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<Slide 2> Scott A. Wood 12-6-2020

<Slide 3> SERIES: LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

<Slide 4> PART 1: HOW WILL YOU RESPOND TO CHRISTMAS?

Christmas in 2020 will be one of the most different CHRISTMASSES any of us will ever have. This year has been marked by the virus and one of the most conflictual and bizarre election cycles we have ever experienced. We've been told to shelter at home for almost 10 months. The majority of our culture has been told to shut down. This has been one of the darkness times in our lives as a country.

<Slide 5 Resting>

One of the leading themes in the Bible concerning Christmas and Jesus is that Jesus is the light. He came so that He could shed light on our lives and on our sinful condition. Jesus is the greatest gift that has ever been given to the human race. The human race, however, has responded in different ways to the gift of God's grace, love, and forgiveness.

I am focusing more relationships this year than ever before. Gifts don't hold a strong attraction to me, but spending time with my family, and you my CVCHURCH family, have been most important to me. Most of all, I'm learning to spend more time with Jesus. The truth is that, as we are willing to spend time with each other and allow the light of Jesus to shine through each one of us, it can make this Christmas season the best yet.

This morning we're going to look at 6 different responses that were given to the most incredible gift God has ever given to the human race: Our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Let's begin by <Slide 6> looking at Mary's response.

I. MARY GIVES A HUMBLE AND SURRENDERED RESPONSE.

Luke 1:26-38 <Slide 7> **"IN THE SIXTH MONTH OF ELIZABETH'S PREGNANCY, GOD SENT THE ANGEL GABRIEL TO NAZARETH, A VILLAGE IN <Slide 8> GALILEE, TO A VIRGIN NAMED MARY. SHE WAS ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED TO A MAN NAMED JOSEPH, A DESCENDANT OF KING <Slide 9> DAVID. GABRIEL APPEARED TO HER AND SAID, "GREETINGS, FAVORED WOMAN! THE LORD IS WITH YOU!"**

<Slide 10> **CONFUSED AND DISTURBED, MARY TRIED TO THINK WHAT THE ANGEL COULD MEAN. DON'T BE FRIGHTENED, MARY,"**

<Slide 11> **THE ANGEL TOLD HER, "FOR GOD HAS DECIDED TO BLESS YOU! YOU WILL BECOME PREGNANT AND HAVE A SON, <Slide 12> AND YOU ARE TO NAME HIM JESUS. HE WILL BE VERY GREAT AND WILL BE CALLED THE SON OF THE MOST HIGH.**

**<Slide 13> AND THE LORD GOD WILL GIVE HIM THE THRONE OF HIS ANCESTOR DAVID. AND HE WILL REIGN OVER ISRAEL FOREVER;
<Slide 14> HIS KINGDOM WILL NEVER END!”**

MARY ASKED THE ANGEL, “BUT HOW CAN I HAVE A BABY?

<Slide 15> I AM A VIRGIN.” THE ANGEL REPLIED, “THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL COME UPON YOU, AND THE POWER OF THE MOST HIGH

<Slide 16> WILL OVERSHADOW YOU. SO THE BABY BORN TO YOU WILL BE HOLY, AND HE WILL BE CALLED THE SON OF GOD.

<Slide 17> WHAT’S MORE, YOUR RELATIVE ELIZABETH HAS BECOME PREGNANT IN HER OLD AGE! PEOPLE USED TO SAY SHE WAS BARREN, BUT <Slide 18> SHE’S ALREADY IN HER SIXTH MONTH. FOR NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE WITH GOD.”

<Slide 19> MARY RESPONDED, “I AM THE LORD’S SERVANT, AND I AM WILLING TO ACCEPT WHATEVER HE WANTS. MAY EVERYTHING YOU HAVE SAID COME TRUE.” AND THEN THE ANGEL LEFT.”

