

Expecting

Hope is Born: Part 4 “Expecting”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – December 20th, 2020

4th Sunday of Advent

Readings: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Reflection: Luke 1:46b-55

Greeting: A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

Lighting the Advent Candle: The fourth Sunday of Advent we light the candle of love living among us. “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb’.” (Psalm Luke 1:41-42 NRSV*) *The fourth candle is lit.*

Prayer: Eternal God, in your providence you made all ages a preparation for the kingdom of your Son. Make ready our hearts for the brightness of your glory and the fullness of your blessing in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Luke 1:46b-55

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

(Luke 1:46b-55 NRSV)*

We read the words of Mary and hear a celebration of what God will do. Mary is celebrating not just what God has done for her, but what God will do in days to come. That she recalls all of the good that God has done before. How do we celebrate all that God has done for us? Do we recall what God has done when we speak about what we expect God to do? Do we recognize that we are blessed by God’s presence in our lives? Do we share in those blessings in all that we are and all that we do?

Prayer: Oh Lord, prepare our hearts in this season of advent. Bring us closer to you in all that we are. Help us to remember our Savior born into this world so that we may know your great love for us. Help us this season as we find hope in you. Let us be glad in the expectations you have set for us in your love. Bring us together in your joy and your mercy, that we may be born anew into your grace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from 2 Samuel chapter 7, verses 1 through 11 and 16.

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you." But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

(2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 NRSV)*

Our next reading is from Romans chapter 16, verses 25 through 27.

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

(Romans 16:25-27 NRSV)*

Our final reading is from Luke, chapter 1, verses 26 through 38.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

(Luke 1:26-38 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We come to our final Advent Sunday, and our message for this part of Hope is Born is Expecting. And it is our next to last message with our last being our Christmas Eve message, Becoming. And so, coming into this week, I couldn't help but be thinking about how much Christmas seems to defy expectations, and how it also sets us up to be expecting a lot. And that might sound a little contradictory but our readings for today help to remind us that sometimes our expectations and God's expectations are different. But that it's still good to be expecting God to be acting in our lives. One of the ways that we see this is in our reading from Second Samuel. David decides that God needs a house and Nathan seems to think that this is fine, just telling him if you think that's what needs to be done, go for it. And it's then that Nathan gets a message from God that says, "Well, wait a minute. I know you're expecting me to really be flattered by this. But I've got other plans." And God flips this whole situation on its head. He knows David wants to make a house for him, but the reply is "I don't need a house from you right now and instead I'm going to make you a house." "Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever." And that's a pretty big change of expectations. David and Nathan are expecting God to want a permanent house right away. And God's focus instead is on establishing David's kingdom as a kingdom forever before God. And so now there's the expectation that the kingdom is going to last. This sets a whole slew of things in motion. We hear some of that in Romans. We hear about a secret that was long kept and that was made known. And I think one of the things that we have an issue with is that sometimes we get hung up on the things that we think we know in comparison to the things we actually know. And sometimes we don't allow ourselves to expect anything but what we've already come to believe. And I think it's because we don't like being surprised. But really that's what Christmas is: a series of surprises. A series of changes in expectation that defies what people were thinking.

I think it's important that we remember how much of Christmas was about changing people's expectations. Not just falling in with them. And if you aren't sure what I mean by that, I would say that we look at our Gospel reading for today. We get Mary's confusion and Mary's delight and a complete change in what she was expecting before she was expecting one might say. Gabriel comes to Mary and tells her that she's going to have a baby. Not the message Mary was expecting. She's told not be afraid because she's found favor with God. But she wants to know how this can happen. She's told the Holy Spirit's going to come upon her and things that she thinks are impossible are not impossible for God. But she is going to give birth to a child that is going to sit on the throne of David forever. And Mary's expectations are 100% changed. But that's okay. Her response is one that I think is indicative of the best way to handle something completely and totally unexpected. "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." There's something amazing here because she takes on the unexpected. It is not at all what was supposed to happen. It's not at all what she thought would happen. It's not at all what would make sense. But really, that's the story of Christmas. God upending all of our expectations in order to do something completely unexpected. People aren't expecting the Messiah to be born as a child of humble status. People weren't expecting the Messiah to be somebody that wasn't a warrior king. God changes what it is people thought was going to happen so that something even better could take place. But for that to happen, expectations had to change. They didn't always have to completely change. People were expecting a Messiah to come, holding on to that hope. People were clinging to the idea that the expected would happen in a particular way away. The message that you get at Christmas is "don't get too attached to your plans because God's plans may be completely different."

