

"Advent Expectations: The Story of Elizabeth" Luke 1:13-15a, 18, 24-25, 57

November 30, 2011

Advent 1

When we think of the people in the ADVENT story, who do we remember? We think, first of all, about Jesus, the One who is coming. We remember His mother, Mary, and His stepfather, Joseph. We may remember John the Baptist and his father Zechariah. But do we ever think about his mother, Elizabeth? Hers was a very lonely life. In our text, while her husband, Zechariah, was serving in the temple, Elizabeth was home alone. She was used to it. Her father had been a priest, too. But it was still a lonely experience. Other women had husbands who worked in the temple, but they did not have to be alone. They had children and grandchildren to stay with them and keep them company (happy). Elizabeth had no children.

That's not how Elizabeth expected her life to be when she got married. Back then, people wanted to have children. Children were not a problem, but a blessing from God. If you did not have children, then people felt God was punishing you. Elizabeth expected to have children, but none came. I'm sure Elizabeth had prayed long and hard for God to give her children. I'm sure she was frustrated and often disappointed, but the Bible says she was a righteous person. Elizabeth didn't get angry or bitter. She didn't let this disappointment ruin her life. She lived faithfully to her Lord.

But she probably had given up now. She was an old woman. Her husband was old, too. Her expectations had changed. She could not have children. She accepted the fact that she would not have children.

Then Zechariah came back home. Elizabeth was happy to see him and eager to talk with him, but he couldn't speak. He seemed excited about something and used gestures to try and explain, but he couldn't do it. Imagine Elizabeth's feeling a little while later when she became pregnant. She probably couldn't believe it at first, but there was Zechariah nodding knowingly. It was true. She would have a child.

She hid herself for five months. Maybe she was deep in prayer. Maybe she didn't want to have to explain this strange happening to her neighbors. Maybe she was afraid that something would change. She left her seclusion when another pregnant woman – her cousin Mary – came for a visit. More miraculous events occurred. Her baby and her were filled with the Holy Spirit. Her baby leapt within her womb and she proclaimed that Mary was the mother of her Lord – the Messiah.

This was truly a life-changing experience. Her expectations of having children when she was a young woman had not happened. Instead, God and His blessings for her far exceeded (better) her expectations. God gave her a baby who would prepare the way for the Savior. God allowed her to know that the baby inside Mary was the Messiah. God helped her to believe that this Messiah was for her. Elizabeth learned an important lesson: people's expectations are often faulty (weak), but God's gifts exceed all expectations.

Christmas is a time of expectations. What do you expect? Some children expect lots and lots of presents. Some adults expect that one perfect gift. Some people expect that their family gatherings will go smoothly and all the relatives will behave. But all of those things depend on other people to buy the right thing and do the right thing. When our expectations depend on other people, then they often don't happen and we are disappointed.

Maybe you have expectations for yourself. You want to do better this Christmas. You'll obey your BUDGET when shopping. You'll obey your DIET when eating. You'll finish your shopping and send out your Christmas cards early. How does that go? Do you even satisfy your own expectations for yourself?

The most important question we have is: what do we expect from God? Are our expectations proper? Do our expectations for God agree with His will? Are we looking for something different than His will? Maybe we expect nothing from God. We become like Elizabeth. We have experienced disappointment, suffering, failure, and so on. We may wish for a lot, but expect very little.

What *should* we expect from God? We are sinners. The evil God forbids – we often do. The good God demands – do very little or we ignore. Because of that, we should expect God’s anger, His judgment against us, and punishment for our sins. We should expect no blessings.

Yet God does for us the same as He did for Elizabeth. He does for us more than we expect. He does more than we deserve. He gives to us a baby. As the prophet said long ago, “Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given.” (Is. 9:6)

God reveals to us the same as He revealed to Elizabeth. This baby is no ordinary baby. This baby is born in a miraculous way. As the prophet also said, “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” (Is. 7:14) This baby is God with us – the Son of God - in human form. The Holy Spirit has revealed that to us. Not all people know that. Many see only a baby in the manger. Because of the Holy Spirit, we see God in the manger.

God helps us to believe the same as He helped Elizabeth believe. This baby is born for a special purpose. Jesus came, not to remain a baby in a manger, but to grow into man. Jesus came, not to be served, but to serve mankind and give His life as a ransom (payment) for people’s sins. Jesus did not come to be born and live, but to die and rise again so that we have forgiveness for all our sins, to be in a good relationship with God now, and to live forever in heaven. Many look at Jesus and see only a Jewish rabbi and preacher. The Holy Spirit helps us to look at Jesus and see our Savior and put our trust in Him.

Our expectations for our Christmas celebration may not come true as we want and we may be disappointed because of that. However, let us remember Elizabeth. God did not allow her expectations to come true as she wanted. God did more than she expected. He does the same for you and me. We should expect to receive nothing from God. Instead we receive His gifts. We should expect to receive His wrath. Instead we find mercy. We should expect God to reject us because of our sin. Instead He loves us and accepts us for Jesus’ sake. We should expect to receive His punishment for sin. Instead we receive forgiveness for our sins because of Jesus’ death

on the cross. We should expect death as the final punishment for our sin. Instead we receive life after death as our eternal reward because of Jesus resurrection.

Advent Expectations are not our expectations for God. They are God's expectations for us. Those expectations are always the best. Amen.