First of all, Mary represents the person who God unexpectedly chooses to use. She has no outstanding credentials to bring to the task. She lives in obscurity. Mary brings nothing on her resume’ other than her availability and her willingness to serve God in any way He chooses. Mary finds herself in an awkward and potentially dangerous situation: Pregnant with no husband. In choosing Mary for this most important task, God is demonstrating that these are the characteristics **<Slide 20 Resting>** that He is looking for in people he can use. Availability and a willing humble and surrendered heart to His plan. So, God uses Mary, taking her through a process for which she has no training or preparation. He simply promises through the angel that He has chosen to honor and bless her and that He will be with her all the way.

The entire nature of Jesus birth is truly profound. The humble setting into which Jesus was born, not only reveals the nature of God’s plan, but also reveals the character of God’s heart. He loves and chooses those who have a humble and surrendered heart. It is His pleasure to bless, honor, and exalt those who are humble.

In our culture today, we just don’t get the idea of humility. We want to be seen, honored, and loved. We want to be made over and to be the center of attention. We have a craving to have to be number one! We’re told that we have that right. Yet, the Bible teaches that the greatest in God’s economy, and in his family, is the person who is willing to be last. The person willing to be looked over; trusts that Father God knows what is best for that person, and that He will make sure that their needs are met. Mary personifies the idea of a person being willing to humble themselves before God. To, obediently, live out His plans for their lives.

<Slide 21> James 4:6-8 and 10 says **“GOD SETS HIMSELF AGAINST THE PROUD, BUT HE SHOWS FAVOR TO THE HUMBLE.” SO, HUMBLE YOURSELVES BEFORE GOD. <Slide 22> RESIST THE DEVIL, AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU. DRAW CLOSE TO GOD, AND GOD WILL DRAW CLOSE TO YOU. <Slide 23> WHEN YOU BOW DOWN BEFORE THE LORD AND ADMIT YOUR DEPENDENCE ON HIM, HE WILL LIFT YOU UP AND GIVE YOU HONOR.”**

<Slide 24> 1 Peter 5:5-6 **“AND ALL OF YOU, SERVE EACH OTHER IN HUMILITY, FOR “GOD SETS HIMSELF AGAINST THE PROUD, BUT HE SHOW FAVOR TO THE HUMBLE. <Slide 25> SO HUMBLE YOURSELVES UNDER THE MIGHTY POWER OF GOD, AND IN HIS GOOD TIME HE WILL HONOR YOU.”**

In using Mary, God shows His greatness. He can work through anyone on the street who is willing to serve Him. Mary’s response is what God is looking for **<Slide 26 Resting>** from you and me this Christmas. After the angel had told her the incredible plan God had for her, here is how she responds:

<Slide 27> “MARY RESPONDED, “I AM THE LORD’S SERVANT, AND I AM WILLING TO ACCEPT WHATEVER HE WANTS. MAY EVERYTHING YOU HAVE SAID COME TRUE.”

Mary demonstrates that true greatness has nothing to do with social class, monetary clout, or degreed background. True greatness is a function of a willing and surrendered heart. What God is looking for, this Christmas, from you and me **<Slide 28 Resting>** stands in stark contrast to the kind of credentials our culture looks for and honors. External appearances count for little to nothing, but our attitude and character are EVERYTHING to Him.

The word ‘virgin’ is used twice to describe Mary: Once in vs. 27 and then in vs 34. When Mary asked the question of the angel, **<Slide 29> “BUT HOW CAN I HAVE A BABY? I’M A VIRGIN,”** she wasn’t doubting God’s power or promise she was simply stating the fact that she was not sexually intimate with Joseph **<Slide 30 Resting>** yet. She had no way of knowing if she couldn’t have children. Remember this about Mary: there had never been an account, in the O.T., of a virgin birth, AND, there never would be a virgin birth again, after hers.

Darrel Bock in his commentary on the book of Luke states, **<Slide 31> “The text’s description of her as a virgin reveals that she had grown up with a sense of personal responsibility and integrity.** Loved ones, this is what God is looking for in us.

<Slide 32 Resting>

Mary’s response is what God is looking for from you, me, and all of us, as a church family, as we head into 2021. He is looking for each one of us to say, concerning Jesus Christ and His plan for our lives: **<Slide 33> “Use me as You will. I will not refrain from serving because I do not feel qualified or usable.**

I trust You to direct guide and empower me for Your service.” How are you, presently, responding to the gift Jesus wants and desires to give to you this Christmas season Spiritually, emotionally, relationally, financially, vocationally, intellectually and physically?

