, I'm going to encourage you if you have a Bible with you to open up to a passage of scripture that is a part of the Christmas story but it's really not, and I'll explain that in a minute. I want you to turn to the gospel of Matthew 2. Now as you're turning to Matthew 2, you will notice on the stage today that we have what we might call a nativity set. Now just so you'll know, this is actually the preschool nativity set that we had here on our campus for many weeks that we moved in after our Christmas Eve services simply because we needed one that could be visible for one and all to see, because most of us have some form of a nativity set at our homes. Typically, we put them on some type of furniture or dining room table or such, most of them are not large. Now some of you have those that go in the yards and they're somewhat large, but a nativity set as a whole, generally speaking, is composed of the same characters whether it's a small one on your desk or a large one on this stage. Occasionally there will be some characters that are missing and/or added but generally speaking what we have before us are the wise men, the shepherds, the animals, Mary and Joseph, and the star, and of course, baby Jesus.

This is designed to give us as a culture a visual story of what we know as the Christmas story, and so today I thought we'd have fun. This is Christmas day, it is Sunday, and so I thought today we would actually walk through the nativity set and just discover who are all these characters, what part did they play in the story, and we're going to work from the outside in, obviously ending with the primary character, the person of Jesus Christ. But today, I want to encourage you to turn to Matthew 2. If you were part of our Christmas Eve services last night, you'll notice that we did not read this passage. We read from Luke 2:1-20 and Matthew 1:18-25 which are known as the traditional Christmas stories, and you'll discover in just a moment why typically this is not the passage read at Christmas time. But beginning in verse 1 of chapter 2 it says,

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, 2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. 3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. 5 And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, 6 And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. 7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. 9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. 11 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Now we read that story and it's one of the most famous stories and characters related to what we know as Christmas, but, again, this is one of the issues that we have with what we know as a traditional nativity scene, is the wise men, generally speaking, probably were not there the night that Jesus came in flesh, but we'll get to that in a moment.

Let's talk about these "wise men." I want you to notice what the Bible does not tell you. The Bible does not tell you how many wise men there were. There could have been an entourage of dozens of them. We have no idea. We typically claim there were three wise men because they came bearing three gifts and so, therefore, we just place three wise men, as you will see on this nativity set, we have two on this side and we have one on this side, and these individuals, obviously it would make an odd nativity set to have, you know, 48 wise men come rolling in on your dining room table, but it says they came bearing three very specific gifts. They came with gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Now there's two reasons these gifts are critical to the story. One is a very doctrinal aspect, and one is a very practical, and let's begin with the theological for a moment. Gold is representative of the king, that one day who we know, this child in a manger, will come at what we refer to the Second Coming, he will come as the King of kings and as the Lord of lords. Even at his birth, he was declared the one-day coming King.

The frankincense, frankincense was an element that was of a priestly order, and this is representative that Jesus Christ would be the priest of all priests. In fact, you read the

book of Hebrews, particularly chapters 7 through 10, it talks about that even in the Old Testament faith of Judaism how the priests would go into the temple on regular occasions, on daily occasions, and they would offer these sacrifices, however the problem was they would last for a season and then it would have to be reoffered, and that Jesus Christ is the ultimate priest, that when he gave his sacrifice of his blood for once, he sat down beside the throne of God.

So he is king, he is priest, and the myrrh is representative of the fact that he would be a prophet, he would be one that would declare the hard truth that oftentimes we don't want to hear in our lives. But that which we know of myrrh also was a part of the burial process of the days of Jesus Christ.

So here these gifts represent him as the one-day coming king, the eternal priest of humanity being the one in between, the mediator between man and God, and the death that he would suffer on the cross to make it all happen. But you know, these gifts were more than just a theological declaration of who this "young child" was, they also had a very practical purpose. If you continue the story after the wise men come, you will discover that Mary and Joseph and the child make their way to Egypt and they will be in Egypt for approximately two years. They are not told by God how long they will be there, he just says, "Go until I bring you out." And you may remember that there was actually an angelic being who comes to Joseph and he warns him, he says, "It's time to go back home, however, you want to go to Nazareth, you don't want to go back down south because things are a little tumultuous down there. We need to keep you safe."

