

ChristmasPortents 19-12-29b

I want to thank Dan and Anna and Lori for our special music this morning. I love to hear the pump organ and I love to watch Anna play. She plays with such authority.

My dad loved that. He said, if you're going to play, play. That's she, you know she's playing when she gets on that keyboard.

It's been so fun to watch from the time her feet were well off the ground on the piano bench all the way till now and it's always a blessing. So thanks for that. We're going to resume our study now in the Signs of the Lord's Coming, when he came the first time and how that relates to when he comes the second time.

The announcement that Gabriel gives to Zachariah includes a rebuke and that he will be unable to speak. And as I mentioned, it's so like the Lord that in the first public notice, widespread public notice that the Messiah is on the way and the forerunner is coming, the messenger of this news walks out and can't talk. Who would plan this? If you were going to set it up, if we got a committee together to announce the birth of the forerunner, which is going to obviously have to be a sign of the coming of the Messiah himself, whether he emerges from the wilderness or descends from heaven or where he's coming from.

But if the messenger is here, the messenger of which the Old Testament spoke, well, there's going to be one of those cars you see in the 1950s movies with the big horns on top driving through town. I've seen pictures when Dr. Criswell would go and do a revival in some town around the country. They would put a placard on a car and have those horns on top and come here, Criswell, tonight at 7 p.m. at the Faith Baptist Church or whatever it might be.

And the angel would have lighted on the pinnacle of the temple and announced it to all of the praying multitudes. Gabriel would have said, behold, here it comes, get ready. He announces it to one guy in a dark room lit by the seven branch candlestick.

And when the guy comes out, he can't talk. He can't. Who but God would do it this way? This is one of the ways you know scripture is inspired and true is no human being would think it up this way.

It's just so counter-expectational. Yes, that is my new word for the week. It's counterintuitive.

It's just not what any human would do. But that's what God does. And it's so typical that Israel, and it's also a foreshadowing because it is as though when the messenger does speak and when Jesus does come and teach, it is the people are deaf largely.

There's only a select few that really get the message. And most of them miss it. He came into his own and his own received him not.

Well, you know, who, but my messenger is dumb. You go back to Isaiah and well, here's the

messenger with the biggest news in history. And why didn't God say, Zechariah, because you didn't believe you're going to break out in a terrible rash.

That'll teach you to ask for a sign when you ought to know better. Or you'll only be able to, you'll be damaged in the hip like Jacob and you'll come out limping and people will know something. Did you fall? No, I was accosted by an angel and I wrestled with him until he told me I was going to have a son.

I mean, it just, of all of the, of the disciplines that God could put on Zechariah, this one was chosen by God specifically as a sign. It's the biggest news in history, but he really shouldn't have to tell you anything. You ought to know that the time is at hand and you'll know when this messenger starts speaking.

But those who were alert, those who were awake would be able to dig further into this and find out. And this is our next point of application. If you want to know bad enough, you'll go past the seeming muteness.

You look around and say, well, we've got all of these signs, but you know, haven't there always been people who thought the end was near and turn of the 1899 to 1900 people thought, oh, the Lord's coming back and the World War One, the war to end all wars. And surely this disaster or that pestilence or this terrible plague, or surely this is the time of the end. And haven't people always thought that in their own time that, well, it's never been as bad as it is now.

So in some ways we look around and say, wow, the stars are aligned and it's just about to happen. But we know historically, many people have thought this many times and it didn't happen. So how would you know? In some ways, the signs are all present.

Everybody knew something happened in the Holy of Holies, in the holy place outside the Holy of Holies. But in other ways that it didn't speak, it didn't make itself plain. So who would know from Zachariah's experience what was about to happen? People who were patient, who went home and visited with Zachariah.

Elizabeth knows him better than anybody. She's going to worm the information out of him because she realizes that this is a visitation from heaven and God's grace, that she's going to be pregnant. And you know, he can mime, he can sign, he can point to somebody's little baby and then point to Elizabeth's abdomen and say, see that? You, you know, angel.

I don't know what he would do, flap his hands for wings, or he could try to write. We know later on he's going to write on a slate, so to speak, that the child's name is John. But somebody would have to be patient.

Somebody would have to stick with it. Somebody would have to do more than walk away saying, well, that was a strange come to pass. He came out and, you know, there, there's a big sacrificial ritual that goes on and the incense is offered.

And then when that priest emerges, he gives a call that starts the sacrifice outside. Well, he's supposed to come out and announce, and he can't say anything. So the guys are all waiting with the wood and the fire and the, you know, the sacrifice.