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II. ZECHARIAH GIVES A DISBELIEVING RESPONSE

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LUKE 1:11-20 “ZECHARIAH WAS IN THE SANCTUARY WHEN AN ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED, STANDING TO THE RIGHT OF THE INCENSE ALTAR. <Slide 36>ZECHARIAH WAS OVERWHELMED WITH FEAR. BUT THE ANGEL SAID, DON’T BE AFRAID, ZECHARIAH! FOR GOD HAS HEARD YOUR PRAYER, AND YOUR WIFE, ELIZABETH, WILL BEAR YOU A SON!

<Slide 37>AND YOU ARE TO NAME HIM JOHN. YOU WILL HAVE GREAT JOY AND GLADNESS, AND MANY WILL REJOICE WITH YOU AT HIS BIRTH, FOR HE WILL BE GREAT IN THE EYES OF THE LORD.

<Slide 38> HE MUST NEVER TOUCH WINE OR HARD LIQUOR, AND HE WILL BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT, EVEN BEFORE HIS BIRTH. AND HE WILL PERSUADE MANY ISRAELITES TO TURN TO THE LORD THEIR GOD. <Slide 39>HE WILL BE A MAN WITH THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ELIJAH, THE PROPHET OF OLD. HE WILL PRECEDE THE COMING OF THE LORD, PREPARING THE PEOPLE FOR HIS ARRIVAL. <Slide 40> HE WILL TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS TO THEIR CHILDREN, AND HE WILL CHANGE DISOBEDIENT MINDS TO ACCEPT GODLY WISDOM.

<Slide 41> ZECHARIAH SAID TO THE ANGEL, “HOW CAN I KNOW THIS WILL HAPPEN? I’M AN OLD MAN NOW, AND MY WIFE IS ALSO WELL ALONG IN YEARS.” <Slide 42> THEN THE ANGEL SAID, “I AM GABRIEL! I STAND IN THE VERY PRESENCE OF GOD. IT WAS HE WHO SENT ME TO BRING YOU THIS GOOD NEWS! <Slide 43> AND NOW, SINCE YOU DIDN’T BELIEVE WHAT I SAID, YOU WON’T BE ABLE TO SPEAK UNTIL THE CHILD IS BORN. FOR MY WORDS WILL CERTAINLY COME TRUE AT THE PROPER TIME.”

In contrast to Mary, Zechariah was a priest. He served at the temple for two, one-week, periods each year. He was a member of one of twenty-four divisions in the first-century priesthood. He was one of approximately 18,000 priests. A priest only officiated at the sacrifice once in his life, being selected by lot. His wife, Elizabeth, was from the priestly line of Aaron. You might say they were a part of the elite, or the aristocracy.

<Slide 44 Resting> Not only did Zechariah and Elizabeth have the right heritage, but they were also righteous in God’s eyes. They obeyed all of the Lord’s commandments. They were seen as spiritually devout and mature. Being ‘righteous’ meant that they conformed, morally, to God’s standards and ways,

and that they were blameless in all of their conduct. They were faithful saints who were approved by God.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were a pious and devout couple who suffered greatly from the embarrassment of not having a child. Remember that, in their culture, to have a male child was a sign of being blessed and accepted by God. Elizabeth refers to her condition when she realizes that she's pregnant in vs. 25:

<Slide 45> "HOW KIND THE LORD IS!" SHE EXCLAIMED. HE HAS TAKEN AWAY MY DISGRACE OF HAVING NO CHILDREN."

Gabriel comes to Zechariah and tells him that his prayers have been answered and that Elizabeth will bear a son. **Zechariah gives a disbelieving response.** This is extremely important, loved ones, because Luke tells us that Zechariah was a very devout, righteous, faithful believer. He regularly obeyed God's commandments and regulations. Being a priest, he knew the O.T. very well. It contained accounts of women like Sarah and Hannah, who were past the age of giving birth, yet God gave them both children in their old age. There was precedent for Zechariah to believe! He knew the O.T. stories!

