



The Angels of Christmas

Hearing God's Voice in Advent
Week 2





Opening Prayer

Lord, none of us expects to be visited by the angel Gabriel. None of us expects to receive a world-changing message such as Mary received. But we know there are times when you call us to a role or a task that we did not expect, or for which we feel unprepared. Through your Spirit, open our hearts to new purposes and new beginnings. Help us to be receptive to the miraculous ways you work in our world, even as they lie beyond our ability to comprehend. Give us a spirit such that the when you come to us, we may say as Mary said, "Let it be according to your word" and follow in faith where you lead us to go. Amen.



What Matters Most

God reaches out to us through messengers, whether they're heaven or purely human, complete strangers or people we know well. "God is trying to tell you something!"

The angels of Christmas came to deliver important messages to people who were hoping for God to intervene in a mighty way, both in the fears and darkness of their personal lives and in their world.

Review of Last Week

- ★ Angel Show and Tell
- ★ “Adventus” meaning “visitation” - especially referring to a visit by the emperor.
- ★ Angelos - messenger of God, Bearer of good news: comfort, announce, commission; Bearer of bad news: flaming sword at Eden, blocks Balaam’s path, ensure destruction of Sodom

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Review of Last Week

- ★ What was most interesting?
- ★ What was most challenging?
- ★ What most helped?

Let It Be



Gabriel and Mary

Luke 1:26-38





Who is Mary?

- Mary is a young girl, believed to be a teenager, 14 or 15
- We have no idea where Mary is when the angel appears
- We know she lives in Nazareth
- She is a virgin, also speaks to age
- Engaged to a man names Joseph, who is “from the house of David” fulling a prophecy from the Old Testament



Who is Mary?

- Spend a few moments silently trying to recall our own early teenage years, How did you feel about yourself, about your place in your community?
- What fears or uncertainties did you face, the emotions you felt, and what were your ideas about what the future might hold?

Finding Favor with God

Others visited by angels with surprise news:

- ★ **Jacob** - Genesis 31:11 - Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am!' & 46:2 - God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am."
- ★ **Moses** - Exodus 3:4 - When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."
- ★ **Samuel** - 1 Samuel 3:4 - Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!"[a] and he said, "Here I am!"
- ★ **Isaiah** - Isaiah 6:8 - Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"



Finding Favor with God

- ★ What do these passages have in common?
- ★ How are they different?
- ★ What does it mean to be favored by God?
- ★ What might have Mary done to deserve this celestial visit?



You Will Name Him Jesus

In 3 verses Mary finds out:

- ★ She will conceive and bear a son
- ★ She will name him Jesus
- ★ He will be great
- ★ He will be called Son of the Most High God and the Son of God
- ★ He will ascend the throne of his ancestor David and rule over Israel forever
- ★ Of his kingdom there will be no end



How Can This Be? Let It Be?

- ★ Have you ever said “How can this be?” What were the circumstances?
- ★ Frequently when we ask, “How can this be?” we already know the answer. Intellectually, we understand but this expression gives us space to try to process what has just happened.
- ★ Unlike Zechariah, Mary doesn't ask for a sign, but she gets one in the pregnancy of her old relative Elizabeth.



How Can This Be? Let It Be?

- ★ After finding out she is have the son of God, Mary then finds out that her much older cousin is also expecting. Why do you think the angel shared this with Mary?
- ★ Is there anything you sense God is calling you to do? Is there anything you sense God desires to give birth to in your life that could make a difference in the world around you?
- ★ If so, what are the consequences & struggles you might face by answering, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word"?