And it's like, you know, come on man, don't seize up. This was a once in a lifetime privilege. Any priest that went in and offered the incense, chosen by lot, he was never in the lottery again.

Once you got chosen for that, that's it. You know, Ed McMahon's only coming once. And so he, he has this privilege and on the biggest day of his life as a priest, he comes out and he can't finish.

What he's supposed to say, he can't say. What is Israel supposed to say when the Messiah is presented and what can they not say? He's, he's symbolic. It's just so rich with significance and anticipation of what is going to happen when the message is given.

There's, there's a message that you don't receive because it's not given. And then there's a message you don't receive because it's given and you don't accept it. And God plays both of those ends against the middle, which comes down to our faith, our persistence, our belief in the promises of God and waiting on the Lord, wait on the Lord, be of good cheer.

What else does Gabriel say? This is joy. Don't, don't be worried. Don't be doubtful.

Don't be saying, well, I need a sign. It's just like the generation Jesus speaks to later. And he says, you're always looking for a sign.

They haven't had enough signs. John says, I couldn't write down all the things that Jesus did that were miraculous. Withering arms, straightening out, lepers being healed, blind seeing.

The man at the pool of Bethesda is witnessed by scores and we need a sign. It's, it's, it's typical of us to let reason overcome our faith and the witness of the Holy Spirit within us. We have a better witness.

Peter says this. Remember the, uh, we have a more sure word of testimony. Peter walked with the Lord.

John walked with the Lord and that which our eyes have seen in our hands have handled. We're communicating to you, but you've got a more sure word in the prophetic scriptures than if an angel came. We don't need an angel in the middle of the night to tell you your prayer is heard and it's going to be answered.

Don't need an angel coming in the middle of the night and saying, um, the Lord Jesus is coming, you know, at six o'clock next Thursday. Don't need that. We have a better witness.

We have the scripture and we have the Holy Spirit. And if you want to know, and you persist, if it's important to you to be ready and we all need to be ready because the return of the Lord for us is as near as our last heartbeat and the last little spark in our electro encephalographic

domain up there. As soon as we're done in this life, the absolute next thing moment in a twinkly human eye is going to be the Lord Jesus descending with the shout, the voice of the archangel and the Trump of God.

So readiness is relative. It'd be great to be alive and remain to the coming. But in some ways, uh, checking out is a ticket straight there.

The longer we pardon? Yes. Yeah. You check out here and check in, uh, to eternity, but we're anxious to use the time that remains to us.

This time is a stewardship and a pastor from years gone by used to say, if you're still breathing, God still has a plan for your life. If we're here, it's for a purpose. Every hour, every minute, every challenge, every circumstance, God has a purpose for us to be here.

When the purpose is over, life is over. Or when we have so completely abandoned the purpose that there's no point in leaving us here. That's the, that's the low, slow bus to eternity.

I want to be on the upward chariot ride as it were. So this is what we're looking at. And as we come forward, uh, we see that not only does, uh, Gabriel announce to Zachariah this rebuke, um, but ahead of that, he says, you will have in verse 14 of Luke one, you will have joy and gladness and many will rejoice at his birth.

Many will rejoice at his birth. And we're going to see this many, it is largely the friends and family of Zachariah, including Miriam and Joseph, Mary and Joseph. They're in the family circle, but this many is sort of a, a, an irony or, uh, the many are actually few.

There's going to be many in the immediate circle, but they're going to be a minority in Israel because the birth of John is just going to be a local event and isn't going to be spread across the whole land. Uh, and he doesn't say they'll rejoice once he starts baptizing people in the Jordan. It says many will rejoice at his birth.

And again, by way of application for us, hopefully the many that are our closest confidants, our closest friends, and you can have friends in your family and you can have your family as friends. But those who are close to us in Christian fellowship should be many in the sense that the majority of them ought to be of mind. That's where we celebrate our joys.

That's where we share our, uh, speaking the truth in love and where we share our observations and our thoughts and our speculations and our, our hopes. And, and to some extent, our prayers is with that many that are in our periphery, who share our enthusiasm for God and for the things of God. That's what the many should be.

So this is many from Zachariah's perspective. And you get the idea that Zachariah has that kind of family. They are chosen for that reason.

They're, they're the nucleus of a group of faithful believers. And those many are going to rejoice

at his birth. And we see them a little further down, but look at what comes next.

They will rejoice at his birth for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. This is a great prayer to pray for your kids and to see that, that hope fulfilled. What better outcome could there be than for someone to be great in the Lord's sight, to be highly esteemed, to be highly favored, to be in line for blessing and reward in the Lord's eyes.

