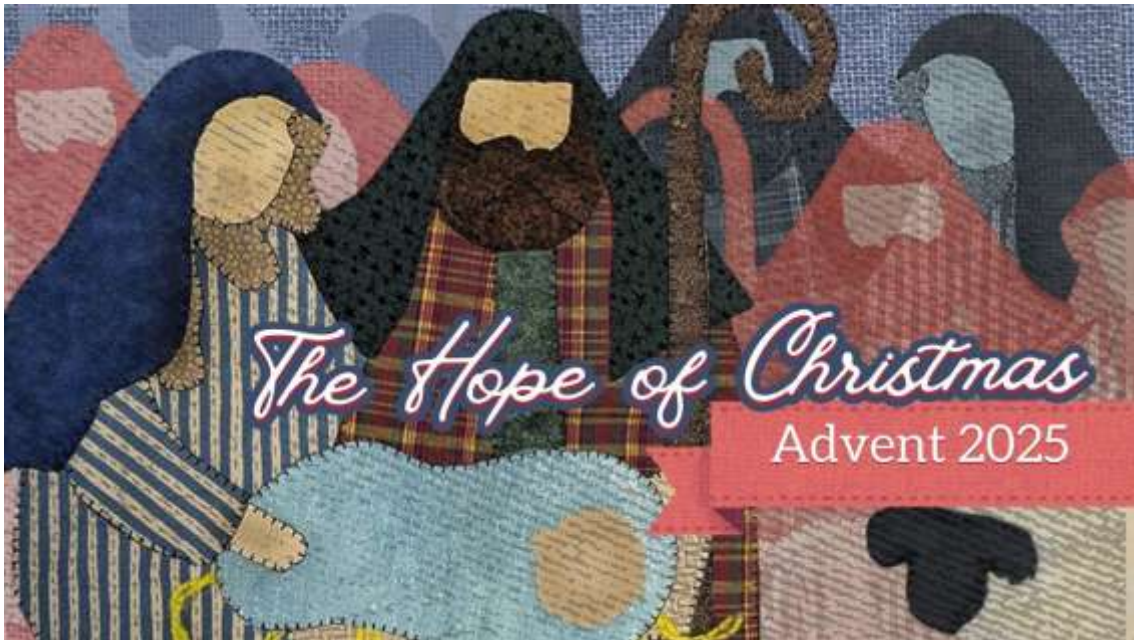


The Hope of Christmas
Kenwood Baptist Church Sermon Series
Advent 2024
Pastor David Palmer
November 30, 2025

TEXT: Matthew 1:17-25



Good morning, beloved. Happy first Sunday of Advent. Praise God. This Sunday marks the first Sunday of Advent. The word "Advent" comes from the Latin verb *advenire*, which means to arrive. Advent is about celebrating the arrival of Christ as Savior into the world. Christians celebrate Advent around the world. They celebrate it the four weeks leading up to Christmas around these four themes: hope, peace, joy, and love. This Sunday, the Sunday of hope, is traditionally known as the Sunday of the prophets, as God's Word leads us to anticipate the hope that comes to the world in and through Jesus Christ, through Him alone.

Christmas is a time when we think of words like warmth, family, togetherness. There are so many ministries in our church. Some are visible, some are less visible. One of the ministries of our church that may be less visible to many of us is the quilting ladies. God bless the quilting ladies. They meet regularly. They have a great time. They talk about the Lord. They encourage each other. This year, for months they've been sewing together this Christmas quilt. It is a story quilt, drawing scenes of Christmas before our eyes. This morning the panel that is folded out before us represents the hope of the prophets. We see a prophetic figure standing with arms outstretched, announcing God's Word. At his feet are four figures. The number four is used in Scripture to represent the nations. God's Word promises hope for all nations. That will be

central in the passage before us. Each Sunday we will see a different scene from this story quilt and share a little bit more detail about it. Around the edges of the quilt we can see stars, and inside the stars are fabrics that have been donated from more than twenty countries; and they are woven into the quilt. So this is a quilt that was lovingly made. It is a quilt that signifies to us the hope of the prophets, and that this hope in Christ has an impact on all nations.