These three elements, these three gifts that the wise men brought, would have been incredibly practical for this journey. First off, let's begin with the gold. You've got to fund the journey somehow. You've got to live. You've got to make do. You're in a foreign country with a foreign language. Joseph's skillset as a carpenter most likely won't be utilized in the middle of Egypt, and so how do you feed your family? How do you find a place to rent to live because you don't know how long you're going to be there? Obviously, the gold would have financed the trip for as long as the Lord needed them to be there in Egypt.

Then there's the frankincense. Remember, this is a priestly element that would have had a pleasant odor to it. Thousands of years ago, there was an aspect or basically a chemical cousin to frankincense, that women would use to adorn themselves much like the modern perfume of our day. You say, "Why is this important?" Because in those days when Mary would go out into the market to get food or to acquire goods for the home, she had to interact with people she didn't speak the language of. She had to interact with individuals who she had no concept or idea of their culture. That frankincense would have allowed her to adorn herself to present herself to be received by those who would be willing to do commerce with her.

And then there's the myrrh. You know, if you're going to take an elongated trip, even if it's a week or two week vacation, much less a hiatus such as this, one of the most difficult things isn't just financing, it isn't just kind of navigating the commerce in the market of

the community, one of the most difficult things is when you get sick. If you've ever been on a trip when sickness has entered your family's life, it's a stressful situation. You're in a foreign place, in a foreign land. It's difficult to communicate, particularly when you're crossing cultural and linguistic barriers. That element known as myrrh, yes, in one aspect and in one variation it was used as a burial medium, i.e. the theological version, however, it was also one of those generic chemicals that oftentimes could be used for medicinal properties. It could be used to settle an upset stomach. It could be used to kind of tone down a headache and such.

So basically, when these men came and gave these gifts, they gave them a bank and a pharmacy all wrapped up in one and said, "Go to Egypt. I've got you covered until I bring you home." However, here's the one major problem with the wise men, is per the nativity they weren't there. Now I'm going to take you back to Matthew 2. Now they came, they just weren't there that night. I want you to notice verse 11. It says, "And when they came to the house." Do you really think that Joseph remodeled that manger for Mary? Do you think that the next day she woke up and said, "Joseph, my whole life I've been dreaming that this would be where we would live"? Of course not. Notice it did not say they came to a manger. It says they came to a house. There is some permanence there. There is structure. Remember, this is Bethlehem. This is where Joseph was from. This was his homestead. He had connections. And so therefore they have found a place to make to the best of their ability permanent for their homestead.

Then you continue and it says "they saw the young child." Notice it didn't say "the babe," because when the shepherds have the angels visit them, remember what the shepherds say, "You will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes." Well, when the wise men show up, they don't find a babe in swaddling clothes in a manger, they find a young child in a house. Now do you understand that when Herod got so wroth, he got so upset after the wise men did not return, that he decided to eliminate any possibilities of the competition of his kingship and so he said anybody that was a young boy aged 2 and under. In other words, he was covering his bases to make sure that any and all competitors to his throne would be eliminated.