He will be great in the sight of the Lord and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. Neither wine or strong drink. What does this tell us about John the Baptist? Ioannes Hall-Baptiste, Yohanan the Dunker.

What does it tell us about him? Drinking neither wine or strong drink. He is a Nazirite from birth. Nazirite.

You will see Nazirite spelled two different ways, N-A-Z-A-R-I-T-E and N-A-Z-I-R-I-T-E. And the latter is correct. It is not Nazarite, like Nazareth.

It is Nazirite. It's a Yod in Hebrew, Nazir, Nazir. And so it's I-N-A-Z-I-R-I-T-E.

Nazirite. Now, what do we know about Nazirites? Can you name me? I told you it was going to be Bible trivia morning. Name me a Nazirite.

Well, I almost gave you a clue there. Name me a Nazirite in the Old Testament. Samson, right? Samson was a Nazirite from birth.

Now, here's a harder one. Name another Nazirite in the Old Testament, dedicated to the Lord from birth. Samuel.

Samson, Samuel, dedicated by his mother from birth. There is a divinely communicated message to both mothers at the time that they are in need and praying and so on. So you have Samson and Samuel, and they are easily observable Nazirites in the Old Testament.

So in your notes or in your mental cloudless sky, blank slate, put Samson on the left of a column and put Samuel on the right. Okay, Samson, Samuel. Now, how would you compare and contrast those two individuals? What is Samson noted for? Charles Atlas, great physical strength, jawbone of an ass, temple pillars, strength, right? Breaks the bonds, all those failed attempts to capture him.

He carries the doors of the Philistine city. Oh yeah, yeah. Picks up the gates of the city and casts him out.

Incredible physical strength. Physical, physical. What was the contrast I closed with in the first session between signs to Israel, signs to the church? Physical versus spiritual.

What would you say about Samuel? Great physical strength, physical miracles and such. Now he does Hugh Agag in pieces, which I think is a wonderful feat. But the horn of anointing oil,

Samuel is the first of the prophets.

Technically Moses, another prophet like unto me, but Samuel begins the prophetic vocation in Israel. He's the first great prophet. He's sort of a prophet priest.

He's there with Eli and he's dedicated and raised, but he's the prophet and he has a spiritual function. He communicates spiritual truth. He anoints with the oil representing the Holy Spirit, the future King Saul, King David and so on.

So Samson and Samuel, physical, spiritual. Now, what is the other function? Well, in fact, turn to Amos chapter two. I know you didn't think you were going to Amos this morning, but Amos, remember you've got Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos.

Amos chapter two verses 11 and 12. God is rebuking Israel for their transgressions. If you go back up to verse six, thus says the Lord for three transgressions of Israel and for four, I will not turn away its punishment because they sell the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of sandals.

Interesting, Jesus was sold for silver and John said, I'm not worthy to touch his sandals. They pant after the dust of the earth, which is on the head of the poor and pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go into the same girl to defile my holy name.

They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge and drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their God. Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars and he was as strong as the Oaks. Yet I destroyed his fruit above and his roots beneath.

Also, it was I who brought you up from the land of Egypt and led you 40 years through the wilderness to possess the land of the Amorite. I raised up some of your sons as prophets and some of your young men as Nazarites. Is it not so? Oh, you children of Israel, some of your sons as Nazarites, Samson and Samuel, some of your sons as prophets.

When I say prophet in Israel, who's the first one that comes to your mind? Elijah, Elijah. And when you think of Elijah, what else do you have to think of? Elisha has the double portion of his spirit. What is said in Malachi about the coming of the day of the Lord? What's going to precede it? I will send to you Elijah, the prophet.

So John the Baptist is going to be in the spirit and power of Elijah, spirit and power, spirit and power. So underneath your little column there where you have Samson on the left, you can put Elijah right below that. And where you have Samuel on the right, you can put Elisha down below that.

Elijah, this is Mount Carmel. This is blasting the tops of mountains. This is the running ahead of the chariot of Ahab and these feats of physical sign language, if you will.

Elisha is much more the spiritual. He's got the double portion of the spirit. He doesn't have the double portion of the physical strength.

He doesn't run 80 miles. He's the spiritual side. So you have the physical and the spiritual.

And this idea of the Nazarite, John is going to combine both. He's going to dwell in the wilderness. He's got this hairy coat.

He's eating locusts and wild honey. He's a man of the earth. He's a man of the land.