We turn this morning to Matthew 1. I have my own personal love story with Matthew 1. It was the first chapter of the Bible that I ever read. A dear friend gave me a little Gideon New Testament when I was a high school student. I was not yet a Christian. He said, “You need to read this.” I opened it up, and I never made it out of Matthew 1: a list of forty-two names. I couldn't believe it. How could the Bible be the best-selling book of all time? This is the driest book ever. I didn't survive that initial reading. I had no one to interpret it for me, to explain it to me. Yet, over the years, I have grown to love this chapter. Matthew 1, is really the first presentation to the world of Christmas, the first word we hear about it.

Working through this text this past week, I have seen and been deeply blessed by three things from Matthew 1 that I want us to see:

First, **Christmas is part of a larger story**. We tend to focus our attention on December 25, or the season, but Christmas, according to Matthew 1, is part of a much, much larger story. In other words, Christmas has deep roots.

Second, **Christmas includes people on the margins**. We will see that in this story. You may be new to Christianity, or maybe you thought, “It’s Christmas. Maybe I should go to church.” If you are not a regular attender and you are here this morning, you are right in the flow of this passage.

Third, as God brings us in from the margins, we see that **Christmas is focused on one person most of all**. The ability to distract ourselves is not a new phenomenon. It is an ancient phenomenon. Yet Matthew 1 reminds us, with all the other things we are thinking about this morning, there is one Person who is central to the story.

So let's explore this together in the way that Matthew communicates it.

In Matthew 1:1, Matthew tells us that his book is:

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

This is the title of this Gospel, the first sentence of the New Testament. In the verses that

precede today's passage, Matthew 1:17-25, Matthew seems to take three large steps backwards from the verses about Christ's birth. Matthew takes a step back to the birth of Jesus Christ. He takes another step back to King David, then another step back to Abraham. Like a great, massive theological slingshot, Matthew pulls us back to the opening chapters of the Bible. Then he will take us with him forward, rapidly, over a list of forty-two names. That's the part where some people think, "I don't know if the Bible's for me." But let me tell you: It is.

Matthew talks through the entire Old Testament story using a genealogy. His genealogy then moves forward. He tells the story of God's saving action, His redemptive purpose, His hope for the world, in three movements. It is a movement that goes from Abraham to David, from David to the Exile, from Exile to Messiah. Matthew reveals himself to be a deep reader of the Bible. You may wonder, "Where did Matthew get this information?" He is actually quoting from passages in the Scripture. He quotes from Genesis, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Chronicles, especially Ruth, Ezra, and Jeremiah. He draws from these recorded genealogies to set before us the story.

The first movement goes from Abraham to David. It is told in fourteen generations. Maybe the name Abraham is familiar to you. Or maybe the big three of Genesis are: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Matthew's story starts with Abraham, who was an elderly man worshiping idols. God called him and said, "Leave everything you have known. Go to the land I will show you." The story continues through Jacob's sons, the twelve tribes of Israel, Judah, Perez, Hezron, Ram. It continues through names that may be less familiar to us, like Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, but then names that seem a little more familiar, like Boaz, Obed, Jesse, and then David, the king. Matthew has covered this first great movement of Scripture from Abraham, who was a sojourner, to David, the king in the land God promised. It is a happy first movement, just like many symphonies that start the first movement of the symphony in a major key; it is usually a happy sound.

The second movement goes into a minor key. It is the story of King David, that leads to the exile from the land: David, his son Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asaph, Jehoshaphat, Joram. Kings of Judah: some good kings, some bad kings, some terrible kings, and some kings, for the super attentive reader of the Bible, are omitted completely. That is interesting, but we will see why in just a minute. Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amos, and Josiah, the king who rediscovered God's will in His book and also was the father of Jechoniah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. If you were at Kenwood in the fall, that was the portion of God's Word we looked at in depth. This middle movement is in a minor key. It is a sad movement, a sad time in the land. David is king to a trajectory of unfaithfulness that leads to exile, deportation, and covenant curse.