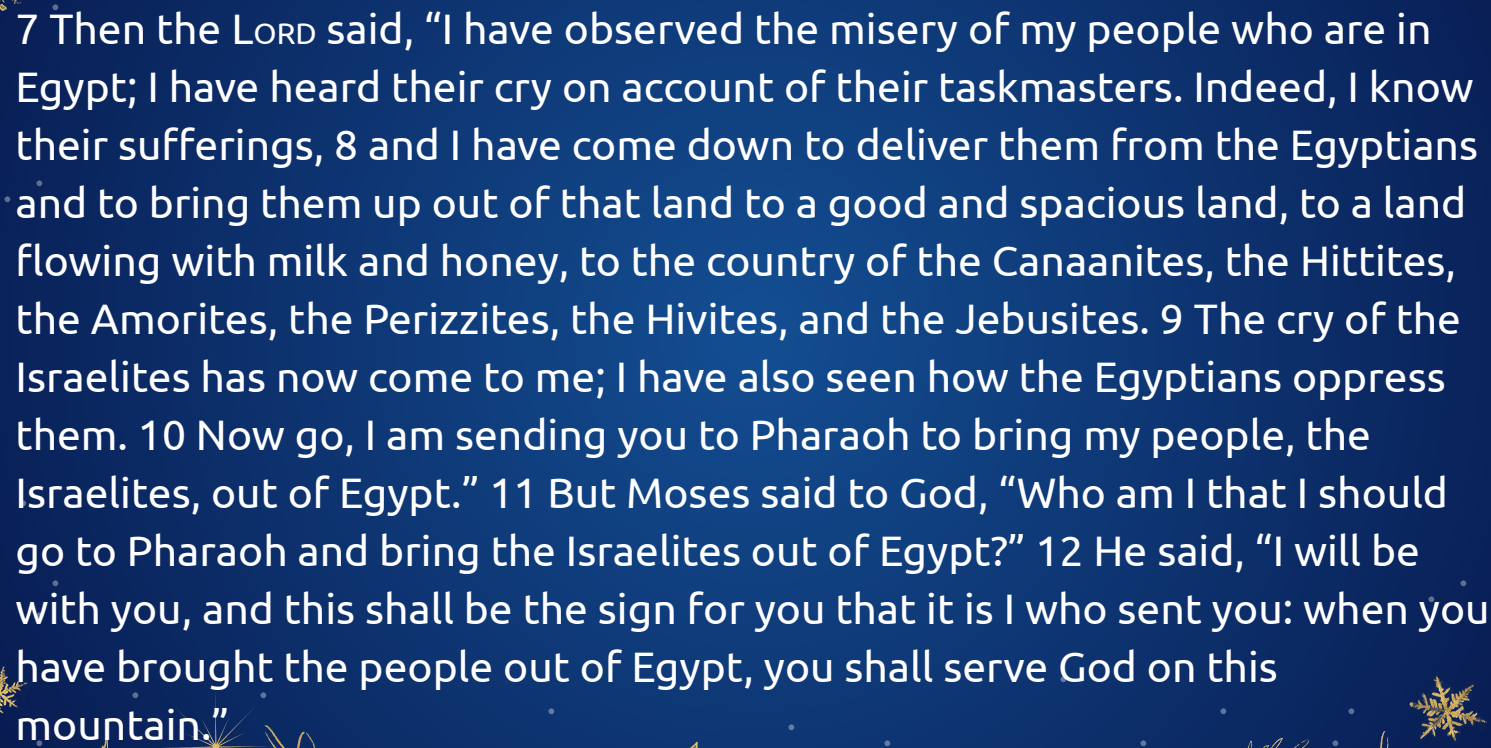


Nothing Will Be Impossible


- ★ Besides her understanding of the physical impossibility that a virgin could become pregnant, what other reasons can you think of why Mary might have asked, “How can this be?”
- ★ Can you think of anyone else in the Bible who is an unlikely choice?
- ★ Why might these people also have been the perfect choice?

Moses - Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness and came to Mount Horeb,[a] the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight and see why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.




7 Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9 The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. 10 Now go, I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." 11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12 He said, "I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."



13 But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."^[b] He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.' "

