

Good evening. This will be a Christmas message that probably isn't going to feel like one, but I promise you it is one. It will help us get ready for Friday night. This is simply serving as a setup for all that. So I'll leave you a little bit hanging tonight, maybe even in despair, but I promise it gets to be better. Now my wife is in this room tonight, so you can know that what I'm about to say is accurate. I have not historically been the biggest fan of Christmas. I resent having to put the lights out. I think it's risking my life, and I don't quite understand for what. The pitch of our roof is insane. So the thought of me being on a ladder hanging up lights or me trying to wrestle an Italian Cyprus tree or me weaving my way through bushes making lights that are uniformly placed is enough to drive me insane. In fact, most years Lauren just starts doing it herself to shame me. So when people go, "Oh your lights look great," she can go, "Thank you. I appreciate that. Matt was watching television." So I haven't been a big fan. I don't like Christmas carols that start in September. That just bothers me. Give us Thanksgiving. For goodness sake, give us Halloween. I've just never been a big fan.

And for whatever reason, this year I've been all in. My father-in-law came over to help me, and we both risked our lives together hanging up lights on our roof. I was even the one going, "Do you think we need a reindeer?" I don't know what happened to me. I was like, "We need to put bows in those trees." A couple of times I thought, "Your meds are off. You need to call your doctor and ask her about your meds. They're off." So we decorated the whole house. I am straight up Chevy Chase this year for some reason. Part of that is that my kids are now at that age. It's really kind of magical to them. Not Norah. Norah is going to wake up Christmas morning because we wake her up, she's going to eat some paper and go back to sleep. I've got three kids. I know that's exactly how it's going to go. But right now for Reid and Audrey, there is this ridiculous anticipation building in them. So even this morning, I'm sitting down in a chair in the living room. My son comes in and doesn't even make eye contact with me. He's just staring at the presents, and he just goes, "How long until Christmas?" I was like, "A few more days, buddy." If you think about it, it really is pretty torturous. You're like hanging up these stockings going, "Soon, as in forty days from now, these will be filled with toys and candy. And I just want to remind you of that every day between now and then." You're doing this to a four-year-old. It's just torturous. So in the end, we've been getting after all of this, and I really have enjoyed it. The kids are now shaking boxes and trying to guess. "I think it's a Barbie because this looks like a Barbie box." "Well, I think I have to take that back to Target." It has just kind of been that year for us where there's a lot of excitement and there's a lot of joy and fun.

But here's the thing and here's where it will take a little bit of a turn and isn't quite the Christmas message most of us were wanting. Last year is when I finally got Christmas. That's when I got it. That's when it clicked for me. And that's pretty embarrassing since I'm a pastor. It's not, "Oh, baby Jesus was born in the manger." I absolutely got that. I absolutely understood the incarnation, just the unfathomable reality that God came in the flesh, that the One that spun the universe into being put on flesh and walked among us. Now I knew that. But on the 26th of November, Thanksgiving morning, I had a seizure right after I put my daughter down and woke up in the hospital. I don't remember any of the tests until the MRI in the emergency room. My wife will tell you that I woke up like five or six times and asked the same set of questions each time, but I don't remember any of that until the last time. I have only one memory of waking up. There weren't multiple memories for me. So I wake up going to the MRI, and then the doctor was very compassionate and merciful to me as he pulled his little stool next to my bed and said, "There is a mass in your right frontal lobe. It looks clean. It should be all right, but you're going to see a neurosurgeon. And I'm going to be honest with you here. I don't remember feeling any fear or worry or angst in that moment. I wanted home. I had bitten through my tongue, I had a seizure in front of my kids, so my mind and my heart was at home wondering what my seven-year-old daughter

was thinking. So I just wanted out of there. He could have told me anything. He could have said, "You're going to grow antlers," and I would have been like, "All right. Can I go?"