Now for years I've kind of teased and I've joked about the wise men, that if you have a nativity set at your home and you want to really be biblical, set out the nativity set and put the wise men in the guest room because they weren't there, all right? Allow them to be the guests that will come here one day, we just don't know when. And today, we could have had a lot of fun and I could have had these three individuals taken off the stage in dramatic form to show that they weren't there, but there's a big problem, you see, this nativity set has a star and the star was not a part of the shepherds' story. The star was not a part of Mary and Joseph making their way to Bethlehem. The star was only a part of the story involving the wise men. So if we remove the wise men from this nativity set, then we have to remove the star and we don't want to remove the star today because this nativity set does an incredible job of communicating an incredible truth about what happened. You'll notice that there's an angelic being who is holding a star over the manger. Now we know that it was an angelic host that came to the shepherds to announce that, "You'll find the child wrapped in swaddling clothes," so it's not unusual to think,

well, maybe there was an angelic host that was over manger, but why would the angel be holding a star? The star was not a part of the shepherds' story, it was not a part of Mary and Joseph's story, it was distinctly, as we just read, it was a part of the wise men's story.

So today let's talk about this star for just a moment. It's this time of year where you'll see a lot of YouTube videos posted and blog sites talking about what the possibilities could or could not be. I want to turn your attention to verse 2 of Matthew 2. Here's the statement, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" Notice what the wise men say, "we have seen his star." Now do you notice how personal that is? It's actually personified that there is a star that they're declaring to be his.

Now if you'll allow me just a little bit of liberty for a few moments, I want to explore what the Bible may or may not say about this famous star of Bethlehem. Is it possible that these men from the east who were wise beyond their years, is it possible that all of the "physical stars, the constellations" all lined up in such a supernatural way that it led them to the young child and the house? Absolutely. Absolutely. That is not beyond God's ability. He could have orchestrated that, and all those that are smarter than I am in that world can show you all these configurations in how that could or possibly have occurred. However, this nativity set has a star and an angel. In the book of Revelation 1, there's this incredible scene where whom we know as the Apostle John is on the island of Patmos and he sees the Lord Jesus in a very different way. He sees Jesus in what we might call his Second Coming regalia. He talks about the robe that he's wearing, his feet are as brass with judgment. It's very Second Coming-ish, and in that picture that John sees in Revelation 1, it says that Jesus, this picture of him, he has seven stars in his right hand. Now here's where it gets interesting. When you go down to verse 18 of chapter 1 of the book of Revelation it says this statement, not this is just a verbatim quote of the Bible, "The seven stars you saw are the seven angels of the churches." It just says that the stars are the angels.

Now I know some of you may be hearing that for the very first time and saying there's no way that stars are really angels, but can I give you a cultural context? Do you know we have a very large city in our culture on the west coast called Los Angeles. You do know that that means the city of angels. What are famous people from Los Angeles called? Stars. Isn't that interesting that stars live in the city of angels? You see, they think they're being original, they've just stolen it from the Bible.

So all that being said, we have this verse in the book of Revelation that claims these stars are angels and then in the very first verse of the first chapter of the book of Revelation, it says that this message that John will receive, that God will send and he will signify it – listen to this – by his angel. That's interesting. What do these wise men say in verse 2? "His star." So not only do we have a parallel in scripture a lot of times with these two items, you have a very clear personification here, and then go down to verse 9. I want you to notice the language the Bible uses, "When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood above the house." That's very personified language.

Now last thing on what we know as the star/angel is this: the story that you have before you contains a host of characters and let me remind you how God communicated what we know as the Christmas story to them. When Mary discovered that she was going to bear the Christ child, God came and communicated with an angel. When Joseph was communicated by God that Mary was telling the truth and that he could follow suit and have the opportunity to name him, God came and he signified it by an angel. When the shepherds were on the hillside minding their own business and the Christ child had been born and God wanted them to find out first, he came and communicated with an angel. So does it not make sense that these men in the east that were so desirous of the Messiah's birth would be communicated with by the same manner that everybody else had heard the story.

So chronologically speaking, these three wise men, their gifts, the angel/star, should not technically be a part of the nativity, however for the sake of today's story we're going to leave them here on the platform. So let's work our way in. Next we have what we know as the shepherds. We spoke at length about these individuals last night. These were those individuals that were pretty much on the lower spectrum of the socioeconomic scale. I made mention of whom we know as King David last night in our Christmas Eve service, that even though we know him as king, he started as a shepherd boy. He started as the job that none of his brothers wanted. He started with a job that required more agony than it did pleasure. You worked hours nobody else wanted to work. You worked with animals nobody else wanted to work with. It was a very thankless low-paying job.