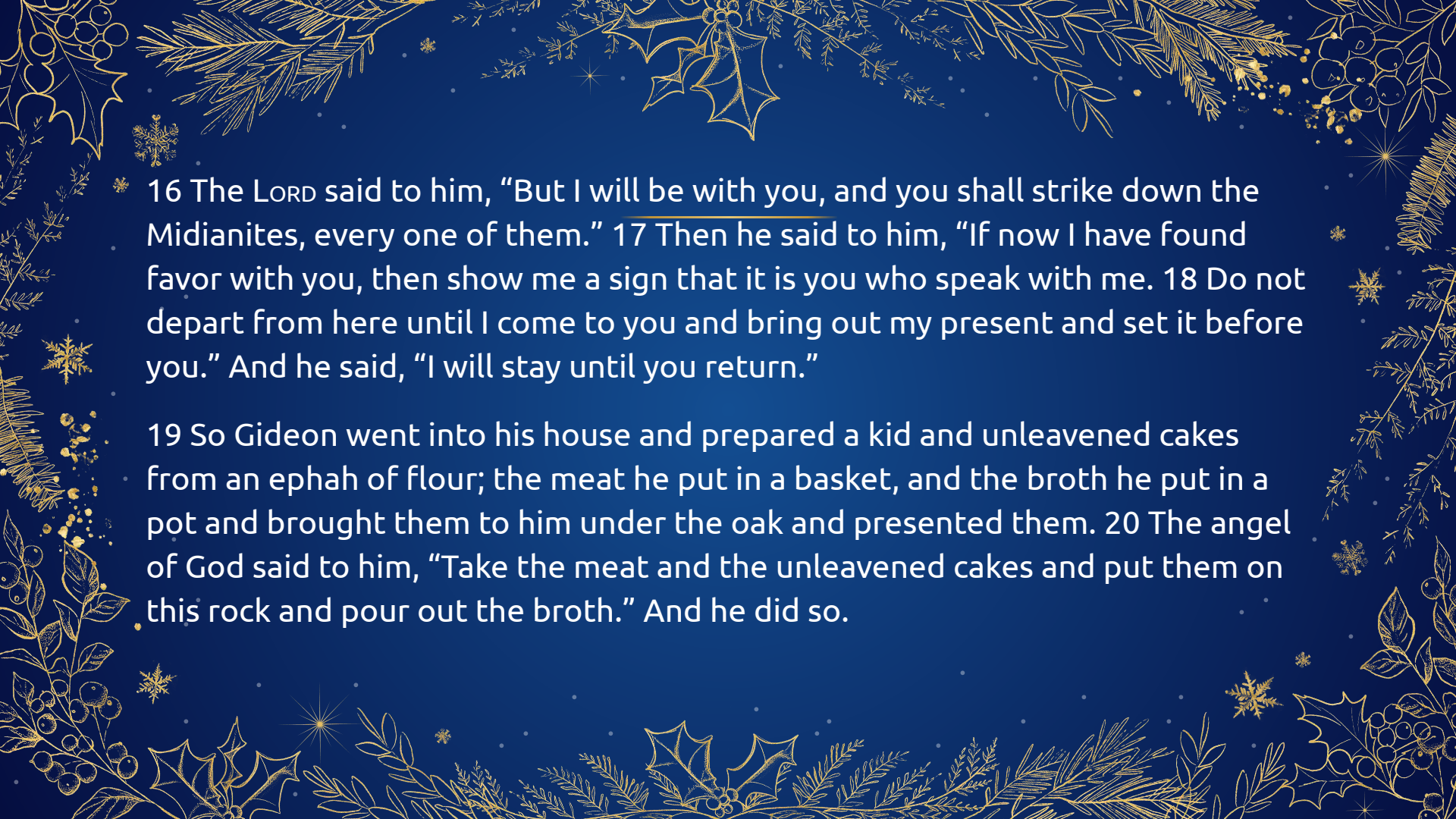
15 God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD,^[c] the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you':

This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.