He lives in the desert, it tells us at the end of Luke chapter one. He dwells in these waste places and does fine. He's a mountain man.

What's that guy called? Survivor man. He knows how to live off the land and sustain himself. But he also has this spiritual message that is going to be communicated through the physical act of baptism.

You know how strong you have to be to baptize people all day long in the Jordan River? A lot of preachers, when they get up in years and they're Baptists, delegate the baptizing to somebody else because dunking people under the water and bringing them back up takes strength. And John, the baptizer, stands there in the current and baptizes people, dunking them, physically submerging them and bringing them back up in their wet, soggy clothes all day long. He's a powerful, powerful man, but he's got a spiritual message.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The axe is laid at the root of the trees and John is the guy wielding that axe. He's John the wood chopper.

He's John the stump chopper. Axe is laid at the root of the trees. Now, this is interesting for a couple of reasons.

Because John announces the coming of the Lord Jesus and Jesus, one of his titles is the Nazarene. And we always say, well, that's Nazareth. He's Jesus the Nazarene because he's from Nazareth.

But in that day, there was quite a bit of confusion because of the homonym between Nazarene from Nazareth and Nazarite or Nazarene associated with the Nazarite vow. And because John preached the coming of the Lord Jesus, identified him both at the baptism and after. Remember that during the early days of Jesus' ministry, John is still active and he keeps saying, you need to go see Yeshua.

And so people look at John and he's a Nazarite. He's never cut his hair, doesn't drink wine or strong drink. And he's a sign man.

And the sign is the Nazarite vow. Interestingly, and if you have any doubt about this, turn to Acts chapter 21. This is something new I learned this last week that I thought I would share with you.

Acts chapter 21. And if you remember, Paul is going to get in trouble here. Verse 15, Luke says, we packed up and went to Jerusalem.

Some of the disciples, this is 21:16 of Acts. Some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us and brought with them a certain Nason of Cyprus, an early disciple with whom we were lodged. When we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

On the following day, Paul went in with us to James and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. This is the occasion and Luke omits it.

And I think intentionally, but all of the talking to the churches about, don't take up a collection when I come, but lay aside on the first day of the week. God loves a cheerful giver, not grudgingly out of necessity. When I come, I will collect for the poor saints in Jerusalem.

And he talks to several churches and he makes a circuit and gathers a significant financial contribution for the poor saints in Jerusalem and brings those goods down. This is the visit after that collection where he brings that wealth to Jerusalem to be distributed in the Jerusalem church to the needy and suffering saints there. Luke doesn't mention the gift, but this is when it is brought.

And you can see the hint of that as you go forward. So what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry includes not only their response and their reception, but also their desire to help their ancestors in the faith, so to speak, those who first came to Christ, the Jewish saints in Jerusalem. And so they've sent this financial gift.

When they heard it, they glorified the Lord, verse 20. And they said to him, you see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed and they are all zealous for the law. But they've been informed about you, that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.

Now, Paul didn't tell the Jews this. He told the Gentiles this. But you know how the word gets turned into an accusation that's hard to refute because it's an admixture of truth and error.

Just look at current day politics. What then? The assembly must certainly meet for they will hear that you have come. Therefore, do what we tell you.

We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them, be purified with them, pay their expenses, so they may shave their heads. All may know that these things which were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.

This is a Nazarite vow. This is the temporary Nazarite vow. We've talked about those who were Nazarites from birth.

This is Samson and Samuel, John the Baptist in particular. Paul, you could take a Nazarite vow and part of this, the hair, the shaving of the head and all of this, would indicate generally something to do with either the inception or the completion of the vow. Well, this is the Nazarite vow.

Nazarite. Okay, now flip over a page to Acts 24, two pages in my Bible. Acts 24, Paul is going to be accused of rebellion and sedition.

And so in Acts 24, Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and an orator named Tertullus gave evidence to the governor against Paul. When he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation saying, seeing that through you, we enjoy great peace, prosperity is brought to the nation. He's buttering up Ananias or Felix rather.

Nevertheless, verse four, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear by your courtesy a few words from us. For we have found this man a plague, talking about Paul, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. The sect of the Nazarenes or sect of the Nazarites, the Nazarites.

Paul has just been associated with this Nazarite vow in Jerusalem. And so this Nazarite idea seems to be reinforced in Paul's example. He takes a vow and shortly thereafter, he's accused of leading a sect of Nazarites.