So why, why would these be the ones that the angels would come and declare? Why would these be the ones that the Lord would say, "You get the first opportunity to see the Messiah"? Can I answer that with a very rhetorical question? Who better received Jesus during his ministry, the wealthy elite or the poor and the struggling? It was the poor and the struggling. You know, even in your own lives when things are going great, how often do you call on the Lord? When things are a struggle, you and the Lord are pretty tight, are you not? These were individuals who probably spent a whole host of those evenings crying out and praying to God, "Surely there's something better for my life. Surely there's got to be something other than this?" And that's exactly the kind of people who the Lord reveals himself to.

And here's another aspect about these famous shepherds. Their term or their job description is what we call pastoral. That's what they did, you pastor the sheep-herd. There's illustrations all throughout the Bible that the pastor and the sheep, the herd, these elements, these allusions in scripture. You say, "Why is that critical?" Do you remember in the gospel of John what Jesus declared himself as in chapter 10? He said, "I am the good shepherd," and he compared himself to a bad shepherd or a hireling who crawls over the wall and does things deceitfully and wrong just for his good, and then when things go sideways he leaves you and abandons you. And he told us that that was the idol, i-d-o-l, shepherd of the book of Zechariah. But Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd." That evening when the angelic host came to the shepherds to declare that the Christ child had been born, not only was he going to those that would well-receive the message but he was also giving all of us a very interesting picture of who Jesus was coming as. He was

coming as a shepherd who would care for his flock. He would give for his flock. He would protect his flock. And yes, he would even give his life for the safety of his flock.

The shepherds are pretty well-known characters and then there's this other character, the animals. Did you know that you can go home today and you can read Luke 2 frontwards, backwards, upside, any language you so choose, you will not find a single animal mentioned. I am sorry, they're not mentioned. The Bible says that there was a manger and we know that historically a manger was a place where shepherds typically gathered the sheep, they typically gathered the animals, it was oftentimes used as what we might call a food trough for the animals. So here's what we've done, we have just assumed, well, if they're in a manger and if the shepherds have come, then there must be a host of animals that were there.

Now the Bible does not say whether or not there were specific animals there. Obviously on this scene, we have one of my favorite animals, we have a camel, we have a donkey and we have sheep. We have a multitude, equal opportunity animals represented right here in the nativity. But did you know we assume they were there, but I'll go further, I'll presume that they were there. I would be willing to say that even though the Bible doesn't mention their presence, they were there and here's why I say that, it goes all the way back to the book of Genesis. There's a very famous story there we know about Noah and his ark, that big boat that he built for 120 years, right? Do you know the Bible says in Hebrews 11 he was a preacher of righteousness? It's that he told everybody, "Hey, judgment is coming. The flood is coming. You're going to want to be on this boat when it happens." Do you remember how many people got on the boat? Eight. Nobody paid attention to him. But who did pay attention? The animals. That's right. Hey, I've got news for you: they're a lot smarter than we are. You don't believe me? Some of you heard me say this, I'm going to do it again: when we get these warning signals on our phones that we are in the pattern of a tornado, there is air that is circling at over 100 mph, it is tearing stuff up, what do we do? We go get in our trucks and we chase it. That's right. "I'm gonna get a video of that thing." We've got storm-chasers. What do dogs do? They're smart, they hide under the bed. Do you know why? Because their great, great, great, great, great, not so great granddaddy one day told them, "Hey, there was a big storm once and you want to make sure that you're safe when that storm hits."