But like the grand finale of the symphony, Matthew's third movement returns us back to hope and joy. This third movement of the story takes us from exile to Messiah. Jechoniah, Shealtiel, Zerubbabel, Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Zadok, Achim, Eliud, Eleazar, Matthan, then Jacob, the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, the Christ.

Matthew tells us that you can understand the entire Old Testament this way. Maybe you forget some of those forty-two names, but you can understand the whole story so far, from God's call to Abraham to the arrival in the land under David; to exile from the land; to restoration, return, and hope fulfilled. It's a three movement story. Matthew presents it in a very balanced way: Fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to Babylon, fourteen from Babylon to Christ.

Scholars have wondered over the centuries: Why does Matthew arrange this in groups of fourteen? There are two fantastic theories that try to explain this. I'm not sure which one of these is right, but they're both awesome, so I'm going to tell them both to you.

I mentioned earlier that a careful reader will notice that Matthew's genealogies are not exhaustive. He omits certain kings so that the numbers fourteen line up. One theory, which is fantastic, is to notice that the way Matthew has structured it, by starting with Abraham, the fourteenth name mentioned is David. The name David, has the numerical value in Hebrew of fourteen. ABCD: D is the number four; E; and then F is really the Hebrew equivalent of the V that is in "David" is 6. So D=4, V=6, then D again = 4. That means that 4+6+4 is 14. Many scholars think that Matthew is subtly reinforcing that this story of Christmas is the story of the promised Son of David. He announces his theme in chapter 1, verse 1, and then he says 14, 14, 14 as a way of saying this is all about the true Son of David, Son of David, Son of David. That's fantastic, and probably right.

There is a second theory which is, frankly, also fantastic. Have you ever been asked to choose between two wonderful things? You don't have to choose. You can just take them both. The other fantastic theory is that the three groups of fourteen are in fact six groups of seven. Six groups of seven point us to Matthew's subtle indication that the birth of the Messiah is the climactic seven.

Matthew's story, in its subtlety, in its repetition, highlights for us that Christmas is part of a much larger story. This is so important for us today. Without connection to this story we find ourselves rootless and adrift. Even if you come from a family that has an honorable past and you can trace that past for a couple of generations, none of us has a family story that goes this

far back to be connected to.

Christmas is part of a larger story. But when we look back through Matthew's genealogy, we see something else. This was electrifying for me to look back through the genealogy and realize that Matthew is also signaling to us that Christmas includes people on the margins.

A distinction of Matthew's genealogy is his inclusion of the names of several women. Women typically are not included in the genealogies. The cadence of the genealogy proceeds with A begets B, B begets C, and it just moves forward that way. But Matthew uniquely includes a set of women. Why? Christmas turns out not to be a story just of kings and powerful men; Christmas turns out to be a story that includes people on the edges, those easily overlooked or excluded.

When you look back through the first movement, the first of these parenthetical comments in Matthew 1:3, is connected with Judah: *"Judah, the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar."* Tamar's story is in Genesis 38. Tamar was probably a Canaanite. Judah had married a Canaanite named Shua by whom he had sons Er and Onan. Er, his oldest son, was married to Tamar. But then Er died. Then the second son, Onan, died. Tamar was a widow, a Canaanite widow, vulnerable, with no descendants. Judah refused to give her his youngest son. So Tamar, scandalously, dressed up in a way that attracted Judah's attention, and he slept with her. He promised to pay her, but she refused. "Just give me a pledge," she told him. So Judah gave her his signet seal. Judah went home. Three months later he heard the report that Tamar was pregnant. Judah was furious, thinking she had brought shame on his house. Judah announced publicly, "Bring her out and let her be burned." She came out and she said, "Please identify whose signet seal this is." It was Judah's seal. She gave birth to twins. Interestingly, the first twin stuck his hand out first; they tied a red cord around it. Then the second son came out in a rush. The name they gave him was Perez. He was the second born. This is another interesting detail in the genealogy: not only does God include Tamar, a Canaanite, but God also bypasses the firstborn. This is also surprising: the genealogy of Jesus includes the bloodlines of the nations; the genealogy of Jesus does not proceed by the rights of primogeniture, as though the firstborn automatically advances. We see something subtly wonderful about the character of God.

