

# **A Story That Intersects With Real Life**

## **Luke 1:57-2:40**

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Well, we are settling into our new study and tour through the book called, “The Gospel According To Luke” in the Bible. This is our third week into it and we’re still sort of just getting into the story.

In the first week, we just dealt with the introduction to the book where Luke basically told us it was going to be a really good story and at the same time be a true story. Then last week we dealt with most of the first chapter which sort of sets things off with a bang, introducing us to angels and to their promise of two miracle births, one to an old senior citizen named Elizabeth and one to a young little girl named Mary.

What we have in store for this week is those promises coming true and what happens when they do. And the overriding thing I think we end up encountering in it is the earthiness of this story. And what I mean by that is the sense of realness and rawness in it. It’s a fantastic, supernatural story, but it’s a very human story. It strikes this tone of realness in it, dealing with real realities, real struggles, and real hope.

Many people have noted that our culture today is one that longs for what is real. Businesses aim to characterize their companies as ones that care about real issues and real people. Never before have we seen so many companies making public political and moral judgments and business decisions in light of those convictions.

Just last week, Uber, Lyft, and Air BnB made public statements about the immigration ban and offered discounts to those affected. Apple, Microsoft, Google, and Facebook are also now finding unity in a joint open letter they published on the issue. And worst of all, I read that Nordstrom is no longer going to carry Ivanka Trump’s fashion line!

In Charles Lindholm’s book “Culture and Authenticity” he writes,

“The quest for authenticity touches and transforms a vast range of human experience today - we speak of authentic art, authentic music, authentic food, authentic dance, authentic people, authentic roots, authentic meanings, authentic nations, authentic products. A desire for authenticity can lead people to extremes of self-sacrifice and risk; the loss of authenticity can be a source of grief and despair. Authenticity gathers people in collectives that are felt to be real, essential, and vital, providing participants with meaning, unity, and a surpassing sense of belonging. Authenticity can also be sought internally, through transformative ecstatic experiences, or externally, in the consumption of goods that symbolize the really real. If a Rembrandt can be called authentic, so can Coca Cola. Authenticity can be used to describe tourist sights, the scent of floor polish, and the president of the United States. It can be found in moments of extreme danger, in the pleasure of carnival, in the taste of champagne. Authenticity can be ratified by experts who prove provenance and origin, or by the evocation of feelings that are immediate and irrefutable. The hope for an authentic experience draws us to charismatic leaders, expressive artists, and social movements; it makes us into trendy consumers, creative performers, and fanatical collectors. Authenticity in its multiple variations, exalted and ordinary, is taken for granted as an absolute value in contemporary life.”

Likewise James Gilmore in his book, "Authenticity: What Consumers Really Want" says,

"Raise the subject of authenticity today and many people eagerly talk about what is real and what is fake. The topic - whether concerning people, places, or things - triggers strong opinions and passionate disagreements even among close friends. What we deem real may not seem so real to you; you may even view it as downright fake. Yet underlying any difference of opinion about what constitutes authenticity is a shared belief that whoever is real is valued. On that we all agree."

With that, let's get into the text and our story for today from Luke.

*Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. 58 And her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her. 59 And on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, 60 but his mother answered, "No; he shall be called John." 61 And they said to her, "None of your relatives is called by this name." 62 And they made signs to his father, inquiring what he wanted him to be called. 63 And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. 64 And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. 65 And fear came on all their neighbors. And all these things were talked about through all the hill country of Judea, 66 and all who heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, "What then will this child be?" For the hand of the Lord was with him.*

*67 And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying 68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people 69 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, 70 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, 71 that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; 72 to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, 73 the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us 74 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, 75 in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. 76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, 77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, 78 because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high 79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."*

*80 And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance to Israel.*

*2:1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

*8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. 10 And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For*

unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” 15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

21 And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb. 22 And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, 28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

29 “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” 33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

36 And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, 37 and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. 38 And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

39 And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. 40 And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him. – Luke 1:57-2:40

- Pastoral Declaration: This is the Word of the Lord.
- Congregational Response: Thanks Be To God.
- Pastoral Prayer

Alright, so my sermon today is titled, “A Story That Intersects With Real Life” and I’ve got three points for us to walk through from the text we just read, “Real Prophecy”, “Real People” and “Real Praise.”