Why would they be called Nazarenes? Why wouldn't they be called Christians? Why wouldn't they be called Yeshuaites or Jesusites? But Nazarenes, this is possibly a corruption. And in fact, these words are not even spelled the same. When you find Nazarene Nazarite in the New Testament scripture, there's some confusion about the rendering into Greek because it's an Aramaic term with Hebrew roots.

So it's very likely that what he's actually being accused of is not association with the town of Nazareth or Jesus of Nazareth, but with this strange practice of vow taking and having financed these guys at the temple and the notoriety surrounding that. So, of course, you have with this Matthew chapter 2 and verse 23, talking about the Lord Jesus himself and the origin of his name, Jesus of Nazareth, where verse 23 of chapter 2 of Matthew, he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by the prophets, he shall be called a Nazarene. Well, this can also perhaps be a double entendre in the sense that you don't have an Old Testament prophecy.

He shall be called a Nazarene. You notice in your Bible, there's no footnote there. There's no cross-reference back to the Old Testament that the Messiah would be called a Nazarene.

But to be a dedicated one to the Lord, to be a Nazarite or associated with the Nazarite vow is probably in view. And so then I ask, well, so what? Why does John need to be a Nazarite? Why is Jesus called a Nazarene? Why is Paul associated with the sect or the cult of Nazarenes? What is the focus of the Nazarite vow? This is single dedication to God's purpose, to the exclusion of

virtually all else, abstaining from wine and strong drink. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with wine or strong drink.

The abuse of it, like the abuse of anything else, is prohibited in Scripture. But Paul tells Timothy, take wine for your stomach's sake. Jesus served wine at the Last Supper.

It wasn't grape juice. It wasn't magically denatured. That was wine.

What Jesus created, the wedding feast of Cana out of the 12 pots of water was wine and really good wine. But as with gluttony or any other thing taken to excess, Scripture says, let your moderation be known unto all, moderation in all things. Bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable often.

Even our Bible study needs to be done in moderation. You can't just sit and soak without time for reflection and application and putting it to use, turning gnosis into epinosis, as we like to say using the Greek. Epinosis is knowledge that is reinforced by and set in our souls by experience.

Moderation. I used to spend a weekend and I would listen to eight or ten Bible classes in a row. Well, maybe if you're by the brook Jareth and you have the season to do that in spurts or sporadically, that's fine.

But there is so much for us to consider and to reflect on in any portion of God's word. That's the time we need is to sit by the river of living water and drink that water in and be nurtured and nourished by it. So you don't have to overdo listening to Bible class.

It's hard to overdo the reflecting on it, the consideration of it and the application of it in the daily tasks. This is why God didn't earth to be a giant stadium seat with somebody teaching Bible class in the middle. Life is tasks.

Life is earning your bread by the sweat of your brow. Life is your family, your chores, your self-sustaining and mutually sustaining activities. That's what takes up most of life, which should tell us that most of our life is supposed to be application of what we know.

Think about the Old Testament saints that might have heard one or two things from God in their whole life. And all the rest of their life is application. Joseph didn't get Bible class in prison in the Old Testament.

He was applying day by day by day. And this is what brought God's favor upon him was not what he learned, but what he applied, what he did with what he knew. Well, quickly now, the announcement that we've seen in Luke continues in the episodes when when Jesus is born and then is brought to the temple for dedication.

And so you come to Luke 25, which is going to be hard to find in Matthew. Luke 2, 25. Jesus is presented in the temple, beginning in verse 22.

The days of purification, according to the law of Moses are completed. They brought him to Jerusalem, presented him to the Lord. Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.

Notice, dedicated every firstborn. The male that opens the womb, firstborn son shall be called holy to the Lord. And that comes from Exodus chapter 13, three times there.

And to offer a sacrifice, according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. Notice there is a doubling here. There is a two bird offering.

Now, verse 25, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. Bible trivia pop quiz question. What does Shimon mean? Where does it come from? What is its root? This is going to be Peter's original name, Simon Bar-Jonah.

It comes from Shammah. The first man of note to bear this name was the second son of Jacob. Right after Reuben comes Simeon, Shimon.

And Leah says, God has heard my prayers. God has heard me. She realized that she wasn't Jacob's favorite, that he was really pining after her sister, Rachel.

But she said, God is blessing me with children because he hears me when I talk about my situation. God hears. What did Gabriel tell Zachariah? First thing out of the box, your prayers have been heard.

What does Simeon's name mean? Your prayers have been heard. What is Simeon going to do but greet the Messiah on behalf of the people? Because the people, the faithful people's prayers have been heard. So his name, which was given to him at birth, his parents little knowing, probably close to a hundred years before this, devout name, devout man, whose name was Simeon, waiting for the consolation of Israel.

