

We always open up by saying thank you. Thank you for your presence with us. Thank you for salvation of our souls. Thank you for the hope and the peace and the love and the joy that surpass all human definition. Lord, thank you for bringing us together by the power of your Holy Spirit to cast our eyes upward in worship. Worship in song, worship in prayer, worship through your word, worship through our giving, worship this time of year, the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ. It's in your name that we ask you to lead us today as the pastor, the teacher in this church and the church universal. All glory goes to you. Amen. Our opening word is Psalm 98 as we enter into our time together today. Sing a new song to the Lord for He has done wonderful deeds. His right hand has worn His holy arm has shown His saving power. The Lord has announced His victory and has revealed His righteousness to every nation. He has remembered His promise to love and be faithful to Israel. The ends of the earth has seen the victory of our God. Shout to the Lord all the earth. Break out in praise and sing for joy. Sing you a praise to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and melodious song. With trumpets and the sound of the ram's horn, make a joyful symphony before the Lord the King. Let the sea and everything in it shout His praise. Let the earth and all living things join in. Let the rivers clap their hands and lead. Let the hills sing out their songs of joy before the Lord. For He is coming to judge the earth and He will judge the world with justice and the nations with fairness. Yet we suffered, now is nothing compared to the glory He will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who His children really are. Against its will, all creation was subject to God's curse, but with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when we will all join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. When we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us, I will pour taste of future glory. For we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as His adopted children, including the new bodies as He has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved. If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently. Now let's pray. God of hope, thank you that in your great mercy you have given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fail, that we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand in the hope of the glory of God. To such a degree that we can even word in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, character and hope. And hope does not put us to shame because your love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. And they remind us often that everything that was written in the past was written to teach us so that through the endurance taught in the scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope, grant that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit and that we who put our hope in Christ might be for the praise of His glory. Amen. Beautiful music really sets the tone for as we say the season. The decorations, the music, the special music, the carols and the Christmas hymn I would call them. The ones that tell the story of the birth of the Savior. It's one thing that we spoke about earlier in the week. The fact that Christmas has turned into this big monstrosity of a thing. Secular, sacred, all kinds of things that are just thrown in there during this time of year. A holiday, shopping season, the best season of the year. Why? Because you get the best sales of the year. That sort of thing. And within the church, the church itself can do some not so great things during Christmas as well. Putting on all kinds of secular type stuff and doing all kinds of weird things like the church has a tendency to do even at Easter and so forth. Pastors will dress up as Easter bunnies and it's just weird. Around here, every single year, I try to bring us back to the fact that Christmas really is not just about the birth of a baby. The birth narratives of scripture are theological statements that are being made. If the birth narratives of scripture are not true, then Jesus Christ is not who we say He is and who He said He was. And we, as Paul declares in 1 Corinthians, are wasting our time. So we need to look, and this evening I believe Melissa will be reading the birth narrative from Luke. And we need to pay careful attention to

understanding the theology of it because the birth narrative, the conception and the birth of Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God, is cornerstone in telling us who He is. And why do we study scripture, look at scripture, every chapter of scripture we see God, we learn who God is. And then as we always say, because we are created in His image and His likeness, the more we learn about Him, the more we learn about ourselves. And it starts with understanding that the sacrifice is useless if He is not fully human and fully divine. And that is the essence of the conception and the birth narratives. Everything else flows from that. And so every single Sunday I want to just start there at the foundation of the theology of Christmas. Advent is designed by the church to lead us into that moment of birth when God is incarnate and being in the world. But He was created in Mary's womb. He was conceived in Mary's womb. He always was fully human and fully divine. That's a very important statement about human beings and when human beings come into existence, the moment of creation. So if you see that the stories themselves are deep and rich, and you can look at the political stuff there, and you can find out the history that's going on, you can look at the social stuff there, and the things about Mary being betrothed and turning up pregnant, and you can look at all of the theological stuff there that tells us who God is. I don't want you to forget that. I don't want you to drift off in the greatest Holland shopping season of the year and forget that Christmas is about who God is. And if He's not as is described in the conception and birth characters, then this is all a waste of time. So we read then, stemming from that, the scripture was from