## I. Real Prophecy

With the first point, “Real Prophecy” what we have in our story today is reference to five different prophecies. The word prophecy can mean either forth telling or foretelling. Forth telling is telling it like it is, just straight talk and foretelling is predicting the future.

Most of the prophecy stuff in the Bible is actually forthtelling but here in our story, we’ve got references to five different foretellings.

1. The angel Gabriel's prophecy of John's birth.
2. Zechariah's prophecy of John's life.
3. An angel's prophecy of Jesus birth.
4. Simeon's prophecy of Jesus to be the Savior for all.
5. Anna the prophetess' confirmation of Jesus the Savior.

Now I don't want to talk about any of the specifics of their prophecies just yet, but first, have us consider together the nature of prophecy itself. In our human quest and desire to know what is real and what is true, throughout the story of the Bible, foretelling prophecy is one of the things God has given to us so we might know that He is real and that we can trust Him.

Now there's approximately 2,500 foretelling prophecy passage in the Bible that have been fulfilled in actual history. There's about 300 that refer to Jesus. If you just take 8 of them, like the most specific ones...like Jesus will be born in Bethlehem, will be born of a virgin, will have a crucified on a cross, and will have his side pierced...if you just take 8 of the most specific ones, the chances of those prophecies being fulfilled is 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000 (one hundred quintillion).

John Lennox, who has three Ph.Ds and is a mathematics professor at Oxford says the chances, like human life resulting from the big bang, are simply too staggering. If you just tried one chance, every second, there wouldn't be enough time in even the longest estimations for the age of the universe. To give you a comparison it's like a tornado hitting a lumberyard and out coming an apartment complex. Or say each chance is a silver dollar, if you laid them out all over California it would cover the state two feet deep. The chances are like walking in, reaching down and picking up one specifically marked silver dollar.

It's just not possible. That's why the prophecies of the Bible are so unique and so powerful. Prophecies in the Bible really drive the whole story from the beginning in the garden of Eden, throughout the entire history of God's people, leading to Jesus, the Church and then what is to come in heaven.

In our story, both Simeon and Anna had given their whole lives to prophecies about a savior coming for all peoples, who would be God's light and bring redemption. When Jesus' human parents, Mary and Joseph brought Him to the temple as a little baby, there was something about Jesus which struck them and they knew Jesus was that promised savior.

In the first part of our story today we've got Zechariah, who when he is first given this prophecy from the angel Gabriel that his wife will have a son in her old age and that his son would introduce the world to Jesus the Savior, he doesn't believe it. Zach couldn't believe that the prophecy was true, so the angel made him mute.

But then in our story today, He believes. Zach like most guys longed to have a son. I get that. We tried but never could figure out how to make boys, so we have three girls.

In that day and age, if you knew you were only going to have one kid, your only son, the expectation is that the father would give him his name. That's what verse 59 says that they expected Zach to name his kid Zach after his father.

But when they ask him, Zach writes down that his name would be John as the angel instructed him. And immediately, at that moment he's able to talk again. When Zach embraced the truth of the prophecy he was able to speak...and then, the first thing he speaks is praise to God and then gives his own prophecy about who and what his son John will be like.

All throughout our story today the text is putting us in the same dilemma. Will we believe the prophecy like Zach? Will we listen to the angels like the shepherds did? Will we recognize Jesus for who He is like Simeon and Anna did?

Now I get it. The idea of believing in prophecy is kind of weird. I think for us today we kind of put it in the paranormal pseudoscience category of weird stuff like dreams and ghosts. But just put yourself in the shoes of these people.

Imagine an angel shows up in your living room and tells something crazy and seemingly impossible is gonna happen...imagine the angel says your 90 old grandmother is gonna get pregnant, who's never had kids her entire life. It's physically impossible and so outlandish, afterward you probably just figure that whole seeing the angel and hearing it talk thing was just in your head like a weird dream.

But then, lo and behold your grandma starts showing and actually ends up giving birth to this kid. What do you think that does to you? Do you think that would jar your thinking a bit to start to believe that what the angel said was actually true, because if the angel was right about that then he was probably right about everything else too?

You see we've got to imagine ourselves in this story because what prophecy ultimately is designed to do is to connect us to God. It's designed to tell us that God is real.

What prophecy teaches us about God is that He's a God who knows the future. God knows all things and ultimately determines all things. So the question that's put to us is whether or not we will trust Him with our lives?

