

**God is Expectant©**

**Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:39-45**

**Nov. 30, 2014**

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**First Sunday of Advent**

Today we are transitioning. This is the first Sunday of Advent, but in some ways, we aren't maybe quite ready. I mean, we just celebrated Thanksgiving and I know last week you sang Thanksgiving Hymns. Last Sunday was also Christ the King Sunday on our Christian calendar.

With the arrival of Advent, we say hello to the new Christian Year. Happy New Year everybody!

Christ the King Sunday – on the Christian calendar – was also last Sunday. It is a time to summarize all that was learned throughout the past year and to proclaim once again that Jesus is Lord; he is the Christ; he is the King over all!

So, while we are turning our focus onto Advent, I think it is important to close the year, and open a new year, with thoughts of Christ being King.

It is actually very appropriate for us to think about, to reflect on, as we begin the Advent Season. Believing that Christ Jesus is the King over all, the one who rules our hearts, and ultimately will rule the world, is why we would spend this time during Advent hoping for, longing for, and believing in his return.

Advent means “coming.” But, it also means “arrival.” So we prepare our hearts and our lives once again for the coming of Jesus. Yes, we know that he has arrived – 2000-some years ago and that his life made a huge difference for the world we live in.

In his coming, we have come to know the grace and mercy of God. We have known in an up-close-and-personal-way this God, who loves us more than we could have imagined.

In Jesus' coming, we have come to know that his death on a cross and his resurrection from the dead gives us great hope and promise of our future life after death.

In his coming, we who have believed, have come to know a transformation in our lives – in how we treat people, in how we live our lives for him, in serving others, in forgiving and loving others. In our practice of stewardship. We have come to learn the ways of Christ by studying him, by learning who He is and how He lived.

The fact that this Christ-child entered the world is a miracle. The gospel of John tells us that he has existed from the beginning of the ages. He tells us the 'WORD', meaning Jesus, became flesh and lived right here on earth, among us as a human.

We heard the words from the prophet, Isaiah, proclaiming that this child would be born. All authority would belong to him – like a King! He shall be called: *“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

Isaiah says he will establish justice and righteousness and will gain more and more authority.

And in Luke we hear the beautiful words of Mary’s cousin Elizabeth, spoken when Mary, who is expecting Jesus, comes to visit her. Elizabeth had her own miracle as well. She, too, is expecting a baby, at a very old age. Her baby will be John the Baptist, the one who comes to prepare people’s hearts for the coming of the Lord.

Upon seeing Mary, Elizabeth proclaims: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. ‘

While Mary was told by the angel that Elizabeth was expecting, Elizabeth did not know about Mary’s pregnancy but she knew right away who the baby was when she heard Mary’s voice.

It was way beyond Elizabeth’s expectation!

We are often tempted to think we have things all figured out. We read the Isaiah passage with the knowledge of the Luke passage. We already know what God has done. But do we? Have you ever been surprised by God?

Even in our prayer lives we can fall into a rut, following set prayer patterns. What would happen if we prayed expectantly, leaving room for surprise? How has your prayer time or conversation with God changed over the years?

In the Luke passage, Mary and Elizabeth each found herself preparing for a baby she hadn’t expected. We’ve all had Mary-and-Elizabeth moments when we’ve thought we were too old, too young, or too fill-in-the-blank. Maybe you’ve given up on a prayer or dream for your life. Imagine God laughing at the limitations we put on ourselves... and on God!

So, what are you expecting this Advent and Christmas Season?

During Advent we expect the usual crowds at the malls, the usual Christmas TV specials, (and commercials) the usual visits with family and friends, and the usual church programs.

If we approach Advent in a manner that routine, can we really expect anything different at Christmas? Does ho-ho-ho lead to ho-hum? Can life be different?

Remember, God said “Yes!” on Christmas Day. Because with the birth of Jesus – Immanuel, which means “God is with us,” God came to us to show us just how different our lives can be.

In place of fear, we have the courage to face whatever comes our way. In place of hopelessness, we have great hope that whatever happens, we belong to God and, in the end, it will all be alright.

In place of feeling alone, we have the promises of Jesus saying, "I will not leave you alone. I will send the comforter, the advocate, the Holy Spirit."

When we are children, we normally have pretty high expectations at Christmas. Sometimes, when we grow up, we set those expectations lower. We know that Christmas will come and go but the bills will still be there (in fact, now there may be more). And whatever else we are concerned with in life will probably still be there as well.

But what if we turned things upside down this year? What if, instead of us focusing on our own expectations, we consider what God's expectations are of us?

Yes, we believe that our salvation comes as a free gift from God, through Jesus. There is nothing we can do, or be, that will earn that salvation. We just believe. But in our professing to believe in Jesus Christ, it seems like there might be something expected of us.

Of course, God expects us to respond to the great gift of His Son, Jesus. Jesus sacrificed everything for our sake. God gave His Son because He loves the world so much, that whoever believes in His Son will not die but will have everlasting life. God does not expect us to earn our way into heaven. That's good news!

God does expect us to respond to the greatest gift ever given.

And then, it makes sense, doesn't it? That God expects us to *share* the story of Jesus, a story we surely would never get tired of telling or hearing. It is an amazing story! It is a wondrous miracle story of love – for you, and me!

God expects us to *prepare* by being watchful and waiting. Perhaps there is a spiritual discipline you might want to practice during Advent this year. Maybe you have let your prayer life slack off some. Or, perhaps your Bible has been collecting dust lately.

Or, maybe you know your calling as a Christian is to serve or help the poor and needy but you've allowed too many personal things to crowd out that call. Maybe you've seen a sign-up for a mission trip or helping in a soup kitchen or something – but you haven't acted on it yet.

Advent is a time to turn your focus back to what is truly important; to seek what it is that God might be expecting from you as his child; as a disciple of His Son. It's hard to stay focused in the midst of all the secular Christmas events and decorations and shopping and wrapping. And

most of us enjoy those things too. I do. But they can crowd out our focus on the very reason we celebrate if we are not intentional about keeping that from happening.

Perhaps this is the time to reflect on and consider how – and if – Jesus is truly the King of your life; the ruler of your heart. Because if he is, then we live very different lives than if he is not King.

And that brings us back to his coming again. In Advent, we do prepare our hearts for the celebration of Christmas – the birth of Jesus Christ. And we do long for and hope for a renewal of our hearts, of our spirits, our minds as Christmas comes. When we stay focused on his coming, his birth – somehow those concerns that are still there after all the celebration is over, seems to be more manageable and perhaps not even as huge as we thought it was.

But, if Jesus is King, then we are surely expecting more someday. Because as wonderful as this world is today, we know it is not the perfect Kingdom that the Bible tells us about. Right?

I mean, where do we see places of injustice? It doesn't take much watching the news to know it is everywhere, in every country. Justice has not yet been established.

And where do we see peace? And where do we see harmony and nothing but pure love? The only Kingdom we will find that in is the Kingdom that will come when Christ returns.

And so we wait. We wait with expectation and anticipation. Right? Yet, I don't think we really do wait and anticipate quite as much as we say we do. It's been so long since that promise was made. And it hasn't happened yet.

Perhaps Advent is about asking God to renew our expectation of, and our anticipation of Christ's return AND about asking God to show us exactly what God's expectations are for us individually, as well as us – a congregation that is striving to be what Christ would have us be.

We are expectant. And God is expectant too. Taking time for prayer and silent listening – yes, even in this busy, chaotic time (or ESPECIALLY in this time) is of the utmost importance for one who wants something more in life – while we wait.

Let Advent begin!  
Amen.

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