**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 7 years old) to be a volunteer for each service. Have a wrapped present for each service with a gift inside (i.e. small toy, 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 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 about this 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, and 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. If you haven’t yet jumped in, sign up on the COMMUNITY app or on our website. And now would be a great time to join us because today we’re turning the page from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

*(Talk to kid)*  You doing OK over there? I just need you to wait a little longer.

Before we turn the page to the New Testament, 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.
* The Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple of God, and carried the people of God off to live in exile.
* 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 400 years ago!
* Your great, great, great, great, great grandma and grandpa hadn’t even been born yet 400 years ago!
* Nobody had 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? *(pause)* Most of us have experienced 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 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.

However, 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”)* Remember, 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. Now, 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 spits in the dirt, makes some mud with his saliva, spreads it on the man’s eyes, and when the man washes the mud away he can see.
* There was a **woman who had been subject to bleeding** for twelve long years. She touches the hem of Jesus’ robe and knows 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 frees the man and he can 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:

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

*(Go slow)* 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 from right here at our Plainfield location that reminds us that Jesus still breaks through. It’s a story Jason Ishmael, our StuCo Director, shared with me about a couple students. I’m going to change their names, but the students gave their permission for me to share the story with all of you. Here it is in Jason’s words. *(Feel free to substitute one from your location.)*

A few Wednesdays ago, as I was preparing for StuCo that night, I felt God prompting me to ask the students a question: “What has God been doing in your life?” I thought maybe I’d ask them as a group, but about an hour before StuCo started, I saw Rebekah in the lobby and felt led to pose the question to her.

Rebekah has been actively involved in StuCo this school year, but I was not aware of what she’d gone through this past year of her life. She shared how last summer she had struggled in a place of darkness and depression. Her despair had grown so deep that eventually she saw no way out and made an attempt to take her own life. That attempt brought her struggles out into the light, and God began to break through. She got the help she needed, she reengaged with StuCo, and God began to replace the lies with truth, loneliness with love, and despair with hope. The wonder of Jesus breaking through!

As I listened to Rebekah’s story, I sensed that God wanted her to share her story with the other students that very night. She graciously agreed, and about an hour later, Rebekah stood before her peers and shared her story of the hope she had found.

And her story opened the door for God to break through to Michael. Michael was there that night. And as he listened to Rebekah’s words, no one knew the struggle that was going on in Michael’s life. To be honest, I saw him on his phone at one point and thought he wasn’t paying attention so I texted him, “Hey dude, these words are for you.” Although somehow instead of my text going to Michael; it went to his mom.

Later that night, Michael shared with his small group that he had been contemplating hanging himself. His small group was there to come alongside him, and, of course, I had inadvertently looped his parents into the conversation. That night Michael began to realize he was not along and he got the help he needed. The wonder of Jesus broke through that night, and now Michael, too, is on the road to healing.

*(Question from above)* Even in our darkest times, our longest waits, Jesus wants to break through with 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 can break through.

**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. Here’s what we’re going to do…

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.

Maybe you are sitting there today and you know the person next to you needs a breakthrough. Ask them during this time if you can pray for them. Or perhaps someone comes to your mind who is not here, take this time to pray for that person.

And as we come to Jesus, asking him to break through, we’re also going to remember Jesus, and how he has already broken through. During this time, I invite you 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 death and resurrection, 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 *(or have Communion stations)*. Let’s open our hearts to receive the wonder of Jesus in this moment.

*(Question from above)* Again, we invite you during this time to come for prayer, to pray for someone near you, to pray for someone you know. 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.*