In the story, God is determining everything. He's determining the course of Zechariah and Elizabeth's lives. He's determining the course of John's life. He's determining the course of Mary and Joseph's lives. And He's determining the mission and purpose of Jesus' life.

Real prophecy tells us God is in control and calls us to trust Him with our lives. It calls us to be who God created us to be, to find our role and to serve Him in it.

God wants us to know that He is real and that if we believe that our lives can have real purpose and real meaning.

And I'll tell you what having that behind you in the way you view your life changes everything. It kind of frees you up because then you're not living with this pressure to have to figure everything out for yourself and hope it goes well. We just entrust ourselves to God who put us into the world, knows us best and then we serve Him and His purposes.

Everybody has a place and purpose. Do you know what yours is? Are you looking to God's Word, His book of prophecy to try to help you figure that out? We've got to look to Him and to trust Him. He's given us good reason to believe that He's real and that He will not fail us.

Everyone is important to God. That's one of the things I love about this story so much. In it, God involves and works through all different types of people and promises that Jesus will be for all peoples.

Let's look a little closer into that in our next point, "Real People."

## **II. Real People**

One of the ironic things about living in a culture with such a desire for authenticity, for people being real and genuine is that at the same time we are increasingly living in a culture of fakeness.

What do you think of when you think of fake people? All the bachelor show contestants? Shmooser salesman? Someone who is always really nice to you face to face but then talks trash about you behind your back?

I came across this definition of fake people.

"Those who are usually associated with ads, any male or female on a billboard, magazine, or TV that looks so beautiful and perfect, that they are fake. People that you would NEVER bump into at your local Dunkin Donuts or pumping gas next to you at a gas station. Typically, fake people are white people between 18-30 in age qualify."

Now there are people who are obviously fake that seemingly have as much depth to them as a puddle of water. But there's a more subtle fakeness growing among us.

Karl Moore recently wrote an article in Forbes magazine titled, "Authenticity: The Way To The Millennial's Heart"...

"Social media has enabled Postmoderns to communicate their true feelings with much less anxiety about being personally judged. It also gives them the ability, however, to distort information to fulfill an agenda without much consequence. Facebook, Twitter and other social media/networking sites provide an outlet for endless self-expression.

Many Postmoderns struggle to separate their online and offline personas; online, they are able to say and do whatever they like with very limited consequences. They can mask their true emotions and shape themselves to appear to be whoever their online peers expect them to be, thereby fulfilling the social expectations of each other user. Or at times, just play with alternative identities.

In life, however, the truth may be quite different. They could be very unhappy with their offline situation. By confusing the two worlds, they adopt their online image in the real world, thereby losing their authentic self. This can make the “true self” hard to identify.”

What the story surrounding Jesus birth offers us is something real, something earthy, something we can really connect with because in it God’s entrance into the world gets wrapped up into the lives of real people. There’s a real earthiness to this story.

It starts with this older couple who has lived for years with the pain of not being able to have children, when that’s all they ever wanted. Can you imagine how it felt to be them?

Then we’re introduced to this poor young couple, Mary and Joseph. We know they’re poor because when they go to the temple to offer their sacrifice their option is either a pair of turtledoves or pigeons which was one of the cheapest things you could offer, reserved only for poor people. It basically means they’re like welfare status.

In every society, in every age, there are only a handful of people who are actually well off and have a lot of money. Most are either poor or just sort of middle of the road. Maybe God’s blessed you with money, which isn’t a bad thing, he just means for you to be a blessing. For everyone else, you know or probably will know at some point the pain and the stress that finances can bring into your life. Being poor, barely able to make it, is rough. Just imagine having nothing and then having a baby?

Then there’s this radical social commentary inherent in the story where angels, who are esteemed as these special elite beings announce the birth of Jesus the savior of the world, to shepherds who were considered the dirty, low class, not welcome in normal society.

What’s the worst job you’ve ever had? Imagine not being welcomed to certain restaurants because of your job. Imagine not being allowed to go into certain parts of the temple because you’re a shepherd. Imagine everyone always knowing what you did for work and looking down on you.

You see, these people in this story are real people, dealing with real life and difficult situations. It’s raw. These people are like you and I. God isn’t some far off idea. He gets dirty. Literally down in the dirt in a stable, inside a dirty feeding trough. There’s a real earthiness to this story in how God shows himself.