So I finally went home and, through some contacts we had with our elder board, we got in touch with Dr. Barnett, one of the two best brain surgeons in the area. So we scheduled with Barnett that Tuesday, and I went into that meeting not worried at all. I was not prepared for that day. That day taught me how to go to the doctor. It wasn't until that day that I knew how to go to the doctor, because I had never received bad news before. So I'm literally walking in to meet with Barnett thinking that I'm about to hear, "We're going to have to watch this for the next few months. We'll take MRI's, keep you on your seizure medicine and we'll just watch it." So that's what I'm expecting. I go in with Lauren and Brian Miller, our chairmen of the elders who has been such a dear friend of mine through this whole ordeal. We go into Barnett's office, he sits down and pulls up this screen and show it to me. I think doctors have to do this. I have no idea what he's talking about. And he turns to me and said, "This looks really bad. I've made space for you on Friday." I don't even know that it registered when he said that. "You made space for me on Friday? What do you mean 'space?' Are we going to grab something to eat?" And then it dawned on me that I'm going to have what they call a "resection" craniotomy. I find out they're going to cut out a big portion of my right frontal lobe. They began to talk about what this could mean, what this could do, and I felt like I got punched in the soul and I could not find the ground. So we're making calls, we're letting people who need to know first like. My parents and my in-laws were making those calls. I was trying to call a couple of my boys. I tried to call Patterson, and when he answers the phone, I literally can't talk. I'm trying to tell him what I just learned, and I can't get the words out. I had to hand the phone to Brian Miller and he told Patterson, "He's got surgery on Friday. It doesn't look good."

So we go in on Friday and I have a seven hour craniotomy. They crack open my head, they cut out the tumor, put my skull back on, stick my into an intraoperative MRI, take a picture and they don't like how it's signaling around where the tumor was. So he cuts out some more, puts the skull back on, takes another picture and still doesn't like how it's signaling. So he cuts out some more and then, in his words, sees that my brain "kind of turning to mush," and so he thinks he's pushed it as far as he can. So knowing that I'm vain, he sutures me up instead of stapling me shut so you can't see the scar. So I wake up later. And here's the great thing about being a believer in Christ. You always come out of surgery in one of two places. You either come out groggy with your family there or you come out into eternal glory. I come out groggy to Barnett going, "Do you know who I am? Do who I am?" To which I responded, "Yeah, I know who you are. You're David Barnett. You're my surgeon."

Now I begin to get better. They move me from ICU into a regular room and then over into rehab, which is great because now I can say, "When I was in rehab. . ." And I was never able to say that before. So they moved me into rehab because I had some weakness on my left side and had some cognitive issues. If you could imagine me fluttering a bit, that's what was happening. I was arguing with one of the therapists who was saying, "Which one of these items don't belong." I was like, "I can argue any of those. Which one do you not want to belong?" My wife was literally going, "Matt, you're making this harder than it needs to be." It was like a spoon, a knife and a chainsaw. I'm like, "Well, you could take the spoon out because the knife and chainsaw both cut things." And then from there, I start to wake up to the reality that nobody is telling me what they took out of my head. So I start asking some questions and here's what I would get, here is my first flag that something was wrong. I'm going, "Hey, what did we find?" And they're going, "Just get stronger. Just recover from the surgery." Well I've been around this enough to know that's not a good sign. And then when they do tell me the pathology, they're like, "Why don't you get some of your friends and family, and you guys come up to my office and we'll talk about it." I'm like, "Am I going to die? Today?" So we meet and they tell me I have anaplastic oligodendroglioma, a malignant unencapsulated brain cancer. The protocol is six weeks of radiation and chemo with a little break followed by eighteen months of chemotherapy. The life expectancy is 2-3 years.

They release me from the hospital on December 16. I was not all there, but they let me out. And when you cut out a big hunk of your brain, spinal fluid fills it in, so your brain is a little more buoyant. So when I would roll over in bed, I could feel my brain kind of moving within my skull. It's pretty gross and yet, looking back on it now, pretty awesome. I was a wreck. Confident in my God? Absolutely. Loving the process? No. Look, I am not afraid to die, but I have preferences. Turning into a vegetable in front of my young children is not my preference. Getting attacked by a pack of ravenous wolves, that's my preference. How cool of a story is that? "What happened to pastor Chandler?" "Wolves." That's like a legacy. "He drooled himself to death," that's not how I want to go out. But I don't have any say in that either, do I? So in the end, I'm hopped up on steroids and every time I see my kids, every time I talk to my wife, every time I see anything, I'm literally wondering if this is the last year I get to do that. "Is this the last year I get to see that? Is that the last year I get to experience that?" I began to wonder about my children's future. So I'm just crying all the time, which is wiggling everybody out. So I would put my headphones in, put some worship music on and I would just be with the Lord and hide out. And then Lauren would go, "What are you doing?" Then I would try to explain to her that I feel like I'm crying all the time and I don't want to wig out all the kids. But I couldn't even explain that to her without crying.