<Slide 46 Resting>

STILL, Zechariah gives a disbelieving response. Here, he is in God's temple performing priestly duties and a leading angel from God comes and gives him a promise. Zechariah asks for a sign. In this case, it shows that he doubts the truth of the message given to him!

Zechariah is disciplined for his unbelief. He does get a sign. Gabriel responds to his unbelief by telling him that he stands in the very presence of God and it was God, Himself, Who commissioned this angel to bring him this good news. Because Zechariah refused to believe Gabriel, he receives a DIFFERENT kind of sign to remind him of his lack of faith: Gabriel says to him that he, Zechariah, will remain silent and unable to speak until his son, John the Baptist, is born. Eduard Schweizer has a powerful comment on the discipline that Zechariah experienced. **<Slide 47> "A salvation that does not reveal, and thereby change, what stands in its way, would not be real salvation.**

<Slide 48> That God opened someone's eyes to that which is distorted in such a way that the person is re-formed, not simply shattered, is a demonstration of the living God."

In other words, through the temporary discipline, Zechariah, and all of us, learn something about trusting God's Message.

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Is there a place in your own heart that you have been disbelieving what God promises you in His word? Could you be experiencing God's gentle, but firm and loving, discipline in your life right now?

In vss. 59-64 we find that, when it comes time for the naming of the baby, the Bible says their friends and relatives wanted to name the baby Zechariah, after

his father, but Elizabeth said they would name him John. Their friends and family couldn't believe it. They said you don't have anyone in all of your family by that name. Then they appealed to Zechariah. Guess what loved ones: He had been mute for over 9 months, probably closer to a year. He motioned for a writing tablet and when he wrote the name John, which was his act of faith and obedience because the angel told him to name him John, he was released to speak again and he began praising God!!

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III. JOSEPH GIVES AN OBEDIENT RESPONSE

<Slide 51> Matthew 1:18-25 “Now this is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. <Slide 52> But while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancée, being a just man, <Slide 53> decided to break the engagement quietly, so as not to disgrace her publicly. As he considered this, he fell asleep, <Slide 54> and an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “Do not be afraid <Slide 55> to go ahead with your marriage to Mary. For the child within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. <Slide 56> And she will have a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” <Slide 57> All of this happened to fulfill the Lord’s Message through His prophet: Look! The virgin will conceive a child! <Slide 58> She will give birth to a son, and He will be called Immanuel (meaning, God is with us). <Slide 59> When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord commanded. He brought Mary home to be his wife, but she remained a virgin until her son was born. And Joseph named Him Jesus.”

Joseph is an incredible example of what it means to obey what God tells you to do. Joseph stood to lose a lot in his community by marrying a woman who got pregnant out of wedlock. His reputation and standing in the community would be incredibly tarnished. He was also torn because, before the angel came to him, the Bible says, he had planned to break off the engagement, but to do it quietly, so that he would not disgrace Mary. Even though he thought Mary had disgraced him, he was still wanting to act lovingly toward her.

<Slide 60 Resting>

As you read the rest of the story, because of Joseph’s obedience, the angel of the Lord continues to come to Him and tells him what to do. Joseph’s obedience made it possible for Jesus to be born, to be kept safe, so that He could fulfill His purpose for coming: That was, to die for us and to save us from our sins.

What is it that God is asking you to be obedient about this morning (afternoon)? Is it about establishing a daily prayer time? Establishing a daily Bible reading routine? Is it about a relationship you know you need to get right? Is it the following through on a prompting and leading that He has been giving you? Obedience is a response that Father God wants you and me to give to Him, this Christmas season, in response to the incredible gift of His Son Jesus Christ.

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IV. KING HEROD GIVES AN ANGRY AND MURDEROUS RESPONSE

<Slide 62> Matthew 2:13-18 “AFTER THE WISE MEN WERE GONE, AN ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED TO JOSEPH IN A DREAM.

