Chapter 21 of THE STORY

10:30 a.m.

"Rebuilding the Walls"

We're glad you're here. If you've not been here before, relax. We aren't going to ask you to stand up and introduce yourself or anything like that. If you're new to First, we do have print materials on the table at the back of the main level of the worship center... or just ask someone.

If children are with you, that's wonderful. Jesus loves children and so do we. You might sit near the front so the children can see and hear everything. There are children's activity bags on the coat tree at the back of the sanctuary; and children's bulletins on the table. We do offer a staffed nursery for pre-school children during worship if you'd prefer to use it for part or all of the service. The easiest way to get there is go have an usher provide an escort.

In each program is a half-sheet insert. Please fill it out and use it for an "offering" at that time of the service.

Beverage and light refreshments are offered in the dining room, in the lower level, at the conclusion of worship. Everyone is welcome!!

PRELUDE "God of Wonder" Christian Chaos

Lighting of the Candles Ringing of the Bell

PRAISE & PRAYER "Just a Little Talk with Jesus" [No. 3107]

JOYS AND CONCERNS... and the Power of Persistent Intercession!

Call to Prayer "Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying" No. 2193

Prayers of the People The Lord's Prayer

* A JESUS STORY Mark 1:1-9

L: This is the Word of our Lord. Response: Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN'S LESSON

Deanna Licht

(Pocket change collected in the copper kettles this week goes toward the One Great Hour of Sharing special offering.)

ACT OF PRAISE Choir Kids

HEBREW BIBLE READING Nehemiah 1:1-9

* SING "Thy Word Is a Lamp" No. 601

MESSAGE "The Book of the Law" Pastor Paul

"The Gideons: Making the Bible Available" Jim Broffitt

GIVING TITHES and OFFERINGS
THE OFFERTORY

Choir Kids

(The ushers will bring the offering forward during the prayer.)

* A PRAYER (unison)

Ever-loving, ever-giving God, as we bring our gifts to your altar, we confess our need for repentance. We have given in to the temptation to see the world and its resources as ours to use as we please. We have lived too often as if we were the center of the universe. Help us move through this season with repentant hearts so we might see not just your great blessings, but also ways to be a blessing to others. Amen

* SENDING FORTH

L: May God's grace, mercy and strength be with you.

ALL: And may I be an instrument of God's grace, mercy & strength to the world in which I live. Amen.

* MARCHING SONG

"Wade in the Water"

No. 2107

ANNOUNCEMENTS: How We'll Each Put Hands & Feet To The Gospel This Week Always use a microphone so everyone may be included. Thank you.

POSTLUDE "I Refuse" Christian Chaos

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Preparation for the coming week:

Chapter 22

You may be thinking, "FINALLY! We get to the New Testament!" Yes, we'll begin to celebrate Christmas all over again. There was a small boy playing the part of the innkeeper in the annual church Christmas pageant. In the heat of the moment, he forgot his lines, so he said to Mary and Joseph what God wants us to say, "Come on in; I've been expecting you." God could use even Caesar, in ordering the census to be taken, to bring about the fulfilment of the Upper Story.

I find it interesting that humanity has such 'rules' about how things should happen. Then if/when life doesn't happen the way we think it is supposed to, it's not uncommon that there's hushed chatter [shall we call it gossip?!] begins. You know, "They've only been married six months." Or, "She shouldn't be doing that in her condition." But God's not working according to our timeline, expectations nor standards.

Some Christmases stay forever in our hearts and memories because they were so beautiful, so perfect. But other Christmases are etched in stone because they were so IMperfect. Maybe there was a flood; or the turkey burned; it snowed two feet and the relatives became surly captives for an extra two days.

But maybe it's those Christmases where everything seems to go wrong that we find the most authentic of our Christmas experiences, where we discover the Christ child in our midst. I mean, that first Christmas would never make it into anyone's family photo album of 'perfect' holiday moments. Maybe, just maybe, God does in fact understand our own lives more than we do!