Now Christmas Eve rolls around and we're coming. I needed out of the house, and Lauren needed me out of the house. So we got here really early, hid out in my office and then security walked me through the back hallway, through the back door and I sat in the back with my in-laws, my kids and my wife and sang, "O come, O come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel." And I got it. All the angst and all the hope that they were feeling for the Messiah I felt for a moment back there, and it made last Christmas a benchmark in my life. With all those cute Christmas carols carried the thunder of God in them, and I sat back there and wept and cried out to Him. And I think we miss the weight behind Advent, we miss the weight behind what this season is. Part of it is because we live where we live by the grace of God. So we miss out on the sorrow that accompanied the people of Israel right up until that baby screamed in Bethlehem. So what I want to do is walk you through a bit of history to frame up what we're going to be celebrating come Friday for this people. And then I want to give you hope if this is your year to feel the weight of it.

You know some of this. We start with God being the Creator of all things. He creates all things good, in rhythm and they work well. Sin enters the world and fractures, breaks it, destroys everything. Man spirals out of control in his depravity to the point where God regrets the day He made man and kills all of them but Noah and his family. The boat crashes into a mountain in Iraq (apparently). From there, they begin to populate the earth again, and it doesn't take long for it to go dark again. In Genesis 12, God comes to a man named Abram and says, "You're going to have a son. You're going to be the father of a great nation, and out of that nation I'm going to raise up a Messiah who will fix all of this. All that has gone wrong in the Fall, I'll restore through this line. Now there were some issues with that. Abraham was 75 years old at the time of this promise, and Isaac would not come for another 25 years. He's 100 when his kid is born. Can you imagine high school graduation for Isaac? "That's awesome. You're great-great-great grandfather is here. What do you mean that's your dad?" So you finally get Isaac and the thing begins to move and you begin to see this lineage begin to grow. Abraham settles and his sons settle. And then you've got Joseph who has the dream that his brothers bowed down to him, the youngest of the boys. And the moron tells them this at breakfast. "I had this crazy dream last night. You guys bowed down and worshiped me." You should probably just keep that one to yourself. They know that their daddy loves Joseph more than he loves them, and so they sell him into slavery. From there he ends up in prison because Potiphar's wife tries to jump him, he leaves, she rips his coat off and claims that he tried to rape her. You've got this whole difficult life, but then it ends with him being one of the ruling elites in Egypt. A huge famine hits Abraham and the clan, so much so that they are forced into Egypt to seek food and water. And when Joseph's brothers come into town, who do they have to talk to about food and who do they have to talk to about sanctuary? Joseph. So Joseph, on that throne, just like he dreamed about so many years before that, sees his brothers come before him and say, "There is a famine and we're all dead if you don't help us." Do you understand what this means? That means that God's promise to Abram is dead if

Joseph's not on that throne. Joseph says the very famous line, "What you have meant for evil, God has meant for good." And he gives his brothers and his father and the tiny nation of Jews sanctuary in Egypt.

Now the Bible tells us from this moment that they began to grow and grow and grow in Egypt to the point where the Egyptians were a little wigged out about how big the Israelite families were. So the Jews were like Mormons on steroids with a dozen or so kids each. Every Jewish family was like a TLC show. So the Egyptians see how outnumbered they are and start to get worried that Israel is going to wake up and take Egypt from the Egyptians with their superior numbers. So the Egyptians buy into one of the greatest follies that leaders have ever bought into (and they still buy into it today) when they're afraid of a people group. They oppress and suppress them, and that's exactly what they did to the Jews. So they make the Jews slaves, force on them hard labor, dehumanize them and take away their dignity and their humanity. Because remember how we meet Charlton Heston? An Egyptian is beating a Jew and Charlton snaps and kills the guy with his bare hands. That has always just given me a great affection for him. Anybody can spear or shoot a guy. He killed him with his hands. And then from there, he freaks out because somebody saw, and he runs off into the woods. Later we find him tending sheep when God shows up and says, "I've heard the cries of My people. I remember the promise I made to Abram. Go to Pharaoh and tell him to let My people go." Moses argues with God. I can make life simple for you. You don't win arguments with God. He's all knowing and you're not. You don't win. It's like your one-year-old arguing with you. You just should win that. So in the end he goes, he leads them out and they come back to the borders of the land they once owned before the famine forced them into Egypt.