Romans 8, which is one of my favorite texts. And it talks about, we believe it, it talks about all creation is growing to be redeemed. Right? Even though the kingdom of God is broken on earth, broken into earth, the earth itself and we in these fragile clay jars are still susceptible to all of the things that are there. The destruction that the earth can bring, the disease, the brokenness, the emotional stuff, the psychological stuff. All of creation is growing, and in verse 23 it says, "We believers also grow, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering, we too wait with the eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as His adopted children, including the new bodies He has promised us." Now, again, not sugar coating and just gleefully bouncing through the Christmas season, we understand that the hope of which the Holy Spirit is speaking is the hope of the future, the hope of the return of Christ, the hope when we will no longer simply, God forgive, simply be indwelt by God's Holy Spirit, but we will be glorified by God. Our fragile clay jars will no longer be fragile clay jars, they will be eternal bodies, such as the One of Christ. And our spirits will no longer long for selfish, self-centered and egotistical things, our spirits will be pure, understanding the things then that we only see dimly now, as if through a clouded mirror. We hope for that as Christians, so when we tie all of this together from the conception of Christ to the birth of Christ, the life, the ministry, the death, the resurrection of Christ, the bodily resurrection, we see the complete story and as Scripture teaches, He is the first of all who will be raised in Christ. We see His body, we know His divine spirit, and we hope for that day when the kingdom of God is established fully on earth. And there is no more lying, there are no more tears, there is no more pain. People will not be emotionally broken and driven by grief or pain. Bodies will not be susceptible to disease. We will know the joy of the Lord in full. I went over to Romans 5 as well. And here we go, when we preach the Gospel and the Gospel of Hope. Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand. And we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory. That wraps up quite a bit of that right there in that one, right? The peace and the joy and all of that. We can rejoice too when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. Endurance develops strength of character and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. Like we pressed into the text on Wednesday evening, I'll ask you again, what does that mean to you? Our confident hope of salvation. And it can mean different things to different individuals, but we need to have our grounding in the truth of Scripture. Salvation is by faith alone, in Christ alone. Salvation is the unmerited, unwarranted favor of God upon those who will believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah. This leads to the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. And that leads to a new

way of living. We call that baptism of the Holy Spirit. We model that as Brittany did through baptism of water and rising up out of the water. Now we walk in the confident hope of our salvation. We know the end. There's a little sign out there. Don't we just, what does it say? Don't be misspelled with it. Everything's going to be alright. We know the end, yet we still fear sometimes, don't we? We know the end, yet we still worry sometimes, don't we? We know the end, yet we're afraid of this, that, or the other thing sometimes, aren't we? We know the power that raised Christ from the dead lives in us. We know that we are called to bring that message to all four corners of the earth. Yet we kind of worry about being judged for doing so. So you see that we're not at the end yet. We know the end. We have the power. We have those times when we absolutely are just in communion with God through His Holy Spirit. And then we sort of walk on and maybe not so much. Because we're still sinners and saints. When we have the confident hope, one day we will be saints. Walking in the confident hope of your salvation is more than just raising your hand at a church service one time, or feeling all emotional and saying, "Yes, I'm going to give my life to Christ," or inviting Jesus into your heart, as they say. None of that is back. It can lead out, obviously, to salvation. But the confident hope of salvation goes beyond just being saved from hell and damnation. The confident hope of salvation walks with you in your walk every moment of every day. The confident hope of your salvation is evident on your face and in your behavior and how you interact with everybody inside and outside the kingdom of God. It's how you deal with complicated emotional situations. It's how you deal with complicated family situations. It's reflected in everything that you say and everything that you do. "Well, how can I be sure of what I'm saying and what I'm doing?" That's why we go deeply into this every single week. And we want to go even more deeply into this in 2025. If you want to know, read it. Then you'll know when we walk in this confident hope of salvation. I like to think that I walk in my confident hope of my salvation and I'm walking in my calling and all of those things. But if you're friends with me for five minutes, you know I'm a grumbler. I'm a grumbler, this, that, and the other thing. I don't want to do this. You ask me? And then I'm like, "Oh, what am I doing?" And I get back on track. Or somebody says, "Brian, be quiet." Or worse. And get back on track. I know the confident hope of my salvation and I see it reflected in my children and my grandchildren and everything. Boy, you would think that there's just not a care in the world. Everything is awesome. I don't have anything to worry about. And this is just my testimony. And I bet each and every one of you can stand here and say the exact same words. But yet, here I am. Having this thought or that thought or doing this or doing that or grumbling about this. I'm a sinner and I'm a saint. And I long for the dead, I hope for the dead of Christ's return. When he says, "Through it all, you stayed faithful to