



Matthew 11:2-11
Sermon
St. Michael Lutheran Church
Sunday, December 16th, 2007
Elise Stringer, Faith Formation

"The Unexpected Jesus"

Expectations: They can fill us with hope and joy, confident that something great will happen.

Expectations: They can leave us devastated, our hopes and dreams dashed by disappointment when something other than the expected happens.

Expectations: We all have them. Whether bane or blessing they are a part of who we are as human beings.

What do you expect?

As I wandered through the aisles of a department store just last week I was reminded of a Christmas long, long ago; well it seems like long ago, it was Christmas 1986, I was 6 years old.

I had high expectations for Christmas 1986. My wish list included a pair of cowgirl boots, a kit-n-caboodle doll, pink and red patent shoes, a Barbie bike, an etch-a-sketch and many other things.

When it came time to open gifts that year, I did what most children do; I crawled under the tree and started sifting for gifts with my name on them. Much to my disappointment I found none. Everyone had at least 3, 4 or 5 gifts, but I couldn't find even one for me. I was shocked, maybe even devastated. My high expectations of finding each gift nestled beneath the tree were quickly shattered as everyone tore into their shiny packages, and I was left empty handed.

My papa whispered in my ear, "that **1** over there is for you." I turned and looked in the corner of the den, behind the tree to find a large box, almost as tall as me, wrapped neatly, with a big red bow on top. Yes! **1** for me. Wait, only **1** for me. I silently sulked as I made my way to the big box in the corner. How could I get only 1 gift, my list was so long, so detailed, I told Santa exactly what I wanted.

The anticipation grew as I tore the paper from the life-size box, and then the bow and finally I was ready to remove the top. My papa leaned in 1 more time and said, "that's **1** big box."

Much to my surprise, inside that **1** big box were lots of presents, all individually wrapped. Shoes, shirts, dolls, boots, legos, an etch-a-sketch, and yes there was even a Barbie bike in that box.

Needless to say, that was not what I expected for Christmas in 1986.

Expectations: We all have them. They are a part of who we are.

What do you expect?

Advent is a season of waiting, anticipation and expectation. This is the time of year when we as Christians wait, and watch and pray, and expect the coming of the Christ Child.

But it's also the time of year when the world around us flies by, racing toward the commercialized day of celebration, filled with red-nosed reindeer and jolly old Saint Nicks. With parties, shopping, cooking and more,

this can be a time of overwhelming excitement for some and overwhelming exhaustion for others. It's the time of year when expectations are high and patience is low.

In today's Gospel lesson we hear the world was really not much different then. Chaos, excitement and expectation.

"When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Jesus, are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

Expectations: Waiting, watching and praying for the gift of Christ. Are you the one, the one we've been expecting?

It appears as though John the Baptist is surprised to hear of what the Messiah is doing, of who He is and who He is becoming, anxious to hear the news of Jesus' unlikely ministry. The King of Kings and Lord of Lords is dining with sinners, loving the lame, and healing the helpless.

This King is one who comes to us, not in fine gold, linen and pearls, but in dirty clothes, lying in a manger, surrounded by animals. Not what we'd expect of a king.

So what do we expect of this babe, named Jesus, born of a virgin, lying in a manger? This King, this Lord, this Savior?

Expectations: They can fill us with hope and joy, confident that something great will happen.

"Jesus answers the disciples, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have good news brought to them.'"

Expect the unexpected. A King, without a royal court, or a robe of fine linen, who heals, loves, forgives and blesses. Is this the Jesus we expect? Is this the Jesus we wait and watch and pray for? Is this the Jesus we teach our children to expect? The Lord of Love and Father of Forgiveness.

Do we truly believe that this is the one born in Bethlehem? The one who comes to us, this day and everyday.

Expectations: They can leave us devastated, our hopes and dreams dashed by disappointment when something other than the expected happens.

Sometimes in the midst of the world in which we live it is easy to be overwhelmed by the chaos, the pain or the busyness. Surrounded by sights and sounds of success, sadness and schedules we are distracted, left wondering, wandering and weary. Wondering if this Jesus we wait for, anticipate and expect really does come, to us, each one of us, offering a word of hope, joy and comfort. Wondering if this Jesus we wait for will heal our wounds, love us conditionally, and forgive our failures.

The Good News of God's Gospel says that the babe who comes wrapped in bands of cloth, lying in a manger, **IS** the one we wait for, the one we expect. This babe is the one who comes for all and to all. The one we wait for this Advent season is Jesus the Christ: the one who sits with us in the darkness of our fear and pain, the one who stands with us in the light of our joy and excitement, the one who holds us in the hour of our failure, and the one who loves and forgives us in the moments of our pride, selfishness and pity.

But is this what we expect? The Gospel calls us to expect the unexpected. To believe and have faith in what the world says is unbelievable; to believe and have faith in the goodness of God's mercy through the gift of a child.

Advent makes promises and on this the third Sunday of Advent we hear promises of hope, grace and glory. Promises declared to the disciples, John the Baptist and to each gathered in this place. ***God will hear the cry of the poor. God will heal the broken, each one of us. And the small, the weak and the needy will have their time to rejoice.***

Expectations: We all have them. They are a part of who we are as human beings.

Advent makes promises, promises that exceed any expectation: Christ has come, Christ is coming, Christ will come again. This is what we wait, and watch and pray for.

What do you expect?

What do you expect from a children's Christmas program or the reception of new members? Today, in just a bit, our congregation will see and hear both. They will together experience the joy of children's voices and the growth of this family of faith.

Today's Gospel text says that the kingdom of God ***comes***, through the children of this place, through a shaggy donkey and a curly horned sheep. Through the smiling faces of little ones eager to share the word that Jesus is coming!

And the kingdom of God will go out from this place to the homes and families of each of these children, blessing them, filling them with the promised joy of Christ.

The Gospel text says the kingdom of God ***comes*** through this congregation to the new members joining today. Each of us brings forth the kingdom with God's grace, love and forgiveness given freely to each person who will stand here today and make promises to be members of Christ's Body in this place.

And finally the Gospel text says the kingdom of God ***comes*** through these new members and their families to bless the family of faith gathered at St. Michael.

Can you believe it? John the Baptist had a hard time believing it. This babe who comes silently in the night, is the one we wait and watch and pray for. Christ the King. ***Christ has come, Christ is coming, Christ will come again.***

This Advent Jesus the Messiah is indeed coming to us, but not in the way we expect. This one who comes will shower us with life-giving water, will open our eyes, and unstop our ears. This one who comes has and will change us forever.

"Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus, born to set they people free, let us find our rest in thee." A hymn not only for December, but a refrain for our entire lives.

Listen and Look. Expect the unexpected! Jesus is coming, so go tell everyone what you see and hear in this place.

Thanks be to God. Amen.