And the Holy Spirit was upon him. The Holy Spirit is upon him. How would they know this? I don't know, but he's notable because the Holy Spirit is upon him.

So there's something unique about Simeon. And in the Old Testament, those people who served a special function, who were exceptionally devout, God would send his spirit to them. But it was by exception rather than by rule.

But it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he, verse 27, he came by the Holy Spirit into the temple. Now, how many times is the Holy Spirit mentioned here? Thrice.

Three times. So just between you and me, is this an important detail? He's filled with the spirit, that the spirit is upon him. The spirit talks to him and the spirit leads him.

Now, this is who we want to be. We want to be the people who know that our prayers are heard and answered in heaven. Simeon.

We want the Holy Spirit to be upon us. We want him to communicate to us and we want him to lead us, don't we? And this is the basis for the fulfillment of this prayer and this prophecy. He came by the spirit into the temple.

You don't have to be in the temple every day, but the spirit says, you better get down there today. Something's happening. So he knows something and he doesn't get it from scripture.

He gets it from the prompting of the Holy Spirit. It's a circumstantial piece of guidance and we sometimes get this. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, now pay attention to what Simeon says.

Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word. You're letting your servant depart in peace according to your word. You said, I would last until I saw the Messiah.

I've got him in my arms. I can depart in peace. My work here is done.

God put Simeon on the earth ultimately for this purpose. One moment in his life, one of the last moments in his life justifies his entire life. The Holy Spirit is upon him and he's ready when the Holy Spirit gives him the go sign for this one great mission.

And he had to wait all the way until he's old for it to happen, but he's faithful. The Spirit is on him. The Spirit talks to him, the Spirit leads him, and he's ready when he gets the word to go.

And he goes to the temple. Where was it that Zachariah got the word? At the temple, this same temple. It's just a stone's throw from the Holy place here.

Servant can depart in peace according to your word from my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all the Jews, prepared before the face of all Israel, prepared before the face of all the sons of Jacob. Is that what it says? You have prepared before the face of all peoples. How does Simeon know this? You've prepared before the face of this is the Messiah.

This is the anointed son of David, the one who's going to bring in the kingdom for Israel and all nations are going to be subjugated to Israel. So why is he talking about all peoples? You have prepared right in front of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to whom? The Gentiles, Simeon, all peoples and the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel. But who's first? Wouldn't you think you've, you've come to bring the Messiah to all Israel and the Gentiles are going to be a by-product.

He mentions the Gentiles first. This man knew his Bible. This man was taught by the Holy spirit.

The Holy spirit talks to him and he knows that the Gentiles are going to get there first and the glory of Israel is going to come after. That's why he talks about all peoples and the Gentiles and

Israel is almost an afterthought. Joseph and his mother marveled at the things which were spoken by him.

As you could imagine, they already know their son is the Messiah. They already know that it's a miraculous birth, but what Simeon says shocks them. They marvel at it.

I thought this was going to all be about Israel. All he's doing is talking about all peoples and the Gentiles. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, behold, this one is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel and for a sign which will be spoken against.

A sword will pierce through your own soul also that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. Simeon knows that there's going to be this huge backlash and rejection. He doesn't say here it is.

We're on the threshold of the kingdom. Comb your hair so that you can wear your crown and you're going to be the mother of the king. He says swords, falling and rising of many in Israel.

Now, falling and rising of many in Israel, what does this tell you? If you're falling, you have to start up high, right? So people up high are going to be brought low and rising, you've got to be low to be elevated, right? Simeon knows that the whole concept of what it is to be godly is going to be turned on its head, literally so. The falling and rising of many in Israel, the humble are going to be exalted. Remember the song of Mary? God is exalting his humble servants and the falling and rising.

To fall, you have to start high. To rise, you got to start low. Falling and rising and the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

This is what Jesus is going to allude to just before his arrest, trial and crucifixion. I've not come to bring peace but a sword. The sword is mentioned here.

Jesus mentions the sword. It's going to divide households and some of the ones who ought to know better are going to fall and some of the ones you think wouldn't know are going to rise. Well, we want to get to our final point here which is verse 36.

There's one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter Ephanuel of the tribe of Asher. So all kinds of things I could say about this but let's just look at the names. There's one Anna.

What name is this? What Old Testament name is this? Put an H on each end. It's Hannah. It's Hannah.

Her name is Hannah. Where has that come up recently? The lady's name is Hannah. She is a prophetess.