In it what we’re introduced to through that is the story of a God who knows and cares for all kinds of people, which is why He came into the world the way He did. Everyone is excited about Jesus. Angels, old people, poor people, dirty people, religious people, irreligious people, women, men...all people. The Gospel is a very human gospel. There’s a real humanness to the message of Jesus.

One of the Bible commentaries I read this week said something good. It said,

“The circumstances of Jesus’ birth are so basic and humble in origin that it is hard to appreciate just who it is that is born here. Most regal figures are born with great ceremony and celebration but Jesus’ birth is as average as it comes.

The announcement that of ‘good news of great joy that will be for all the people’ indicates that God desires to speak to every person about the coming of Jesus, since all humanity is

impacted by his coming. All people can be filled with joy because Jesus may be lying in an animal trough, but heaven is present at his birth.” – Darrel Bock

There’s a key line and key verse in the whole chunk of text we’re working with today. It’s in chapter 2 verse 30-32 in part of what Simeon, who was likely the temple priest, in what he said about Jesus. He says, “My eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles.”

What Simeon declares here and what the whole story is telling us is that Jesus is the One who was born to bring salvations for all peoples. Not that all people would believe in Him but that He is a savior for every type of person. He’s a “light of revelation to the Gentiles” which is a way of saying He’s for every race and color of skin.

It doesn’t matter if you’re young, old, rich, poor, religious, irreligious, black, white, middle eastern, hispanic, asian, man, woman, child...Jesus is a savior to all.

It says He’s a light of revelation. Revelation is God revealing Himself to humanity. So this is a way of saying that Jesus cast light on God, who God is and how God thinks and feels toward all peoples.

And that’s the connection point. That’s what we have to see and understand and believe if we’re going to escape becoming fake. You see, it’s when we’re unable or afraid to be ourselves, to be who God created us to be, to believe that He loves us the way we are, that we start becoming fake.

Fakeness flourishes whenever we believe lies about ourselves and about God. Often because of the way that people have mistreated us, we start believing that God thinks and feels the same way toward us.

But it’s not true. God’s not fake. He’s real. And that’s why He sent His son. To be a savior for all peoples.

Today are you afraid that God doesn’t or couldn’t love you or care about you because of who you are?

Today do you feel guilty about something you’ve either done or not done and you just feel caught in this constant loop of trying to fix yourself and you think God’s disappointed with you?

Today do you feel shame about not being enough? Like you’ve failed at life and there’s something wrong with you?

The Jesus story Luke records for us tells us it doesn’t matter who we are or where we’re at in life or what we’re going through, Jesus entered into the world to be a savior for all kinds of people. What this story calls us to is to get real with ourselves, admit our fakeness and receive God’s gift of salvation for us in Jesus.

Now that’s not easy and lest we start to think that getting there is something we have to work to accomplish, let’s move into our last point to see how it works in the examples of our text. So our last point for today, “Real Praise.”

### III. Real Praise

There are five different praise sections.

First, when Zechariah is able to speak again verse 64 says “he spoke blessing God” and then verse 67 tells us that those first words were, “Blessed be the Lord God!” Blessing means to speak out praise. It’s where you say good things about and to a person.

The second praise section in our story is from the multitude of angels who sing this song of praise saying in verse 14, “Glory to God in the highest!” To give glory to God is to give God honor and credit and to acknowledge Him as being good, supreme and wonderful.

After the angels, the shepherds go see Jesus and they leave verse 20 says, “glorifying and praise God for all they had heard and seen.” I just imagine them so stoked, they probably couldn’t stop turning to each other and saying stuff like, “Can you believe it?!!! I can’t believe we got to see Jesus! Can you believe God decided to tell us! Shepherds! Ha ha ha! God is truly good!”

Next up is Simeon, who’s one life goal was to see God’s savior before he died. When he does, he’s ecstatic. Verse 28 says, “he took him (Jesus) up in his arms and blessed God.” There’s that word blessing again. Here I imagine it was a bunch of words of gratitude thanking God for coming in Jesus, thanking God that he got to see Him and surely what we know from his words, thanking God for what He would do through Jesus.