me." Through it all, you still kept your eyes turned toward me. Or at least, you turned back around to me. And he says, "Well done." That should be the hope of every Christian. Along the way, in the hope of your salvation, there are going to be many, many pit stops. Many times if you steer off the road, many situations, complications, you name it, you live life. My goodness, the stories in here, the life stories, the real life stories that are in here, you know what it is. And you know that we don't preach from any sort of ivory tower. What is the confident hope of your salvation? How is the confident hope of your salvation going to help you this afternoon, tonight, tomorrow, when you go to work, when you're dealing with those folks, when you have those emotions, when the grief comes over you? What's the confident hope of your salvation look like then? That's what matters. It all begins, it all begins with the conception of Jesus the Christ. Know Him, know us. This hope will not lead to disappointment, says verse 5. For we know how dearly God loves us because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love. When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now that, as Scripture always is, is very relevant to the time, right? With God's chosen time, Christ was conceived and born. But, as Scripture does, it is also relative to your own personal experience. It's the beauty of the layers of Scripture. And probably, each and every one of you can look back to that time and repeat those words. At just the right time, Christ came into my life and saved me. Wherever I was, whatever I was doing. For some of you, that time has been a very long time. Julie gave us testimony of decades of being a Christian when she gave her life to Christ as a teenager. For some of us, it may have been a huge moment and

transformational story. For some of us, like me, it was this weird journey that we didn't know what was going on at all until we turned around and it was like, "Yeah." And, you know, whatever the case may be, you were lost. If you're a Christian today, you were lost. Now you're found. You were blind, but now you see. You were condemned. Now you are saved. If you're not a Christian today, I would implore you to consider my words because they're true. God became incarnate. And He gave Himself the perfect sacrifice for your sin so that you can be in relationship with Him. So every human being, verse 6, can say, every Christian, every Christian can say, dare I say, "When I was utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for my sin." Now most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. I love the reality of the writing. People always think, this is just a little sidebar, but people always think that, "I don't know, Paul was glowing and his feet never touched me." "His feet never touched the ground and every word was a direct word of God." That's not true of the prophets. That's not true of Paul. Definitely divinely inspired. But he was a divinely inspired person like you and me. And so he goes on with these little tangents every once in a while. Like when he, I think it's Corinthians, but he's talking about, "Well, I didn't baptize that family, but I remember baptizing that family." But I don't think I'm going to baptize anybody else. So he goes off on this little thing. And I love that because it's showing us, actually it's showing us the divine inspiration of scripture. That it's real. And this is also very true. "But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." "And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, He will certainly save us from condemnation." "For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of His Son while we were still His enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of His Son." Remember the strong words of scripture here. Remember the strong words of Jesus Christ. If you are friends with the world, you are an enemy of God. When the world hates you, remember they hated me first. You go into the world and expect persecution, expect to be brought before the courts, expect the world to come down on you. "But don't worry," he says, "when the time comes, I will give you everything that you need." "I will give you the words to speak and I will give you the courage to speak them." Paul is here because we are saying here that we are born enemies of God. We are born in rebellion. And it was the death of His Son while we were still His enemies. Understand the power of that. I have an individual who is my enemy. And I always say, some people, we know each other, he does not like me. He is my enemy. It's not just some person that's yelling at me because I'm a Christian. This person really is my enemy. And imagine a situation where here is my enemy devoted to harming me. Imagine a situation where it comes down to it's either him or me who is going to live and I will give my life so that he can live. That's what we are talking about here. Paul is saying, "You might do that. I might jump in front of a train for Mark here. I know him, I love him. There we go." But what about that person who is there and hell bent on killing me? And the situation arises where it's him or it's me and I say me. And I die so that he may live. That's what Christ did for you. That's the significance of these passages. That's the significance of this theology. And understanding that I cannot underscore that enough. That you walk in the confident hope of your salvation every moment of every day in every situation. You can go back to that cornerstone of who Christ is and the power of God's Holy Spirit within you and seek his wisdom, counsel and guidance. He is with you. He will never leave you or forsake you. So now, verse 11, we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends with God. We were once enemies. We are now friends. We were once in rebellion and we are now part of a kingdom. We once were blind, but now we see. We once were lost, but now we're found. Look at all of those positive things that I just said. They constitute the confident hope of your salvation. Walk in those things every day. Every day. That is a hope, a peace, a love, a joy. That will be more than any human understanding of those things. Amen. Amen.