Isn't it interesting? The first prophet's mother's name is Hannah and the last lady in the Bible we know of bearing this name is herself a prophetess. And you remember when Deborah rises as a judge in Israel because the men aren't doing their job? You have a prophetess in Israel

because the prophets aren't doing their job. So she is a prophetess.

She is the daughter of Ephraim. This is a little tougher to parse but it'll help when I tell you that the P-H-A-N element here means face of and L is God, face of God. There's a man in the Old Testament who named a place this.

He was going to meet his brother that he hadn't seen in a long time and he was worried and he sent his family across the brook, Jabbok. And while he's waiting there, a man comes and he wrestles with him all night long and he gets crippled in the hip and he calls the name of the place Peniel. Peniel and Phaniel are the same word.

She's the daughter of Peniel. I've seen the face of God and lived. The face of God.

What are they looking at? Remember the Mary Did You Know song that came out recently? Do you know when you're looking at the baby's face, you're looking at the face of God? Well, they are. Peniel. She's the daughter of Peniel.

Of the tribe of Asher. The tribe of Asher is really fascinating and let me just tell you really quickly about the tribe of Asher. Asher is the second son of Leah's handmaid.

Zilpah. And it divided into five clans. It's a weird miniature of what happens with Joseph dividing into two tribes so that his sons Manasseh and Ephraim are counted as tribes.

The grandsons are elevated to be sons. Same thing happened in the clans of Asher. So there was the Imnites, the Ishvites, and the Berites.

But then through Beriah, there are two more clans, the Heberites and the Malkielites. And so the first three clans are named after Asher's sons. And then the fourth and fifth are after Beriah's sons.

So it would be as though there's a tribe of Joseph and Ephraim and Manasseh. So you've got three, but then these two sons are elevated up and counted as sons of Asher. Asher is Jacob's eighth son.

What is eight the number of? On the eighth day circumcised, new life, new birth, seven days of human history, if you will. The eighth day is the kingdom of the father. It's the day of renewal.

It's the day that a cleansed leper could reenter the fellowship of Israel. Asher is the eighth son. There were six tribes on each side, six on Mount Gerizim and six on Mount Ebal.

Gerizim is the Mount of Blessing. Ebal is the Mount of Cursing. Asher was one of the six tribes on the Mount of Cursing.

And if you go back to the curses that are pronounced in Deuteronomy 27 verses 15 through 26, count them. There are 12. There are 12.

Cursed is he who does this. Cursed is he who does that. I wish I had time to go through them.

It's fascinating. You find that in Deuteronomy 27, beginning at verse 15, such as cursed is the man who dishonors his father or mother. Cursed is the man who leads the blind astray on the road.

That was all a part of Asher. Asher means happy. We talked about what Anna signifies.

We talked about what Peniel, Phanuel means. Asher means happy. And you can go back to Numbers chapter 26 verses 44 and 45 to get those five clans that were a part of Asher.

But you have the number five. You have the number 12. All of these are Old Testament Israel signs.

Simeon sees him first and talks about the Gentiles. Anna, Hannah, daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher, comes second and is all full of Israel signs. So it is a reminder that when this age is complete, the age of the Gentiles, the age of the church, the age of Israel is going to resume and those instructions will be in effect.

But this takes place in the temple and at the temple, the temple precincts. Flip back a few pages very quickly here for just a brief review. We've read this in recent weeks.

Matthew chapter 24, Jesus near the close of his ministry in Matthew 23, 37 is up on the Mount of Olives and he weeps over Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. See, your house is left to you desolate.

For I say to you, you shall see me no more until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple and his disciples came to show him the buildings of the temple. Do you not see all these things? Not one stone left upon another that will not be thrown down.

Verse three, he sits on the Mount of Olives. Tell us, when will these things be? What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age? Remember, we went through this in some detail recently. I just want you to skip down because take heed that no one deceives you.

A lot of things are going to happen that are not signs of the end times. And this is everything that he talks about all the way through. Verse many coming in my name saying, I'm Christ will deceive many wars and rumors of wars.

Don't be troubled. These things come, but the end is not yet. And during this intermediate time, nation will rise against nation kingdom against kingdom, famines, pestilences, earthquakes in diverse places.

These are the beginnings of sorrows, but these are not signs of the end. And that's why they have occurred all down through the centuries. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and

kill you.

And you will be hated by all nations for my namesake. Then many will be offended, betray one another and hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many lawlessness will abound.

Love of many will grow cold. He who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations.