They send twelve men to spy out the land, and they come back to report. Of the twelve, only Caleb and Joshua say, "We can do this." The other ten go, "This land is filled with a bunch of Shaquille O'Neals, they've got towers up into the sky and they will kill us a hundred times over if we go in." Joshua and Caleb persist, "We can take these fools." And in the end, they lose the bet and God goes, "Okay, then you don't get to go in." They wander the wilderness for forty years until every one of them is dead except for Caleb and Joshua. Even Moses dies before he gets to go in. Now God showed it to him, but He didn't get to go in. Joshua was the one to take them in. Now they head in and, although in Sunday school we romance the mess out of it, it was bloody warfare for decades and decades.

And then Israel began to grumble again. It's weird. They started to complain again. Here's what they were whining about. "We're tired of hearing directly from You, God. We want a king. Give us a king, not just a leader. Because the other nations have kings." And so God gives them a king, a man named Saul. People Magazine 930 B.C. voted him "Sexiest Man Alive." Saul is a foot taller than everyone else, he's the best hunter they have and other men feel like lesser men in his presence. He is made king, and it does not take him long to believe the hype about himself. He falls out of favor with God, and God anoints another to be king, David. Now David plays the harp, but you're not going to jack with him. When he goes and hears Goliath talking noise, he goes to fight him and the rest of the soldiers start mocking him a bit. He says to them, "God gave me the lion, He gave me the bear; He'll give me the head of this dog." So David's going, "I've killed a lion and a bear, and both of those were by God's power and God's might. God will give me this fool's head." So he plays the harp, but you're not going to go, "Hey, harp boy!" Because you'll lose your teeth. So in the end, David plays the harp, but he's a man after God's own heart. God anoints him king, and he becomes king after this extended period of time and we begin to enter into the golden age of Israel's life. He is raised to the throne, but his throne is marked by war. He is constantly at war. He's got mighty men who are just unbelievable and can kill a hundred guys at a time. They are just beasts. And he's constantly at war, so much so that God's not going to let him build the temple because he had killed too many people.

So David dies. And it's interesting that around men, the Bible never stops, even at these significant moments where king David dies, the Bible stops for a verse or two and then the story just continues. Even in how Scripture is written, God is trying to teach you that there is one story and one superstar, and it's not David, it's not Abram, it's not Moses, it's

not Noah. There's one superstar, and His name is Jesus. Now to get back into this, David's son Solomon becomes king and he establishes the temple in Jerusalem. And it looks like for just a brief few years that Genesis 12 has been fulfilled. You've got Israel, one of the most powerful, feared nations on earth. They are unbelievably wealthy. You've got men and women coming from the surrounding nations to check out the temple and to check out the God of the Jews. In the New Testament, any time you read the term "God fearing man" or "God fearing woman." That's what it's talking about. Lydia in Acts 16 was a God fearing woman. That is a non-Jew who is interested in and looking into Yahweh, Jehovah. So it begins to look like Genesis 12 is happening as the nations come to check out the temple in Jerusalem.

Now Solomon dies, and immediately the kingdom begins to fall apart. There is basically a civil war that occurs and fractures Israel into two kingdoms. Israel is the northern kingdom made up of ten tribes, and Judah is the southern kingdom made up of two tribes. So that golden era, that pinnacle of Jewish life in Israel did not last long at all. At this same time, the Babylonians and the Assyrians began to build up their armies on both sides of Israel and Judah, and it didn't take long for Assyria to wipe Israel off the map, to take their land and to send their people into exile, slavery and service. Now Judah hung on a little bit longer than Israel, about a hundred years longer, but they too fell by just the sheer might of those great nations and were put in exile. So what you see happening over the next couple hundred years is Cyrus sends Zerubbabel back into recolonize that area with Jewish settlements, and then there is a second one that comes with Ezra the Scribe. So they come back in and they resettle and begin to feel like they're going to build this thing back up. So they're once again coming out of slavery and back into the land that God promised them, and they begin to try to put life back together.

