**Turn the Page Week 8 – Waiting to Wonder**

**Message Big Idea**: “Turn the Page” by recognizing the everyday wonders of Jesus in our world.

**Scripture:** Luke 2:1-20, Matthew 15:29-31

**Note**: Pre-select a child (recommended 6-7 years old) to be a volunteer for each service. Have a wrapped present for each service with a gift inside (i.e. oversized candy bar).

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**Video Overview: The Gospels**

**Introduction: Waiting**

*(Series Graphic)* Christmas is just two weeks away! As adults, we tend to freak out about that because we think of all we have yet to get done, but kids tend to experience the wait for Christmas differently. In fact, I asked my friend *(kid) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_* if he/she would help me out this morning as we think about waiting for Christmas.

*(Bring kid on stage and have him/her sit in a chair. Have a handheld microphone. Kneel down beside chair to talk.)*

* Tell me \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ are you excited for Christmas?
* What are you most looking forward to? *(If the child doesn’t mention presents, ask them about presents.)*

It can be hard to wait to open presents! Well, I didn’t want you to have to wait another two weeks for a present, so I have a present for you to open today! Do you want a present? *(Pick up present)* Well, I’m going to give you this present, but I don’t want you to open it right away. I need to tell the adults in the room a little bit more about today’s Bible story before we get to the present. So would you be willing to just hold the present and wait? *(Hand the present to kid)*

**From Old to New**

Alright, while \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ waits to open that present, let me remind you where we’ve been in our current series, **“Turn the Page.”** *(Hold Bible)* For the past seven weeks, we’ve journeyed through the Old Testament in the Bible and all the twists and turns the people of God encountered along the way.

I hope many of you have joined us for the *(Graphic)* **Turn the Page Bible Experience**…a Monday through Friday podcast or email that is helping us grasp an overview of the Bible, the story of God and his people. If you haven’t yet jumped in, sign up on the COMMUNITY app or our website. Now would be a great time to join us because today we’re turning the page from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

But before we do that, let me remind you where we left off in the story…

* Because of their disobedience, God allowed his people to be conquered by a foreign power, the Babylonians.
* They destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple of God, and carried the people off to live in exile in Babylon.
* Then, after almost 70 years in exile, the Persians conquered the Babylonians.
* Though still under foreign rule, the Persian kings allow the people of God to return to their homeland to rebuild the Temple and the city walls of Jerusalem.

So as the Old Testament closes, the people of God are not free, but they have hope! The Old Testament prophets spoke of one who would come…a Messiah who would rescue his people.

* *(Micah 5:2)* Micah declared that this Messiah would come from Bethlehem.
* *(add – 2 Samuel 7:16)* Nathan said he would come from the line of David and rule forever.
* *(add – Isaiah 7:14)* Isaiah prophesied that he would be born of a virgin.

And Malachi, the last prophet who wrote the last book in the Old Testament, declares:

**“…the Lord you are seeking will come…” –Malachi 3:1**

But then… *(pause)* nothing. As the Old Testament closes, it seems God goes dark for a really long time.

Speaking of a long time… *(Return and address kid)* How are you doing over here? Do you like waiting? Waiting can be really hard. I know I’ve made you wait to open that present, but do you know how long the people of God had to wait for the promised Messiah? 400 years!

400 years is a long time!

* The United States wasn’t even a country yet 400 years ago!
* Your great, great, great, great, great grandma and grandpa hadn’t even been born yet 400 years ago!
* Nobody had (Name of show) TV or video games 400 years ago!

400 years is a long time! But so is the amount I’ve time I’ve made you wait. So are you ready to open your present? Go ahead. *(Let kid open gift. Thank kid for helping and have him/her exit stage.)*

**Waiting**

No one likes waiting! I don’t like waiting for people to answer my text messages or for the brownies to come out of the oven or for the next Star Wars movie to come out.

No one likes waiting, and some of us have been waiting for a very long time…not just for something trivial…but for something serious.

Do you know what it is like to be waiting on God and it seems he’s gone dark? Most of us have experience that at one time or another.

* Maybe you’ve been **out of work or underemployed** for a long time. You feel the stress of the rising bills. And it feels like God isn’t showing up.
* Maybe you’ve watched as a loved one has spiraled downward into a **destructive addiction**. You’ve done all you can think to do. You’ve cried out to God, but it feels like God isn’t showing up.
* Maybe you’ve been suffering from some **physical or emotional ailment** for a long time now. You are tired. You long for relief. But it feels like God isn’t showing up.

Waiting is really hard. And the people of God had waited a long time. 400 years! During this time they went from being subjects of Persia to being trampled by the Greeks to eventually being oppressed by the Roman Empire. 400 years of waiting. But just when it seemed all hope was lost, we turn the page to the New Testament, and wonder breaks through!

**The Birth of Jesus**

**In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.**

**So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. –Luke 2:1-7**

After all that waiting, wonder breaks through. Jesus, the Son of God, comes in the flesh to rescue his people.

*(Highlight “So Joseph went up…to Bethlehem”)* Micah had said that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem, and a Roman census, an inconvenient responsibility of everyday life, brings Joseph and Mary there.

*(Highlight “the town of David…line of David.”)* Nathan had claimed that the Messiah would come from the line of David. Joseph had to return to the town of David, because he was from the family of David.