Then the end will come. Then the end will come. So nine through 14, these are your signs.

Now we are not being yet in this country delivered up to tribulation, but it is happening around the world. It is happening in China. It is happening in Africa.

It is happening in Europe. It is happening in places where Islam has become dominant and terrorism is rife. Christians go to Voice of the Martyrs online and you'll get a daily summary of how many Christians are being martyred around the world.

You don't hear anything about it because your American media is not going to talk about it. Go to Voice of the Martyrs, read the list, read yesterday and the day before and the day before, go back weeks, months, thousands and thousands of Christians are being killed all around the world all the time. And we hear nothing.

But this is one of the end time signs. They will deliver you to tribulation and kill you. You will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

Christianity has become a byword all around the world. Governments have come out formally against it. This nation has eschewed it and banished it from the public arena.

Many will be offended, will betray one another and will hate one another. This is beginning to happen especially online. This is your cancel culture and your internet piling on and tweet storms and hate crimes perpetrated online.

It's far more vicious than a physical mob. And isn't it significant that in this age of spiritual things and immaterial things that this is the nature of much of the persecution and the hate is that it's in the realm of thought. Teen suicide has never been higher than it is right now.

And a lot of this is pure rejection. Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. There's never been as many false teachers and false prophets on the earth with as big a megaphone as there is now.

Never ever in history. It's a thousand fold what it's ever been. These signs 9 through 14, when Jesus starts saying the end is not yet, that's just the beginning of sorrows up through verse 8. That's the beginning.

But then 9 through 14, then is now false prophets rise up and deceive many lawlessness

abounds. Any argument there? Morality has been redefined to be whatever I want it to be and whatever you want it to be. Has the love of many grown cold? Never before in history has the love of many grown as cold and there's never been so many.

He who endures to the end shall be saved. Be Zachariah and Elizabeth. Be Hannah and Simeon and Joseph and Mary and those many who rejoice at the birth of the forerunner and the ones there were more rejoicing at the birth of John the Baptist than there were rejoicing at the birth of the Lord Jesus.

You've got a little group of shepherds and look who it is. No Pharisees, no Sadducees, no high priests, no Levites, nobody in the entire religious structure. It's the non-denominational shepherds out living their life, doing their job, anticipating and waiting for.

And do they need a sign? Do they ask for a sign? The angel says, you'll know you found him because he's going to be laying in a manger. And they don't even question that. You talk about the king of Israel and he's in a manger? They leave immediately.

They are trusting by habit. That's who we want to be. Gospel will be preached, gospel of the kingdom be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations.

This has literally been fulfilled. Every nation, there's not a nation on the earth that doesn't have a Christian witness and that's only in the last dozen years or so that they have finally reached every single nation. There are some people groups.

Elizabeth reminds me that there's a wonderful ministry opportunity among deaf and communities like that, but the nations, everybody's heard it. It's been fulfilled just in the last 10 to 15 years. Then the end will come.

So we've seen the signs of the first coming. These are the signs of the second coming and there's nothing left to be fulfilled. It is all set up and waiting for our departure.

The 70th week of Daniel with all of its attendant operations of the beast and the false prophet and then the second coming. And remember the contrast between physical things for Israel, spiritual things for us. We meet the Lord in the air.

For Israel, he comes to the ground. The angels that announced the first birth were standing on the ground. We always picture them in the sky singing.

They're on the ground chanting. Multitude praising God and saying glory to God in the highest. It's down to earth.

It's on the ground. The first man was earthly. The second man is heavenly.

Israel as God's chosen people is earthly. We as the body of Christ are heavenly. So it makes sense that our signs are going to be of a non-concrete nature.

Don't look for a John the Baptist. This is why Jesus says if somebody comes out and says he's there or he's there, don't pay attention. Your sign is going to be something the Holy Spirit communicates when you are faithful, when you are righteous and when you are looking and praying.

So this is how we know you've got the answer. You know how to figure it out and we go from there. Well, let's close here in a word of prayer.

We'll resume next Sunday with our study in the Gospel of Matthew. Father, thank you for the provision of the Lord Jesus first and foremost, for the presence and power of your Holy Spirit as our witness and our messenger and the power of your inspired word that is so ubiquitous. We so take for granted the availability of a Bible at any time.

You can open a hotel drawer and it is there. You can look on a shelf or on a table and it is there. You can look online and it is there.

We have the availability of your word as never before in history. We pray that we will remember to avail ourselves of it, that God the Holy Spirit will prompt us and remind us to love, faith and obedience as we await the soon return of your Son, the Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.