Now I know I'm being humorous and I'm being presumptuous but did you know there is a biblical record of the animal kingdom recognizing the Lord before the humans do, and I've just got a sneaky suspicion that the animals that were in the area kind of had an idea that something was up, something was big, and they might want to just kind of be a part of it. We have no record that they were there but based on the fact that they got on the boat and most humans didn't, I'm going to say they were there at some point during the story.

Then we make our way to the center. I want to begin with Joseph. Now it's not just because I'm a man but I think Joseph is the unsung hero of the story. We'll talk about Mary in just a moment. But can you imagine the ridicule that he had to endure? Can you imagine the gossip? I mean, how many people came to him and said, "You know, I

warned you about her." How many people came to him and said, "I told you about that family." How many people came to him and said, "Surely you're not gonna go through with this?" You do remember the same people that told Jesus he ought to stone the woman caught in adultery are the same people that probably had a conversation with him just a few decades earlier saying, "You don't have to stick this out. You don't have to commit to this. You can back out and you have just cause." An angel showed up and said, "Joseph, this is the story, this is what Isaiah talked about, this is what Micah talked about, this is what all the prophets talked about, and you get to be a part of it." Do you know the Bible never says he questioned. The Bible says he never said, "Hey, angel, can I have a day or two to pray about this?" The Bible just said that when he awoke he went and did as he was told.

Now we have Matthew 2 open, hopefully you still do. I want you to turn over one page to the left and I want you to see something special about Joseph that you may not have ever seen in the Christmas story. I'm going to read verse 20 and 21. It says, "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." Listen to verse 21, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou," you, "shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." In the culture of the Bible, it was a man who named the child. You remember the story of John the Baptist? Remember Zechariah, his dad, is the high priest and he's told by the angel that you're going to have a special son and his name is going to be John, and when he comes out, he doesn't believe, he's struck dumb, he's unable to speak. And when he comes out they say, "What is his name?" And he writes it down and everybody marvels because nobody in his family was named John but he named him John because that's what God said his name would be. What we just read in verse 21, who was it that gave him his rightful name Jesus, Yeshua, Redeemer, one who saves? The very first person who recognized the Christ child as the fulfillment of all these great prophecies verbally was Joseph, the one who was told, "You can get out of this." The one that was told, "Ah, you don't need to stick around." He's the one that said, "His name is Jesus."

Then there's Mary. Obviously the scripture says highly favored. When you read the gospel of Luke, I know we typically go to chapter 2 which is the famous Christmas story, but right before there in chapter 1 there's a section of the scriptures that we call the Magnificat, it's Mary's song is what it is. She makes this beautiful declaration to the Lord about her being a part of his plan for humanity and in verse 47 she makes a fascinating statement, she refers to Jesus in her womb, already been conceived of the Holy Ghost, she refers to him – listen to this – as "my Savior." Now you do realize you don't need a Savior unless you've got sin, right? You don't need saving unless you are lost.

You know, a lot of times people question why was Mary highly favored? Why was she the one that got to bear the Christ child? I mean, after all, surely there were other women that were technically qualified, why her? Do you know why? Because she was willing to say she needed a Savior. She was willing to say that she had sin in her life. How many times in Jesus' ministry did he come across just self-righteous pompous people who



thought, "I don't need you. I'm doing good on my own." And yet Mary, well favored, high favored, she was willing to say, "I need a Savior."