<Slide 63> “GET UP AND FLEE TO EGYPT WITH THE CHILD AND HIS MOTHER,” THE ANGEL SAID. “STAY THERE UNTIL I TELL YOU TO RETURN, <Slide 64> BECAUSE HEROD IS GOING TO TRY TO KILL THE CHILD. THAT NIGHT JOSEPH LEFT FOR EGYPT WITH THE CHILD AND MARY, <Slide 65> HIS MOTHER, AND THEY STAYED THERE UNTIL HEROD’S DEATH. THIS FULFILLED WHAT THE LORD HAD SPOKEN THROUGH THE PROPHET: <Slide 66> “I CALLED MY SON OUT OF EGYPT.” HEROD WAS FURIOUS WHEN HE LEARNED THAT THE WISE MEN HAD OUTWITTED HIM. <Slide 67> HE SENT SOLDIERS TO KILL ALL THE BOYS IN AND AROUND BETHLEHEM WHO WERE TWO YEARS OLD AND UNDER, <Slide 68> BECAUSE THE WISE MEN HAD TOLD HIM THE STAR FIRST APPEARED TO THEM ABOUT TWO YEARS EARLIER. <Slide 69> HEROD’S BRUTAL ACTION FULFILLED THE PROPHECY OF JEREMIAH: A CRY OF ANGUISH IS HEARD IN RAMAH- WEEPING AND MOURNING UNRESTRAINED. <Slide 70> RACHEL WEEPS FOR HER CHILDREN, REFUSING TO BE COMFORTED-FOR THEY ARE DEAD.”

I am so heartbroken about the reports telling us that more Christians are being martyred for their faith today than in any other time in our history. Loved ones, our own culture right here in America is becoming more hostile, every day, toward Jesus Christ, Christianity, and the church. When Robert Francis O’Rourke was running for President, he said any Christian organization that spoke against abortion, or refused to pay for their employees abortions, would have their tax exempt status revoked. If Biden becomes president, he is putting O’Rourke in his administration.

<Slide 71 Resting>

Herod is a type of the anti-Christ. He felt threatened by the Scriptural prophecies in the O.T. to Jesus as the King of the Jews. Because the angel of the Lord warned the wise men not to return to Herod, Herod became so angry and that he ordered all of the Hebrew boys aged two and under be killed.

There are those in our culture who are responding, in the same way, to Jesus Christ. They hate Him and they hate His people; His church. Loved ones, as we proceed into 2021, we will need to be a people who are responding to Jesus in a humble, surrendered, and obedient manner.

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V. SIMEON GIVES A PROPHETIC RESPONSE

Luke describes Simeon as a righteous and devout man, filled with the Holy Spirit. He eagerly awaited and expected the Messiah’s arrival to rescue Israel. Notice

how much the Holy Spirit led him. It was the Holy Spirit Who revealed to Him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. It was the Holy Spirit Who led him to the temple that day so that, when Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple to present him to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there.

Simeon was filled with the Holy Spirit! He blessed Joseph and Mary and then he began to prophesy what would happen to Jesus and the kind of impact He would have on people.

<Slide 73> Luke 2:34-35 **"THEN SIMEON BLESSED THEM, AND HE SAID TO MARY, "THIS CHILD WILL BE REJECTED BY MANY IN ISRAEL, <Slide 74> AND IT WILL BE THEIR UNDOING. BUT HE WILL BE THE GREATEST JOY TO MANY OTHERS. <Slide 75> AS A RESULT, THE DEEPEST THOUGHTS OF MANY HEARTS WILL BE REVEALED. AND A SWORD WILL PIERCE YOUR VERY SOUL."**

Loved ones, more than ever, the church must be the community of Jesus Christ! We must be filled with the Holy Spirit through our prayers, in our worship, and in **<Slide 76 Resting>** our living together! We need to be the prophetic community that hears what the Lord is saying to us and then we must boldly pray and speak it out!!

