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Luke 2:1-20

December 25, 2011

What did you expect?

Christmas Day

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Expectations play a big role in our lives don't they, especially at Christmas? We expect to see nativity scenes, Christmas lights, and snow. We expect Christmas parties with Christmas cookies. We expect to get good things for Christmas from our loved ones because they are our loved ones. We expect the things that we get to be of high quality and not to break within the first two minutes of handling them. We also expect to hear things on Christmas day at Church. However, I would like to focus in to one point, we have a God who defies expectations.

Jesus' disciples knew this all too well. In Luke 5:17-26 we hear the familiar story about the paralytic who was lowered through a roof so that Jesus could heal them. Instead of healing him right away, Jesus tells him that his sins are forgiven. The Pharisees definitely were not expecting this. So to prove who he was, Jesus told the paralytic to walk and, even more unexpectedly, HE DID.

Later in Luke 8:22-25 we come upon Jesus and His disciples who were trying to cross the Sea of Galilee and suddenly a storm comes upon them. The seasoned fishermen among the group lost hope. What? They lost hope, these men know the water, this is where they made their living, if they think and expect that they are going to die, they are probably right. So they wake up Jesus to share in their despair. Instead he does something entirely unexpected and calms the storm. This isn't only the wind and the waves eventually calm, Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves and they were instantly calm. This probably brought into the minds of the disciples Psalm 65 that

talks about God is the one who calms the wind and the waves. No wonder they were afraid. They expected death not life. They didn't expect him to have characteristics that God has.

Maybe you were expecting me to talk about the Christmas story and all of the precious things that were happening. I brought up the previous stories to point to the fact that we have an unusual baby in this manger. I want you to keep in mind that this child is going to defy the expectations of everyone around him. Sure, we know what he has done because we've heard the story of Christ's life many times but the disciples had no clue. Jesus gave them every signal that he was who he said he was but they didn't understand. Even before this, there were a lot of unexpected happenings surrounding Jesus' birth that if you think about it, we don't understand either.

The virgin birth doesn't make sense. Mary was engaged to be married and yet she had a child. Imagine the shame that would come with this. She was not married and yet she had a child. This is how God chose to bring himself into this world, through shame. Yes Mary, Joseph, and now us knew that this was the plan but to the people who surrounded them, it probably looked very suspicious. If a human being invented this story, this would probably not be the place to start.

We've always taken for granted that Jesus was born in a manger. If any human was making up the story, the savior of the world would be born in a palace to powerful people but instead he was born in a lowly place. God could've exalted him from the beginning but he chose lowliness for his Son.

One of the major unexpected things surrounding the birth of Jesus is whom the message is delivered to. It could have been the Pharisees, teachers of the law, or even kings but instead it was the shepherds. The shepherds were the lowest of the low. Most people in that day considered them dishonest and undesirable. So when Luke says that they are present at Christ's birth it means that Jesus is for the sinners, the downtrodden and outcasts. Jesus came to people that you wouldn't expect.

Like I said at the beginning of this sermon, we live in a world of expectations. We are expected to show up for school and work. We are expected to show up to our child's sporting events. We are expected to show up for appointments, meetings, and events. With all of these requirements on our lives, sometimes we neglect what God expects of us. We expect so many things from God but what about what he expects from us? He expects us to love the people that he has put into our lives but instead we ignore the people who need us the most. Yes, we show up for church on Sunday but sometimes we put these other things above hearing God's word and reading it in our lives. We are so busy with everything that we forget to be nourished by God's word. I can tell you personally with all of the different things that I am learning at seminary about God and the Bible, I sometimes forget to read my Bible and have time with God apart from the classes that I have. God is not pleased when we neglect his word. In light of neglecting God and trusting him, we feel and expect condemnation and rightly so.

Thanks be to God that it is not left to our expectations. Thanks be to God that he exceeds every hope and expectation that we could ever have. After his disciples believed that Jesus was the Messiah, that Jesus was going to restore Israel to a place of prominence among the nations. The disciples thought if Jesus would overthrow the Romans, we would finally be restored to a

place of glory among the peoples. The disciples focused on getting the promised land back, but God had other plans.

God defied all of the expectations of all of the people in Israel by sending his Son to a people who belonged to him but would have nothing to do with him. You would expect that the Messiah would be treated like a king by all of the religious officials. Instead, they arrested him, beat him, and had the Romans nail him to a tree. If that weren't enough, you would expect that the Father would rescue the Son but instead we hear MY GOD MY GOD WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME? With these words, we realize that God has abandoned his child. With these words we hear the literal hell that Jesus is experiencing. Jesus took upon himself the weight of all our sins and allowed himself to be crushed.

The biggest unexpected thing that could happen in this world is the fact that Jesus did not stay dead, he rose from the dead on the third day. He lives and he will never die again. He retains all of the marks that he received and because he rose, we too will rise again. We can expect our own resurrection.

Above and beyond all of this, Jesus promises more unexpected things. He promises that he would be present in water in order to mark those who he has chosen. He has also promised to be here through His body and blood for the forgiveness of all of your sins. Every time we celebrate these sacraments, we can see God in action through his promises to be in these two events. It is very unexpected that he would be present but he is and we can expect him to be present every time.

We can also expect from Jesus that He will return again to take us to be with him. On the last day we will receive our eternal reward. Our lives will not be run by expectations anymore but we will live with God in eternal bliss.

God is full of unexpected things. Jesus' birth was surrounded with many expectations. All of these expectations point to the fact that Jesus came for you. This babe of Bethlehem desires for you to be his. Time after time in his life he defied the expectations of everyone around him. Now he lives and one day you can expect him to come back. When this happens, you can expect to be with him. God promised it, it will happen. Amen. And now, may God's peace which passes all human understanding guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.