

Love Unexpected©

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Luke 1:26-38

ADVENT FOUR

December 24, 2017

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And now we are here, finally in the fourth Sunday of Advent – the Sunday when we focus on God’s love, shown to us in the amazing gift of the Christ-child, born so long ago. Born to a young peasant girl whose heart was soft and open to God. Mary was that young girl whom God chose to bear his Son – the one who would save the world from sin and darkness.

God saw how far we had sunk into sin and how impossible it was for us humans to pull ourselves out of that dark pit. God saw and he loved us and made a plan – a very unexpected, incredible plan.

This little video is done by the children at St. Paul’s Church in Auckland, New Zealand. There is an American version but I love the way these children talk. Let’s watch.

[Unexpected Christmas](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM1XusYVqNY&t=206s) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM1XusYVqNY&t=206s>

“They can’t sing to the whole world” says God – “that would just be weird. And they also can’t sing to kings and rulers. But they can sing to shepherds – “those blokes could use some cheering up!”

“Brilliant! They won’t be expecting that!”

And isn’t that the truth? Yes, people had been expecting a Messiah for years and years, and more years. But they did not expect that he would be coming as a human, much less as a tiny, vulnerable baby who could do nothing to protect himself from all those in the world who would want to get rid of him. No, they weren’t expecting that.

And on top of that surprise, he was born to a poor couple who were almost as vulnerable as he was. They had little money. They had no power, no prestige, no influence in a world surrounded by power and greed. But God chose this young, innocent peasant girl who was not yet married to the man she was engaged to – this young, sweet Mary was the one he wanted to be the mother of his Son. Never in a million years would they have expected that!

And what about Joseph, Mary’s fiancé? An honorable, honest, decent man who was a hard-working carpenter who had little of anything but his good reputation, his meager wage from his work, and his love for Mary – and finally for the baby entrusted to him to watch over and protect and take care of and to raise in the Jewish faith. They were surely not – in fact, Joseph was surely not – expecting that, as he dreamed and planned his marriage to Mary.

But God, in his deep love for his people, was full of surprises. The surprises included an angel who reassured both Mary and Joseph – angels who suddenly appeared to those *poor blokes* in the

night – those shepherds who needed cheering up. They were cheered up alright! It was the best Good News they ever heard. The Messiah had been born! A Savior who is Christ, the Lord!

His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. They sang to those poor shepherds and their hearts were full and they were excited to follow the star and find this baby. They weren't expecting a sky full of angels singing, or the heavenly announcement. Brilliant!

And when they found him, he truly was in a stable, wrapped up in cloths, lying in a manger – a cattle trough – surrounded by animals and hay and well, yes, other things that didn't smell so good. This was the Messiah. This was Jesus – the one who would save the world by God's loving plan. This baby in a rough manger, in the cold of night. No one would ever have expected that!

Why do you think God would send his son to earth in this way – quiet, vulnerable, ordinary?

When I was a young adult attending a worship service on Christmas Eve, my pastor told this story. I've shared before – a long time ago so you may remember it. But I love it and think it's worth telling again.

Once there as a little girl who was terrified of the dark. She was fine, as long as the lights were on and she knew where her parents were. This night she was upstairs in her room playing with her dolls. Her parents were downstairs getting things ready for supper.

Suddenly the power went off and it was pitch dark. There was absolutely no light to be seen. The little girl started crying for her daddy and he heard her cries and quickly grabbed a flashlight and ran up to where she was.

But when she heard the footsteps rushing, pounding up the stairs and she saw this odd light flashing around, in her fear, she became more panicked and she irrationally scooted far under the bed. And there she stayed, as far back as she could go, whimpering and shaking.

Her daddy tried to coax her out from under the bed; he tried to convince her that it was him and she was alright but until she could see him she just could not relax and come out.

So, her daddy got down on his stomach and he scooted himself under her bed, slowly working his way to his frightened little girl. He talked to her softly and assured her that it was him and that he loved her and she would be alright.

Finally, he made his way to the far corner where she was huddled and he took her hands and she felt his human warmth, and he shined the light in a way that helped her see his face. At last, she knew it was her daddy and she was safe. She let him rescue her from her dark hiding place under the bed.

My pastor said that is how God's Son came to us. He came in a way that was like us – he was God (*Immanuel*), yet he got came so low that he was on our level, coming to us in a way that would not be frightening but would be reassuring – helping us to know that he understood just what we “*poor blokes*” were needing – some cheering up, and much more.

We weren't expecting that but if he had come in all his divine glory and majesty we would have been scared out of our wits and probably would have run and hidden as far away as we could. Because we weren't expecting that either.

Because in our wildest imaginations we can't possibly know what to expect if we were to actually see the Prince of Heaven – the Son of God in all his glory.

And so unexpected Love came to us. It was God's unexpected plan to provide a way for us to know God; to know God's love and – no matter what happened, regardless of what we did, nothing would ever separate us from that amazing love of God.

Our hymn says

*Love caused your incarnation, Love brought you down to me;
Your thirst for my salvation procured my liberty.
O love beyond all telling, that led You to embrace
In love all loves excelling our lost and fallen race.*

*A glorious crown you give me, a treasure safe on high,
That will not fail nor leave me as earthly riches fly.
My heart shall bloom forever for you with praises new,
And from your name shall never withhold the honor due.*

Our hearts shall bloom forever with praises new. All this Advent we have been talking about and reflecting on how our hearts have been like a desert. We sometimes come to feel like we are dried up – parched with thirst. We are longing for God to cause renewal and to drench us with his love and peace.

As we look around today we see the symbolism of the desert in our hearts beginning to bloom again. What we saw when we first started Advent was something bare, dry, plain. It did not even feel so much like Advent – at least not like Christmas. Yet as the weeks have gone by and we have allowed God to work in us and to transform us, to renew us, we see, here in the sanctuary, what we are beginning – I hope – to feel in our hearts.

Our key verse from Isaiah 35:1 proclaims that “thirsty deserts shall be glad; barren lands will celebrate and blossom with flowers.” Today, we see the sanctuary with blossoms and many signs of new life; signs that give us a feeling of hope and peace, of joy and love.

Tonight, we return here to sing and to celebrate the birth of Jesus – the one who came to save us. *Immanuel* is also his name – God actually *came* to us, as *us*, to be *with* us, to be *one of us* so we might not be frightened, or afraid of him, but that we might come to know him and love him. Brilliant! We weren't expecting that! Amen.

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