Once again, they're coming out of sorrow, coming out of exploitation, coming out of mistreatment and oppression to set it up again. "Maybe this is our chance, maybe this is our time." And then has anybody heard of Alexander the Great? Alexander decides to Hellenize the world, and Jerusalem doesn't escape it either. So once again, the Jewish people are put into bondage, put into slavery until the Hellenists screwed up pretty badly. They forbade the Jews from worshiping God and they desecrated the temple. When this happened, a man named Mattathias and his Son Judah, whose nickname was "The Hammer," decide that no occupying force is going to tell them when and where to worship, and they're definitely not going to touch the temple of their God. So they lead a rebellion, the Maccabean Revolt, against the Greeks, and they start to win. Judah was brilliant. He was the first one who kind of figured out how to handle their elephants. He was a brilliant military strategist. He was Braveheart before Braveheart, sans the kilts and blue paint. And he gives the Greeks fits, so much so that for about eighty years, the Jews get self-governing rule again. And then comes Pompey, a Roman general who decided that he liked that sliver of land. And once again, the Jews are attacked, they're overrun and they're in exile, dispersed into dysphoria throughout the ancient world. They are made slaves, made beggars, made thieves and they are absolutely isolated in the ancient world.

Now through all of this, the prophets are screaming out to them, "You need to repent. You need to follow God, you need to listen to the words of God. We need to get back tot the Law. We need to get back to having hearts that desire Him and love Him." You see, Israel had the same problem we have. We tend to forget. It doesn't take us long to believe our own might and to forget how fragile we are. The reality is most people in this room do not feel desperately dependent on God. But the only reason you're breathing right now is because He is letting you. No one in this room is exempt from having their whole world shattered with a phone call tonight, none of you. It doesn't matter what your security system is, it doesn't matter what kind of helicopter parent you are, there isn't anyone in this room whose whole life wouldn't crumble around them with a simple phone call. You are vulnerable and fragile and in desperate need of protection and a Savior. That's the same mistake that Israel kept making over and over. When they were healthy, they were like, "Aren't we good." When they won battles, they were like, "Didn't we do a great job in battle." When their fences and borders went up, they went, "Man, didn't we do a great job." They constantly took credit for what God was doing and exempted God the glory due His name for providing so faithfully to His people.

Now, that takes us to Isaiah 9, and I want to read some of this to you and explain why we miss out on this facet of what Israel is going through as they await the Messiah to come. Isaiah 9, starting in verse 6, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder. . ." Now for most of us, right now a Christmas carol comes to mind. But for them, they just heard that the government will be on His shoulder. So you and I don't know anything about oppression. Oppression for us is being x-rayed into nudity as we board a plane or being patted down. Now I'm not making a political statement about that. I'm just saying that's oppression to us. We do a lot of work in southern Sudan. You're going to hear more and more about that leading up to the referendum on January 8, where the south will secede from the north who has been responsible for the slaughter of millions and millions of the southerners. I was up in DC this week by invitation to meet with some other people who were involved in Sudan. I got to sit in those meetings at the State Department and talk and dream about what we could do. And this week released on the web was a video of police beating a woman while other police sat there and laughed. Now you and I have no comprehension of that. If something goes down, we dial three digits and help is there within four minutes. In our case, they were there in fewer than a minute because we live two blocks from the fire station. We are protected for the most part by our government. We do not live in fear of what might happen. If someone assaults us, there's someone to call. If someone steals from us, there's someone to call. If someone rapes somebody we love, we can make a call and the process of justice begins. Our brothers and sisters in Sudan do not have that. Our brothers and sisters here in Israel did not have that. So we read, ". . .and the government shall be on His shoulders," and we don't even think about what that means to the 1st century Jews looking for this Messiah to come. He's saying, "Hey, that's going to end. I'm going to stop that."

And then look where he goes next. ". . .and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." It is very significant there that He is called the Prince of Peace to a people who have known nothing but either slavery or war since God made them a people. Let's keep reading because verse 7 will help us some. "Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." Now Israel had been here before. They saw the reign of David, they saw the reign of Solomon, they went back in to rebuild with Zerubbabel, they went back in to rebuild with Ezra and Nehemiah, they had the hope of everlasting peace before only to have it snatched away from them and go back into slavery or go back into war. But the prophecy about this boy that was coming is that once He's here, it's everlasting peace, it's an everlasting justice, it's an everlasting reign. It's not for a decade, it's not for two decades, it's not for thirty years, it's not for eighty years, it will be forever. And so Israel watched and waited for this boy to get here.