*(Highlight “He went there…expecting a child.”)* Isaiah had prophesied that the Messiah would be born of a virgin. The fact that Mary traveled with Joseph indicates that they were actually already married. He had taken her home as his wife. The description “pledged to be married” is meant to inform us, the readers, that the marriage has not yet been consummated. “Pledged to be married” is Luke’s way of keeping the passage “G” rated so that one day *(picture)* Linus would be able to read it in the school play. ☺

*(Luke 2:1-7)* Just stop and think with me for a moment about the craziness of this scene! The Messiah, the promised Redeemer, born in a stable, among the animals, wrapped in strips of cloth, and placed in a manger. It’s the absurdity of God being born into obscurity.

Author and theologian Frederick Buechner writes:

**“The incarnation is a kind of vast joke whereby the Creator of the ends of the earth comes among us in diapers… Until we too have taken the idea of the God-man seriously enough to be scandalized by it, we have not taken it as seriously as it demands to be taken.” -Frederick Buechner, Faces of Jesus**

After all that wait, a wonder unlike any the world had ever known breaks through…and he was worth the wait. Many people didn’t even know or recognize what had just happened. But for those who did…

**“…all who heard it were amazed…” –Luke 2:18**

**The Wonder of Jesus**

But the wonder of Jesus’ birth was just the beginning. As Jesus grew into a man and started his public ministry, everything about him was amazing.

Jesus encountered so many people who had been stuck in the darkness of a long wait.

* There was a **man who had been born blind**. Jesus spit in the dirt, made some mud with his saliva, spread it on the man’s eyes, and when he washed the mud away he could see.
* There was a **woman who had been subject to bleeding** for twelve long years. She touched the hem of Jesus’ robe and knew she had been instantly healed.
* There was a man who for a long time had lived not in a house but in a cave outside a village because the **demons that had tortured him** made him a danger to others. With one word, Jesus freed the man and he could not stop telling others of what Jesus had done.

Matthew writes:

**“Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.” -Matthew 15:30-31**

Jesus broke into the darkness of the world bringing healing, wholeness, and hope. His miracles drew people to him. Everything about him was unique and different. Everywhere he went, he brought wonder.

**Wonder Today**

*(Hold Bible)* Yet the stories we read about him in this book are not meant to just be stories of the past. They challenge us, you and me, to ask ourselves today:

**Do we believe Jesus still wants to break into our world with wonder?**

 Some of us feel stuck in the waiting. It’s felt like 400 years. Maybe you find yourself wondering…

* Could Jesus really break into my stalled career?
* Could Jesus really break into my financial mess?
* Could Jesus really break into my broken marriage?
* Could Jesus really break into my loneliness?
* Could Jesus really break into my child’s rebellion?
* Could Jesus really break into my sickness and pain?

I want to share with you a story of wonder this morning that comes from our Downers Grove location. Sometimes the wait is very long, but may this story remind us, that Jesus can still break through.

**Video: DGR Healing Story**

*(Question from above)* Even in our darkest times, our longest waits, Jesus wants to break through with wonder. I love that the story is a story of healing, but I also love what happened before the healing when she said, “For the first time in a long time, I feel hope.” Keep pursuing wonder.

Sometimes the wonder Jesus brings in our broken, messed up world is not something we can see with our eyes, but something we experience in our souls.

* Peace in the midst of chaos.
* Hope in the midst of tragedy.
* Joy in the midst of pain.

Even in our darkest times, our longest waits, Jesus wants to break through with wonder.

**Response Time and Communion**

So let me ask you today…

* Where do you need a breakthrough?
* Where are you waiting on God?

Maybe you are in need of healing.

Maybe you are in need of hope.

Maybe you need a breakthrough in a relationship.

Maybe you need to finally forgive.

Maybe you need a miracle in your home.

Maybe you need a miracle in your heart.

We want to create some extended space this morning to invite Jesus to break into our world with wonder. I’m going to invite our Prayer Team to take up positions all around the room. And in just a moment, if you are in need of a breakthrough, would you take a step of faith today, approach someone on our Prayer Team, and let them pray for you?

It might take some courage to come, but I promise you, it won’t be scary. They’ll ask you to share briefly about what you’re facing, if you’re OK with it, they’ll likely place a hand on your shoulder or hold your hand, and then they’ll simply pray asking Jesus to break into your situation with wonder.

During this time, we’re also going to receive Communion…the bread that represents Jesus’ body broken for us and the cup that represents his blood shed for us.

Thousands of years before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah foretold:

**“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” -Isaiah 53:5**

Notice Isaiah says, *“…by his wounds we are healed.”* What does that mean? It’s a reminder that when Jesus suffered and died on the cross he made a sacrifice that would provide spiritual healing for every one of us. We would receive grace. We would receive belonging. We would receive hope.

During Jesus life on earth he healed physical bodies; in his dying, he provided spiritual healing. The wonder of Jesus breaking through.

So in just a moment, I’m going to pray and then the ushers are going to come and pass the trays with the bread and the juice. Let’s open our hearts to receive the wonder of Jesus in this moment.

*(Question from above)* And, we invite you during this time to come for prayer. As a community, let’s come together in these next moments, believing that the God of all wonders wants to break into our world with wonder today! Let’s invite Jesus to come.

*Pray. Instrumental music during the prayer time.*