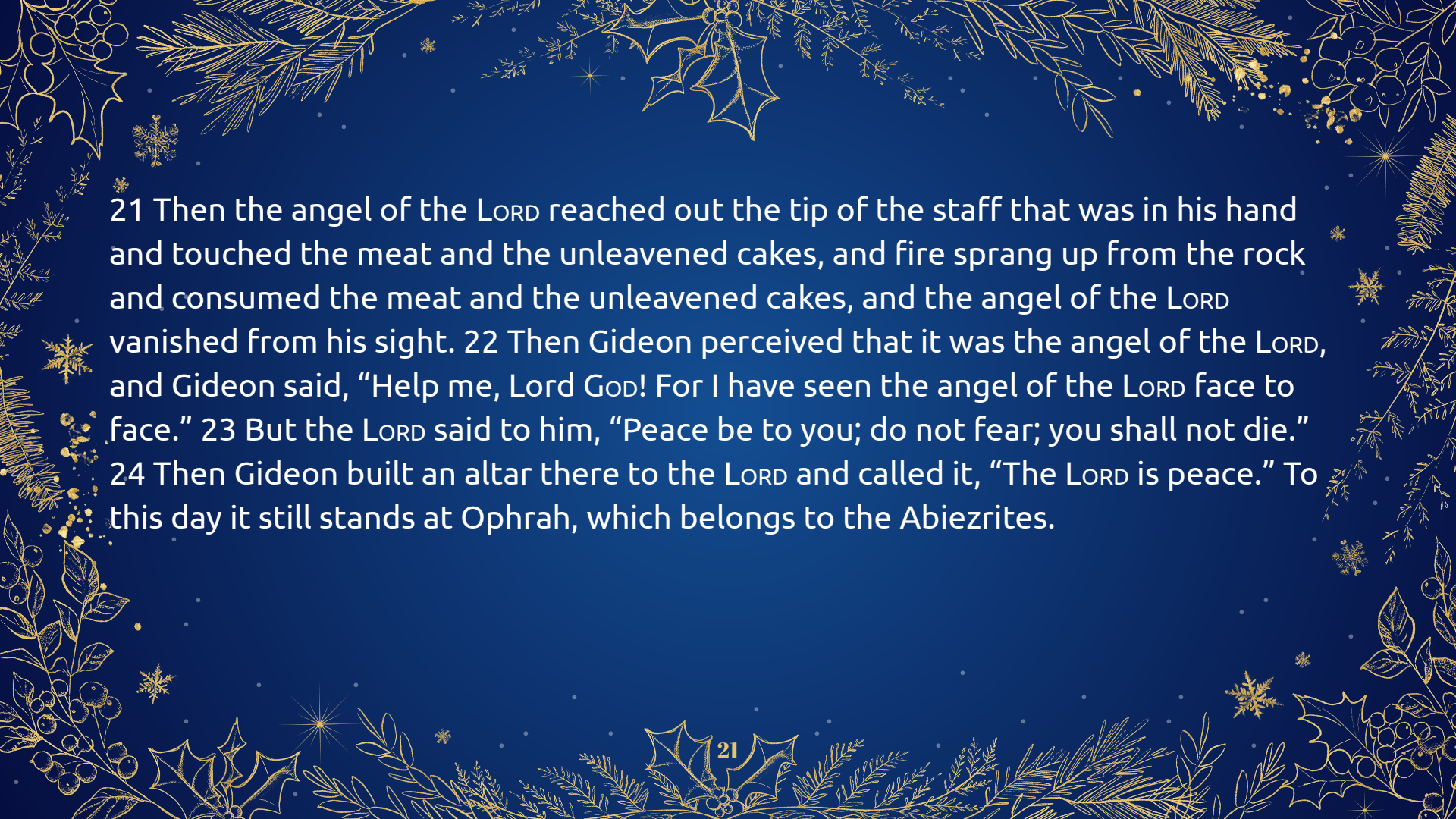
Gideon - Judges 6:11-24

11 Now the angel of the LORD came and sat under the oak at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, as his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. 12 The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said to him, "The LORD is with you, you mighty warrior." 13 Gideon answered him, "But sir, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all his wonderful deeds that our ancestors recounted to us, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has cast us off and given us into the hand of Midian." 14 Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian; I hereby commission you." 15 He responded, "But sir, how can I deliver Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."



16 The LORD said to him, “But I will be with you, and you shall strike down the Midianites, every one of them.” 17 Then he said to him, “If now I have found favor with you, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. 18 Do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you.” And he said, “I will stay until you return.”