Speaking of the Savior, that leads us to the manger. It's not just the final character, it's the primary one. The magi came, the wise men, though later in time, bearing gifts that he was a coming king, he was a priest, he was a prophet. The shepherds showed up because the angelic host told them where he was. Mary and Joseph had navigated nine grueling months of social pressure and physical strain for this day that God would dwell in flesh. But I want to close today on what the Lord told the shepherds they would find. Here's what God told them, Luke 2. We've read it a dozen times over the past 30 days. He said, "And when you go, you will find a sign." A sign? That's an interesting word to use. In the Bible a sign is something that only God can do. I mean, after all, there's a famous story in the Old Testament where the prophet of God questions his veracity and he says, "Okay, God, I need a sign. I need the blanket to be wet and the ground to be dry." And the next morning, God does that. Then he reverses it. What we know in the book of Genesis as the famous rainbow that gave God's promise after Noah that he would not destroy by water again, he gave a sign. There's numerous things. By the way, her giving birth as a virgin is called a sign, only God can do that. Do you know what God told the shepherds? "When you get to the manger you're going to find a sign. You're going to find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes." Now that doesn't seem very sign-ish, does it? In fact, we've got babies in this room that are in swaddling clothes. We've all had babies in our home that we've swaddled. But here's the distinction and the difference: in Jesus' day swaddling clothes isn't that cute blanket that we bring home our babies in, swaddling clothes were reserved for those that were in the final stages to prepare to die. The shepherds would know it was the right one when the babe that had just started breathing on earth would actually be dressed for his death.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Christmas story just begins in the manger but it ends on a cross and an empty tomb. Every part of the story focuses on the fact that Jesus Christ came not to just be born and celebrated but to live and to die and to give himself as a ransom for many. Today, hopefully you have heard some aspect of the Christmas story that you may or may not have been familiar with, what's there, what's not there, what's tradition, what we know, what we don't know, but here's the one thing that you can't and don't need to leave without is that all the characters here, all of them, can be dismissed, you can have whatever opinion of them you want, but the character of Jesus, the Bible says one day this Christ child that we sing about this day, one day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. And so on this Christmas day, the real question isn't how much you know or don't know about the people involved in the story, the question is do you know Jesus, the one who came, who lived, who died and rose from the grave so we might be saved. Mary declared he was her Savior, the question is, is he yours?

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe today you're with us here in person, maybe you're watching online, maybe you're listening on the radio, and maybe on this very special day, the day we've set aside to recognize the birth of the Savior, maybe today's the day where you read this story, you hear this story maybe for the very first time

you realize how desperate you need the story. The Bible says in the book of Romans 10 whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Maybe that's you today, maybe you're that one who needs to call on the name of the Lord and confess your sinful condition even like Mary did and ask him to forgive and save you. If you're that person today, let me encourage you just right where you are, you don't have to do it out loud, you don't have to use the same words, the same phrase that I or somebody else would use, but right now if the Holy Spirit of God is convicting you of your sinful condition and the Savior that Jesus Christ desires to be in your life, would you call out to him? Again, it's not about a certain set of words, a certain set of phrases, this is your heart's cry, this is your prayer to God, but maybe your prayer would go something like this even on the special day set aside as Christmas. "God, today I understand the real reason for the season. God, today I finally understand why Christmas is such a big deal, it's because, God, I've got a sin problem. God, I've been places I should have never been. God, I'm confessing I've done things I should have never done and your Bible says the results or the wages of my sin is death. But God, today I believe the other half of that verse that says but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. God, today I believe, God, I believe I've got a sin condition that only Jesus can save me from. I believe Jesus came for me, I believe he lived for me, God, I believe he went to the cross for me and, God, today I believe that he rose from the grave so I could be forgiven of my sins and I could be saved for all of eternity. God, today I don't understand how to fix all the problems in this world, I don't understand all the issues and the struggles, but there's one thing I know on this very specific Christmas day, that I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can solve. In the best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, in just a moment I'm going to pray for us, then we're going to stand and sing one of the great songs and carols of the season, "Silent night, holy night." But maybe you're that person, maybe you're that individual who cried out to God today, we'd love to have a conversation with you. In fact, we just encourage you while we're singing just to step out and step forward, we'd love to celebrate what God did and is doing in your life even this very day.

*Lord Jesus, today we have come to celebrate your birth because we realize the importance of your death and your resurrection. God, as we enter this time of response, may we not just see you as the babe in a manger or the child in the house but, Lord, the victorious raised Messiah from the dead who can save us and forgive us. It's in his name we pray. Amen.*