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VI. ANNA GIVES A PRAISE-FILLED RESPONSE

<Slide 78> LUKE 2:36-40 **"ANNA, A PROPHET, WAS ALSO THERE IN THE TEMPLE. SHE WAS THE DAUGHTER OF PHANUEL, OF THE TRIBE OF ASHER, <Slide 79> AND WAS VERY OLD. SHE WAS A WIDOW, FOR HER HUSBAND HAD DIED WHEN THEY HAD BEEN MARRIED ONLY SEVEN YEARS. <Slide 80> SHE WAS NOW EIGHTY-FOUR YEARS OLD. SHE NEVER LEFT THE TEMPLE BUT STAYED THERE DAY AND NIGHT, <Slide 81> WORSHIPING GOD WITH FASTING AND PRAYER. SHE CAME ALONG JUST AS SIMEON WAS TALKING WITH MARY AND JOSEPH, <Slide 82> AND SHE BEGAN PRAISING GOD. SHE TALKED ABOUT JESUS TO EVERYONE WHO HAD BEEN WAITING FOR THE PROMISED KING TO COME AND DELIVER JERUSALEM. <Slide 83> WHEN JESUS' PARENTS HAD FULFILLED ALL THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE LAW OF THE LORD, THEY RETURNED HOME TO NAZARETH IN GALILEE. <Slide 84> THERE THE CHILD GREW UP HEALTHY AND STRONG. HE WAS FILLED WITH WISDOM BEYOND HIS YEARS, AND GOD PLACED HIS SPECIAL FAVOR UPON HIM."**

Anna chose a lifetime of service to God over remarriage. The name 'Anna' like the name 'Hannah' means 'grace'. Luke tell us that Hannah was prophetess. In Acts 2:17-18, Peter quotes the prophet Joel, about the 'last days' when sons and daughters would prophecy. In Acts 21:9, Luke mentions the daughters of Philip as prophetesses. Paul, also, identifies prophetesses in 1 Cor 11:3-6. In Jewish

<Slide 85 Resting> tradition, seven women were mentioned as prophetesses: Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, Huldah, and Esther. Also, Noadiah in Nehemiah 6:14 and Isaiah's wife in Isaiah 8:3 are portrayed as prophetesses. Anna actively embodies a person totally focused on praising God. Hannah had been married for only 7 years when her husband died. Most scholars say she was a widow for over 60 years. Hannah's daily activities reflect her piety; her fear of God, her humility, her submission, her devotion. This is demonstrated through her daily prayer life and fasting. Hannah chose a lifetime of service to God over remarriage, which, according to Bovon, was an action that was highly regarded in the first-century religious community. Her spiritual sacrifices describe her labor as religious service, often used in the OT to describe priestly activity. Her lifestyle is a picture of a person totally focused on serving God. Her praise to God, in vs. 38, was given as a response to God's act, through Christ, to rescue Jerusalem. The focus of her praise and revelatory action was her prophetic word about God's redemption. This kind of service, praise, and prophecy comes only through Jesus Christ.

How will you respond to the Jesus of Christmas during this most unusual year of 2020? This has been a year filled with pain, death, crisis, loss of jobs, relationships, hopes and dreams. How will you respond to the gift of God's salvation, forgiveness, freedom, reconciliation and eternal life? Will you give a humble and surrendered response? Or will you give a disbelieving response? Will you be like Joseph and give an obedient response to Jesus? Or will you give the kind of response that many are giving right now in our culture like the response King Herod gave: A angry and murderous response? Will you choose to be filled with the Holy Spirit of God and give a prophetic response like Simeon and a prophetic praise-filled response like Anna? Let's pray.

Communion: Luke 22:14-20

¹⁴ When the time came, Jesus and the apostles sat down together at the table.

¹⁵ Jesus said, "I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before

My suffering begins. ¹⁶ For I tell you now that I won't eat this meal again until its

meaning is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God."¹⁷ Then He took a cup of wine and

gave thanks to God for it. Then He said, "Take this and share it among

yourselves. ¹⁸ For I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has

come."¹⁹ He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then He broke it in

pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "This is My body, which is given for

you. Do this to remember Me."²⁰ After supper He took another cup of wine and

said, "This cup is the new covenant between God and His people—an agreement confirmed with My blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.