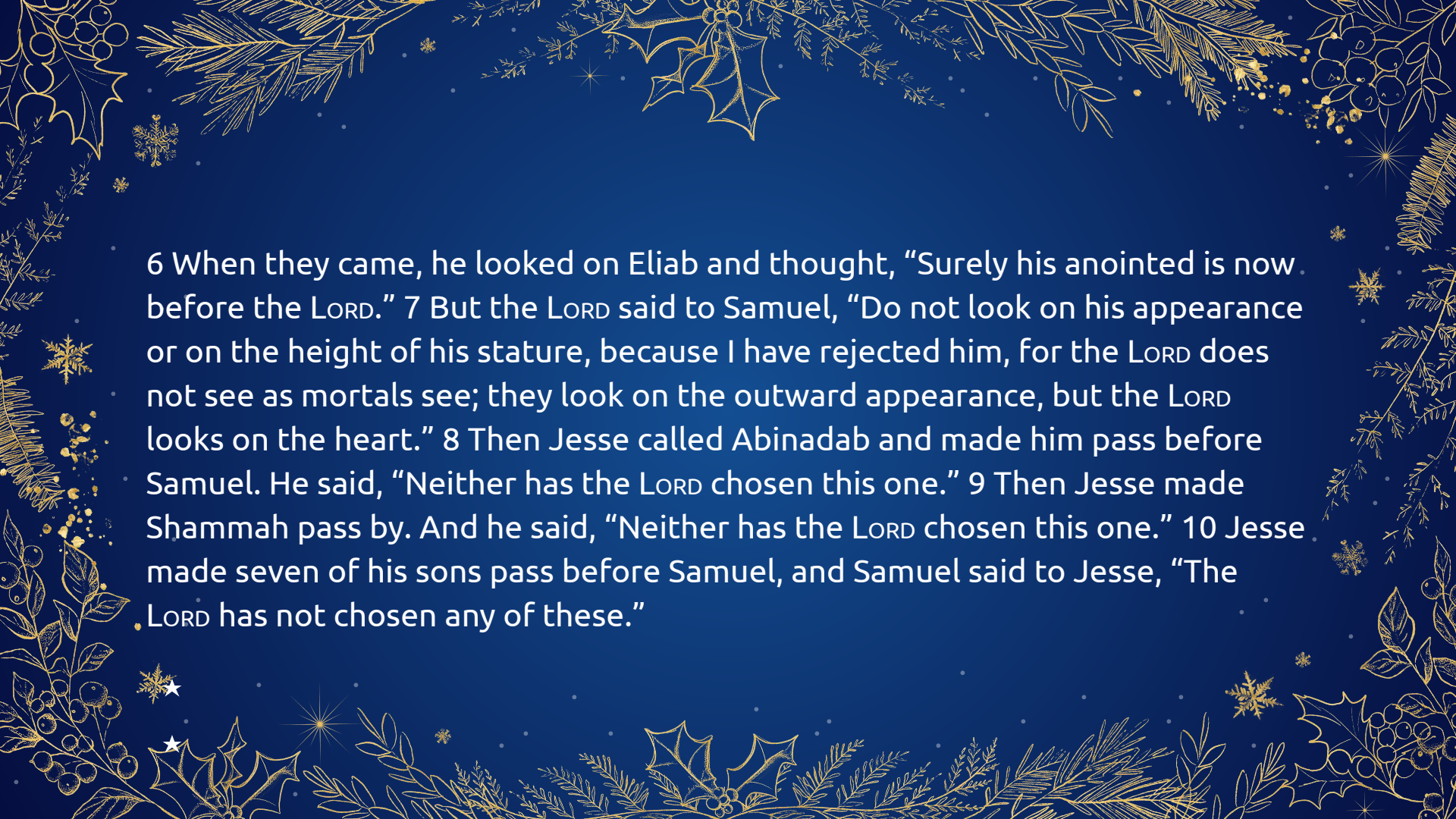
19 So Gideon went into his house and prepared a kid and unleavened cakes from an ephah of flour; the meat he put in a basket, and the broth he put in a pot and brought them to him under the oak and presented them. 20 The angel of God said to him, “Take the meat and the unleavened cakes and put them on this rock and pour out the broth.” And he did so.