Lastly, we’ve got Anna, whose a prophetess. Which by the way is cool. Sometimes people think theology is just for the guys. But no sir. Mary’s song we looked at last week was quite sophisticated. She was a good theologian. And here Anna is too. Verse 38 says when she say Jesus, “she began to give thanks to God” because of the redemption she knew Jesus would bring. She’s overwhelmed, just saying, “thank you, God, thank you, thank you, Lord.”

So we’ve got five different places in our text where people praise God for Jesus entering into the world. Here’s my question. What made them praise? Did they somehow work themselves up to it? We’re they like, “Well, I guess we should be happy and thank God”? Did they have to make themselves believe, where they we’re like, “Hmmm...I’m not really sure about this, but okay.” NO!!!

In every case, they just react right? They just automatically respond and rejoice! Once they recognized who Jesus was and what it meant for them, they could not help themselves but just start blessings and praising and thanking God!

And I think that’s important. I’m not saying that there aren’t times where being responsible and disciplined comes into play, like prioritizing your week and making it so you have time to spend with God by yourself and with others at church on Sunday. I’m not saying there’s not times where we don’t feel a lot of joy and gratitude toward God in our walk with Him.

What I am saying however is I think the heart of faith in God is a response to Him and His work. It’s not something we do. It’s something done for us and in us. Every person in the story simply responds and can’t help but respond when they hear about Jesus and understands what that means.

Zechariah blessed God because he was overjoyed that his son John would introduce people to Jesus.

The host angels gave glory to God because of the peace they knew Jesus would bring for all people.

The shepherds praised God because God chose them to be the first group of people to meet Jesus.

Simeon blessed God because he got to hold his savior, the Son of God.

And Anna gave thanks to God because she knew Jesus would redeem her.

All of their responses are special and unique. They're all great. But I think in this section, Anna's actually helps us out the most. Zechariah talks about Jesus saving us. The angels talk about Jesus giving us peace. Simeon talks about Jesus being God's light. But what Anna says is that in Jesus God would bring "redemption."

You see the question is how Jesus saves, how He brings peace, how His light shines...and the answer is through redemption. Redemption is actually a financial term but here it's used as a spiritual analogy. To redeem is to buy back with a price.

The reason people need saving is because all people have been affected by what the Bible calls sin. Whether it's our own failures or the wrong things done to us, fear, guilt, and shame has stolen the peace God created us for.

The result is we start buying into fakeness. We try to make up for those things. We try to fix ourselves. But we fail and we end up far from God. So in Jesus God sent His Son, not only to be born, but to die. And on the cross, Jesus pays the ultimate price in order to purchase us with His blood.

I'm not sure how many of the details the characters in our story knew about Jesus and what He would do on the cross but the one thing they did know was that they needed saving, that they were lost, wrecked by sin and that they needed God to do something to bring the back to Himself, to buy them back...and they rejoiced when they saw that Jesus was their redemption.

I believe that's where real praise is birthed. In believing that Jesus is our redeemer. That despite all the mess...despite my own mess, despite the mess of our world, that God entered into in Jesus and that He grew up and paid the price for all of it on the cross so I might know the full depth of His love.

When we see that and believe that, the automatic response in our hearts is praise. When we're captured by that, then we can't help but begin to spew forth thanks and blessing to God for who He is and what He has done for us in Jesus.

Real praise comes from real people getting real with God and receiving the real gift of Jesus. And there's not a better feeling in the world...it's just pure unadulterated joy.

## Conclusion

Today as we've looked at this story we've talked about Real Prophecy, Real People, and Real Praise. I hope and pray God's Word has been a blessing to you.

We're going to have a time of response as we always do here at The Resolved where we take a piece of bread as Jesus' perfect life and dip it in the wine or the juice as Jesus' perfect blood.

As you respond today, come as you are. Come, be the real you and have a real moment with God.

Maybe you're in a place like Zechariah where you've struggled to believe that God's Word is real. Today, come and bless His name knowing that in Jesus God fulfills all of His promises.

Maybe you're in a place like Joseph and Mary and the shepherds where you're financially poor or maybe just feeling poor in your spirit. Today, come and know that Jesus cares for you and came for you, you are special welcome in His Kingdom.

Lastly, maybe you're in a place like Simeon or Anna, where you've believed the Bible but haven't felt a lot of joy, maybe you've just been sort of silently waiting. Today, come and see Jesus who is the light of God and have Him light up your life.

I'll leave us with one last verse from the Bible and then pray.

*"In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace." – Ephesians 1:7*