The second example, in Matthew 1:5, is Rahab: *"Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab."* This is a story told in Joshua. Rahab was a Canaanite. Joshua sent two spies into Canaan to scope it out. We are not told their names in Joshua, but if you collate the genealogies later recorded in Chronicles, it seems very probable that one of these spies was the man we know here as Salmon. Rahab hid the spies, and Rahab told the spies this incredible confession of faith: "I

know the Lord has given you the land. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea when you came out of Egypt.” Rahab had been in some form of prostitution, I think, unwillingly. She reports, “We heard the report of a God who rescues people.” The New Testament tells us that what Rahab did she did by faith. So here is another Canaanite brought into the line. Judah said of Tamar, “She is more righteous than I.” Rahab acted in faith, and we are told in Joshua 6 that she lived in Israel “to this day.”

Ruth is the next one included. Remarkable! I want to stress how unusual this is. Matthew's genealogy is the only genealogy we have from the ancient world that includes these women. Matthew not only is including the women, he is including the nations by doing it. Ruth, the Moabite widow who had attached herself to her mother-in-law Naomi, said to Naomi, in Ruth 1:16:

“Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.”

Ruth's husband had died and together with her mother-in-law, they were in extreme poverty. This kind of poverty is foreign to most of us in this sanctuary. It is difficult for us to imagine a life where you would have to go to the edge of the field to try to find a few leftovers. A former member of our church at Kenwood whom many of us know, I'll never forget his sharing his story of growing up in Cincinnati in a deeply broken family and sharing that he and his sister used to go behind Kroger and sort through the dumpsters to try to find food to eat. That is what gleaning is like. It is God's provision in Scripture that when you harvest your field, don't seek maximum profits. We are so socialized into thinking, “Maximizing my profits is intrinsically good.” God says “No, not in My eyes. I've given you so much. Leave some of it. You don't go back and harvest your field a second time. What you miss you leave for the poor.” And that is where we see Ruth: on the absolute edges. She is a foreign woman; she is picking through the trash to find enough to eat. She comes home, and her mother-in-law says, “Where were you gleaning?” She says, “In the field of a man named Boaz.” Naomi bursts into praise and says, “Boaz! He's one of our kinsman redeemers. He's in this family line.” And in a remarkable story that is the story of the book of Ruth, Boaz purchases the field that was about to be lost, just as Jeremiah had purchased the field. Sometimes making a purchase is an act of faithfulness to God's larger vision. In this case, Boaz purchases the field that was about to be lost to the family and that included taking Ruth as his wife. Naomi saw this happen. Boaz and Ruth together have a son, and in this tender reversal from disaster and being on the margins, Naomi ends up in her old age with a child in her arms. The women of the neighborhood call the child Obed, meaning “the servant of the Lord.” Obed is the father of Jesse, and Jesse is the father of King David.

If you are new to the God who reveals Himself in the Bible, this is what He is like. God has a

plan that He is working out. That plan, though it appears at first glance to be so Israel-centric, actually had the whole world in mind all along.

The next woman that's described in the parenthetical comment is the wife of Uriah: "*David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah.*" Uriah was a Hittite. The story of David and the wife of Uriah is a sad story in David's life. It is told in 2 Samuel 11. In the springtime, when kings go out to do battle, David sent his servants to go to battle and he stayed home. David sees this beautiful woman, and he's the king. She's married, but he invites her to the palace and not just to discuss the news. This is described in the Bible as David's great unrighteousness.

God sees people on the margins. The bloodline of the Messiah includes the surrounding nations. I love a good study Bible, but we have to always remember that the study Bible notes at the bottom are written by human beings. The words on the top are from God. So that means no study Bible is inerrant. Sometimes commentators miss it or misunderstand it. When I'm teaching seminary classes, I know I'm accountable to God for what I say, so I often end my classes by saying, "Lord, if I've taught anything that's untrue, would you cause us all to forget it. And whatever I've taught that's true, would you help us to remember it." I love that we use the *ESV* translation at Kenwood. It is a great translation. And the *ESV* study Bible is a fantastic study Bible, but on this passage, the *ESV* study Bible really misses it. The *ESV* study Bible has a note that says that Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba were women of questionable character. That is the study Bible's comment. With all due respect, that is dead wrong. That is actually *not* what the Bible says. The Bible says Judah says of Tamar, in Genesis 38:26:

"She is more righteous than I ..."