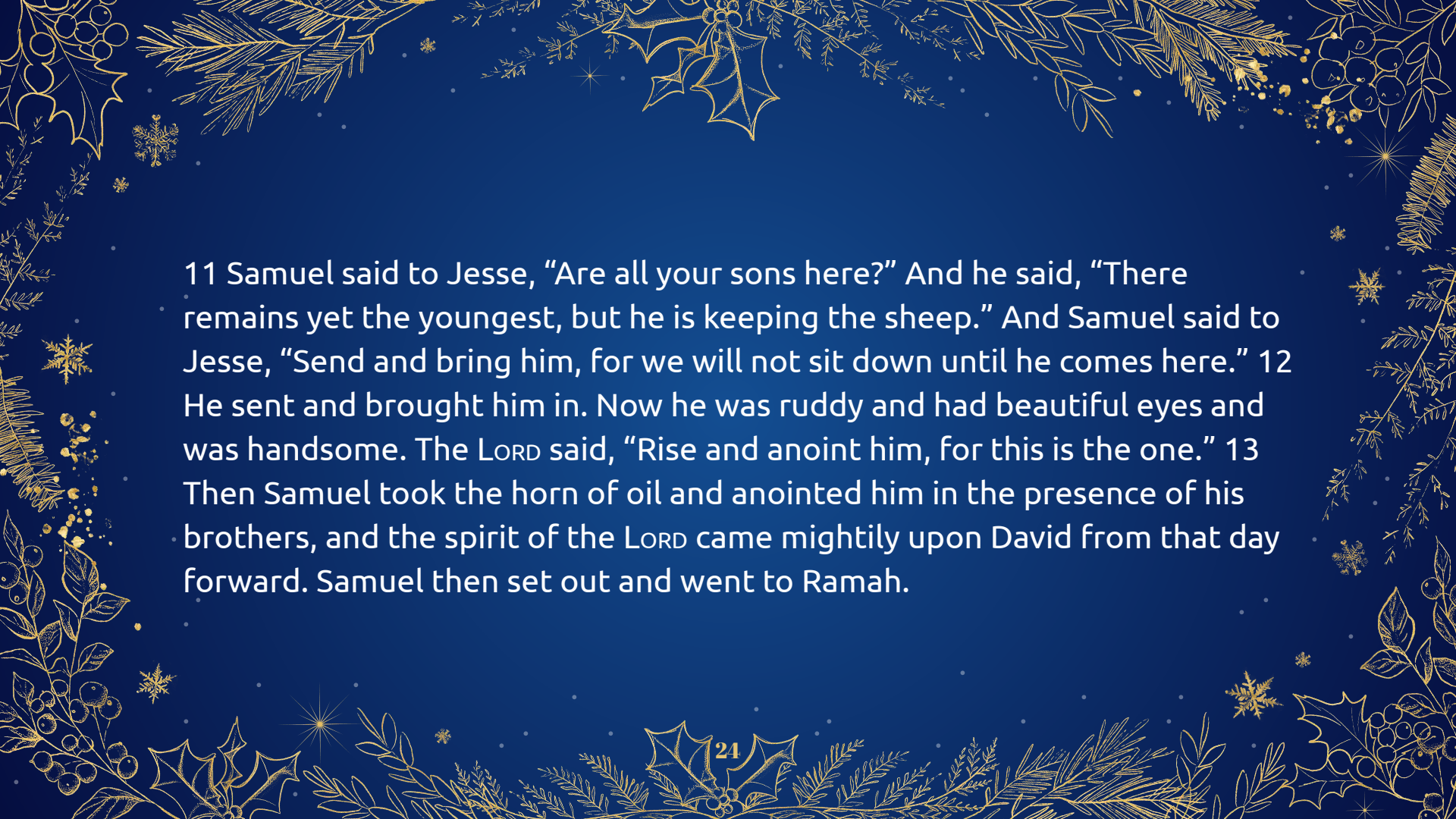
21 Then the angel of the LORD reached out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and touched the meat and the unleavened cakes, and fire sprang up from the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened cakes, and the angel of the LORD vanished from his sight. 22 Then Gideon perceived that it was the angel of the LORD, and Gideon said, "Help me, Lord God! For I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face." 23 But the LORD said to him, "Peace be to you; do not fear; you shall not die." 24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the LORD and called it, "The LORD is peace." To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.

David - 1 Samuel 16:1-13

The LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." 2 Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the LORD said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' 3 Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do, and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." 4 Samuel did what the LORD commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, "Do you come peaceably?" 5 He said, "Peaceably. I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.



6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely his anointed is now before the LORD." 7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him, for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." 8 Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." 9 Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." 10 Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these."



11 Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him, for we will not sit down until he comes here." 12 He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him, for this is the one." 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.



Waiting Together

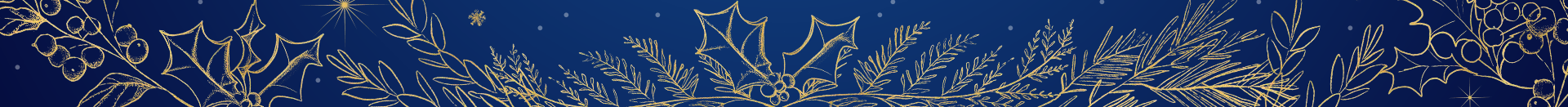
In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, 40 where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit 42 and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. 43 And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? 44 For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."





Waiting Together

Today's Scripture comes immediately after Elizabeth's encounter with Gabriel. After receiving news of her pregnancy Mary sets off for an extended visit with her cousin Elizabeth. Luke doesn't say why Mary decides to do this.