Now let's flip over to Malachi 4. Starting in verse 1, "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." Think about all they had endured and how often the arrogance and violence of men had crushed them and hard pressed them, and God is promising here, "I'm going to destroy all of that to the point where there won't be another shoot, it's not going to come back, there's not going to be stump and it's going to be ashes on your feet. I'm going to end it once and for all." By the way, that's what He promised Abram in Genesis 12. Let's keep reading because there are some cool things in here too. "But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts. Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 6And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." This is such a great text because He's pointing back to promises made and pointing forward to those promises being fulfilled. He's saying, "Remember what I promised you. Remember what I've told you is coming. There is going to be a day where the wicked are finally destroyed and the righteous leap like calves." Now I only understand that from a book

point of view. I've never been around calves when they leap out of the stalls, but apparently they look really happy when they do that and that's the word picture He's trying to paint here for you. There's just this ecstatic thing coming for you and me, and He points back to the Law and the fulfillment of the Law. He points back to relationships being reconciled. He points back to fathers being drawn to their children, children being drawn to their fathers and the restoration of broken relationships.

But what happens next is such an important piece. Let's look at what happens after Malachi 4:6. It's just a blank piece of paper. Now, to go from Malachi 4 to Matthew 1 takes one second for us and Jesus is on the scene. For Israel and the Jews, it's 400 years of nothing, complete and utter silence. So don't miss this. From their inception by God as a people, God is speaking to them, sending prophets to them, sending kings to them, being very vocal with them and now all of a sudden there's this reminder of what He has promised, what is to come and then it just goes quiet for hundreds of years. . .until a baby cries. When that baby cries, everything begins to right. We're going to talk quite a bit about that on Christmas Eve. And then on the 26th we'll finish it because we still live in some of this tension.

So let me end just by saying this. For some of you, this is not your best year in regards to this season. Here's what I mean by that. At my house this year, we're healthy. I'm a round of chemo right now, I'll be done by Tuesday and I'll be fully recovered by Christmas morning. So I'll be there. Last year, I wasn't there. I sat in the room, but I wasn't there. I was kind of fuzzed out of my mind. At the end of the day, I'm going to get there with my kids and we're going to open up presents and laugh. We've got money in the bank, no one has died, we're happy, Lauren hadn't left me this year and we don't have a kid that is sick. My parents and in-laws both have the love language of gift giving, so my kids are going to be spoiled rotten out of their mind with toys that make noise and get them beaten repeatedly. Did I say beaten? I meant disciplined lovingly. In the end I know that's coming. We're going to eat, we're going to laugh and spend time with some family.

That's what we've got coming, but that's not reality for all of you, is it? I know right now we've got members of this church who are in a nasty fight with cancer. There are members of this church who are in the hospital right now. There are people at this church whose husband left, who took the money and left the kids. There are single moms trying to figure out how to do this. There are husbands who have lost wives. There are people who, just because of the economy, have nothing but have children who are expecting, as they talk with their friends, as every commercial goes by and as every billboard is seen, they want, they desire and they tell that to moms and dads who have no means by which to get them those things. So this time of the year for some is lonely and it's painful. And I don't know that this will make it any better at all, but what I'm telling you is that you're getting a glimpse of Advent. You're getting a glimpse of the waiting. You're getting a glimpse of the reality that Jesus really is what we're after, what we need and what our pursuit is. So may God strengthen you, may He bless you and may He keep you. I'm fully confident that He will. Because here's what we know biblically and historically. Eventually the baby cries, and that cry changes everything.

Let's pray. "Father, thank You. Just what an evidence of Your love for us we have, that You would put on flesh and blood, that You would walk among us, that You would intervene, that You would rescue and that You would in one act create the ability for us to put faith in You and live fearless regardless of circumstances. So I know there are those in here tonight who are hurting. There are those in here tonight who this will be their first Christmas without a loved one who passed away this year. For some of us, there will be a lot of tears and this will not be an easy season. But my prayer is that, in this season, this difficult season, that we would find our hearts being drawn up into the greatness that is You, that we haven't been abandoned, that we haven't been sold off into oppression, that we have hope even in the midst of difficult seasons. We love You. Thank You. You are the light, and we agree with our brothers. Come, come, Emmanuel. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."