Rahab is commended for her faith. James says Rahab was considered righteous for what she did. I am all for study Bibles, but just remember, it is only the words on the top that are from God and all human commentators are fallible.

Why has Matthew included these women? I think there are three main reasons:

The first reason is to see the character of God.

The second reason is to show us that the genealogy of the Messiah, the Savior of the world, includes the bloodlines of the world in it.

The third reason is to head off skepticism that God works through births that are unexpected or unusual.

We turn now to the last named woman, Mary. The transition of the genealogy at the very end shifts from the active voice to the passive. Forty-one times we have read that so-and-so begat so-and-so, and so-and-so begat so-and-so, and then at the very last breath of this genealogy,

we read that *“Joseph was the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was begotten.”* It is in the passive voice. That draws us to see that Christmas is focused on one Person most of all. Unlike all other genealogies, in which the genealogy's first name, the progenitor, is the key figure, in Matthew's genealogy it is the last figure that is the most important. This is unusual. Matthew tells us that Jesus is the most important Person of Christmas and that His birth happens in an unusual way, also, by God's providence. He tells us in Matthew 1:18:

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”

Matthew tells us that this was from the Holy Spirit. From the Holy Spirit she's with child! The birth of Jesus signals for us—even in this phrase—that God is doing something new, that the birth of Jesus is a signal of the new creation.

Birth by the Holy Spirit reminds us of the book of Genesis, the opening sentence of the Bible, that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters, ready to bring forth life. In Luke's parallel account, when Mary asks a fair question, *“How will this be?”* the angel says the Holy Spirit will overshadow you, will flutter over you like at the dawn of creation. God is doing something new. Yes, God is doing something new.

Mary has an awareness and knowledge that something is happening. Joseph doesn't quite realize it initially. He thinks, *“Well, she's pregnant and we haven't gotten married yet. Something is wrong.”* So he reveals his righteousness in wanting to divorce her quietly, not to publicly shame her. But as he is thinking of this, God in His grace and mercy gives Joseph a dream. In this dream, an angel appears. Not only is the angel just seen, but he speaks to Joseph, calls him by name, and says, in Matthew 1:20:

“Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”

Wow. Talk about assurance. The *ESV* says *“for that which is conceived in her.”* It is a fair translation, but it makes us think that a child in the womb is an *“it.”* And that's not true. In the Greek language the word for child is grammatically neuter. It's better to translate this as *“for the Child.”* The *ESV* says, *“which is conceived,”* a fantastic use of the passive voice, but it breaks us from making the connection that this is the same word we just heard forty-one times in the active voice: *“Begot, begat, begat, begat.”* It would be better to translate this as *“Joseph, son of David, the Child which has been begotten in the womb, is from the Holy Spirit.”* That is what is being taught, communicated, and if you've been around Christmas very much you know that that word *“begotten”* is really precious to Christians. It is kind of a fancy formal word, but it is an awfully important word at Christmas time.

It is a central word in the Nicene Creed. This is the 1700th anniversary year of the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed tells us about God:

"I believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. ..."

Aren't you glad that God is the creator of everything you *can't* see? I'm glad for that. Just what we see is pretty awesome. But God also made all these things you can't even see. Then the Nicene Creed tells us about Jesus:

"I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through Him all things were made."

Christmas is about one Person who is absolutely unique. The only Begotten. Of the Father. Before all ages. God from God. Light from Light. True God from true God. "Begotten" is repeated. Not made. "Consubstantial" with the Father, meaning of one and the same substance. And through Him all things were made. Jesus Christ is the only Begotten One in the Christmas story. Then the Creed wisely tells us what happens next:

"For us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became Man."

Of all the wonderful things about Christmas, Jesus Christ is the most wonderful of all.

The angel tells Joseph, in Matthew 1:21:

"She will bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Jesus, in Hebrew *Yehoshua*, means "Yahweh saves." "Call Him Jesus," for He—that is, the Son of God—will save people from their sins.