- ★ How would you feel if you learned that you were to be the parent of a child destined for a special purpose for God?
 - ★ Why do you think Mary went to Elizabeth's?
 - ★ Why would the opportunity to be with Elizabeth have been good for Mary?
 - ★ How would being with Mary have been helpful for Elizabeth?
 - ★ How do you think you might have reacted?
- 



Waiting Together

- ★ Mary seeks out Elizabeth, and they wait together. Wait for what has been promised to and the world. In their waiting, they represent the waiting of Israel. And what other waiting?
- ★ Perhaps she is running to the only person who could possibly understand.
- ★ She also might be “hiding” from her small community. And news of her cousin’s pregnancy gives a convenient excuse.
- ★ Elizabeth found out about Mary through John who is still in the womb and then she is filled with the Holy Spirit and immediately knows of Mary’s pregnancy.

My Soul Magnifies the Lord

and His
Mercy
is for those



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My Soul Magnifies the Lord

- ★ What does it mean to “magnify the Lord”?
- ★ Why might reading Mary’s word make some us uncomfortable?
- ★ Why might the wealthy and comfortable be less likely to see Jesus’ actions and teaching as good news?”
- ★ Only Luke presents two different occasions when Jesus explicitly stated that bringing good news to the poor was part of his mission as Messiah.
- ★ How do you believe that Jesus’ actions and teaching represented good news to the poor?
- ★ How can we, as a church or personally, live more fully into this part of Jesus’ mission?★



Closing Questions

- ★ In the coming week, how will you prepare yourself to receive the Christ Child?
- ★ In the coming week, how will you be more watchful for message from God?
- ★ Where do you believe God may have been at work to send a message to which you have not yet responded?
- ★ How will you be more willing, in response to message from God, to step out with the faith of Mary and say, “Let it be”?



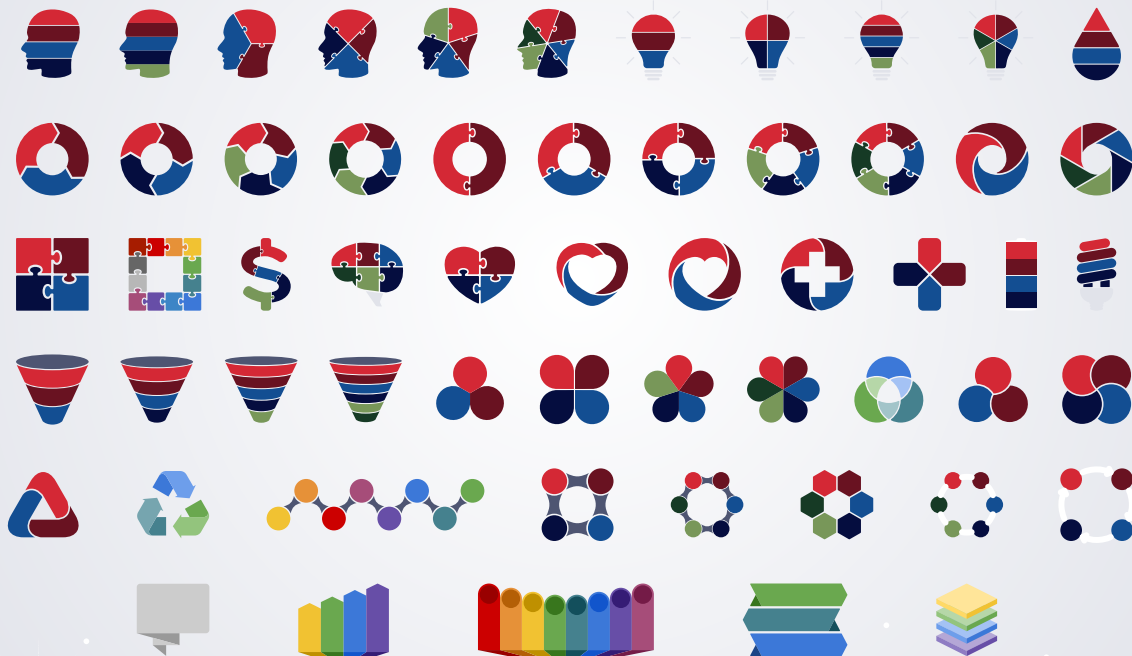
Closing Prayer

"I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee. Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."



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01

Ho ho ho

Let's start with the first set of slides