Matthew steps back from his first retelling of Christmas and tells us, as readers of his Gospel, that *"all of this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet."* That is why the first Sunday of Advent is about the hope of the prophets. The hope of the prophets expressed in this particular hope in Isaiah 7:14:

"The virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."

Matthew knows that not all of his readers will understand the meaning of the name Immanuel. So he kindly, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, interprets it for us. Im-man-uel. *Im* is the Hebrew word for "with." *Im manu*, "with us." *Immanuel*, "God is with us." In Isaiah's own day,

the birth of a child was a guarantee of God's promise, protection, and provision, and that His enemies would perish. In the arrival of the Son of God, Matthew tells us that the promised Immanuel, the Savior who would bring God's protection and provision and the defeat of our enemies, arrives in this Child. Sometimes we wonder, "Is God really for me? Or against me? Is God present? Or is He far away?" From the first telling of Christmas Matthew says, "He's right here. He's right here. And He is for us."

Matthew's telling of the first Christmas ends with Joseph waking up from his sleep. How do you wake up from a dream like that? Do you wake up in a startle? Or do you just wake up with a huge grin? I don't know exactly how you wake up from a dream like that, but what I do know is what Matthew tells us: that Joseph woke up and he just did what the angel told him to do. He took his wife. He did not know her with physical union until she bore a son, and he called that son Jesus. Jesus is the climax of the story, the One who saves us from our sins.

The first Sunday of Advent we light the candle of hope. The hope of the prophets. Christmas is part of a larger story. It has deep, deep roots in it. Matthew's telling of the story draws back and then moves forward. Luke's genealogy just goes backwards, the whole way, all the way to Adam, the first human. Two complementary ways of saying that Christmas has deep, deep roots.

Christmas includes the nations. That means there is room for you in the story and for what God said to Abraham at the very beginning: that in your descendants I will bring blessing to all nations. That is why Abraham's name was changed. He was born Abram, meaning "*my father is exalted*." But God changed his name to Abraham "*you will be the father of a multitude of nations*," because in you and your descendants God will bring blessing to all peoples of the earth.

You may have a great family history. Praise God. Great family histories are a blessing. You may have an absolute train wreck of a family history, and you may not want to even talk about it. But you know what? The glory of Christmas is that God offers this family history to us all and folds us all in to His story, the nations of the world included in the bloodline of the Messiah. You don't need to get a DNA test to find out your ancestry. The test that you must take is the test of, "Have I given my life to the central figure of the Christmas story?" And if you place your faith in Jesus Christ, then His line is your line. That is the story we must have.

Christmas in the end is about Jesus Christ. He is the One who reveals God to the world and brings the world to God. His love is expressed to all peoples. His invitation to come, *advenire*, to come to His Advent, which is for everyone. Christmas is abounding in hope. It is hope fulfilled,

hope promised, hope realized. And then Christmas is meant to be shared.

I think if we're honest, when we're younger, when we see the gifts under the tree, we tend to be excited about the gifts we're about to receive. But as we get older, isn't it so true that we get more excited about what we're *giving*? We really do. We get more excited about what we're giving. The hope of Christmas is so expansive it is meant to be shared and meant to be given.

Hope is meant to be shared, and that hope is found in Jesus Christ. Isaiah 9:2 says it like this:

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light."

That is just one of the most hopeful sentences. It continues:

"Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone."

And that light is interpreted for us in Isaiah 9:6-7:

"For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 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."

Praise the Lord.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, on this first Sunday of Advent, we marvel at You, You who are the fulfillment of the hope of the prophets. You reveal a God who includes those on the margins and the vulnerable, those who have suffered or been treated poorly. We thank You, Lord Jesus, that You have come to the world to save sinners, sinners like us. We thank You, Lord Jesus, that You stand at the center of the Christmas story, of the climactic conclusion of God's saving design. I pray this morning for these my brothers and sisters, those listening online, that You would fill our hearts this morning with hope, that we would have the hope of Christmas in our hearts, that we would receive that hope, and that we would share that hope.

In Jesus' Name, Amen