This is a great year to remember that. We may have all sorts of plans that have been thrown out the window. We may have planned on many things happening that didn't. We can either say that everything was ruined, or we can say that everything has changed. Christmas is still coming. Christmas is still here. Nothing can take away that celebration of God's love. Nothing can take away that hope, no matter how we end up celebrating it, we celebrate it because it is God coming to do the unexpected in an unexpected way. And all that we can truly expect from it is to find hope and love, because God is with us. Because that's the driving point that we need to prepare ourselves for Advent. It's not that we're preparing ourselves for a very specific script. We're not preparing ourselves to follow a specific storyline. We may have the Christmas story down by heart, able to remember every word as it is told. But if we remember the way that Mary reacted, unsure of why any of this was happening to her, and why any of this was happening in general, we are confronted by the simple fact that Christmas is about God doing what needs to be done in whatever way it needs to get done, and that we aren't always going to understand. We may not understand the why or the how of God at all sometimes. But that's OK. I can only imagine Mary, being given that message and then waiting some 30 years for Jesus to begin his public ministry, setting the wheels in motion. We're going to jump ahead. We're going to hear the story of Christ's birth and immediately jump into his adult ministry. It won't take us more than a couple of paragraphs. We quickly leave behind the mother

becoming unexpectedly pregnant. We move right past the child's mother taking on grand expectations of all the things God has in store for her and for her son. I can only imagine how hard it was for her to expect what was coming. Mary is left with all of the words about what is to come, but not a clear sign of how long she would be left holding on to those expectations. In Mary we can see everything that we have been talking about this Advent season. Mary is waiting for all of these wonderful things to happen. She is waiting patiently for this child to grow. She is preparing for his future and hers the best she can, doing what she can to raise him. She is rejoicing, as we heard in today's reflection, over God's grace and favor being upon her. Rejoicing in what God will do through this child. And she is expecting all of the promises that God has made to manifest themselves. Not knowing how long she would have to wait. Not knowing when God would make these things happen. But holding on to the hope that they would. Preparing for a future where the only things she can be certain of is that God is with her. We don't have to wait those 30 years. We can see what happens next. But I cannot help but think of Mary, expecting a baby to come, holding on to hope of what God would do through her. What change God would bring into the world. To the hope that she had in all that she thought God was going to be doing.

I think that's a big part of our Advent spirit. Waiting because we have the expectation of what God has said he will do. Not just expectations for what has happened, but expectations for what our future holds. That we prepare our hearts for Christ coming into this world to fulfill the expectations given to Mary and to David and to the prophets. That we see God doing what he said he would do. Sending a Savior into the world so that we would be free from sin and death. That we would understand how much we are loved and cared for. That when we talk about our expectations in this Advent season, we have the expectation of what has come but also what will come. That we see God's love manifest in this world in the birth of a child, fully human and fully divine. To bridge the gap to bring us closer together in God's love through Christ. That we also expect what is to come, Christ coming in final victory. That this is a season of understanding God's promise to us. That we celebrate the birth of a child that gives us a new birth. That as we take a new birth in Christ, we live in Christ, die in Christ, and are risen in Christ. We are born again through him. And in it all we have hope. Hope in what has come to pass and hope in what will come to pass. That we celebrate Christmas as a reminder of the hope we have in what God has promised. That Christmas morning is about a Hope being born. In a few days, we will celebrate becoming hope in our final message for this season in our Christmas Eve service. For today, we patiently wait for that hope to come. We live with our hope in the love of the Father, the redemption of the Son, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: Lord Jesus Christ, you are the way of peace. Com into the brokenness of our lives and our land with your healing love. Help us to be willing to bow before you in true repentance, and to bow to one another in real forgiveness. By the fire of your Holy Spirit, melt our hard hearts and consume the pride and prejudice which separate us. Fill us, O Lord, with your perfect love, which casts out our fear, and bind us together in that unity which you share with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: We go forth now as a people of hope. We go with the blessings of the Father, in the peace of the Son, in communion with the Holy Spirit. Until we meet again.
Amen.

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Eric Veach	Cathy Devall
Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew
Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen
Don Stewart	Anne Winkler Heinrichs		Michael & Makenzie Reynolds
Ronnie Winstead	John Millsap	Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons
Trinity Powers	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Family of Lois Woolever	Mary White
Nick Nichols	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams
Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte
Kim Hennes	Residents of the Greenup Nursing Center		

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Our Current Series – Hope is Born

This series is our Advent series of how Christ coming into the world fills us with hope.

November 29th – *Waiting* – Our first advent lesson is about learning to wait.

December 6th – *Preparing* – We are a people who prepare for the coming of the Lord.

December 13th – *Rejoicing* – God gives us reason to rejoice in all things.

December 20th – *Expecting* – We await what we know has come and is coming.

December 24th – *Becoming* – We not only celebrate hope, but we become it.

12/20/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron

Greetings! I'm returning with a weekly update this week because of a change in our situation here in Illinois.

We are suspending in person worship until further notice from the Bishop.

I would like to have as many people as would like to be involved in the Christmas Eve service to have that chance. If you would like to do a scripture reading, a special reading, a prayer, or a song, I would be happy to include it with the service this Christmas Eve! I know this is going to be different, but it is still Christmas.

I would also like to know if you'd like to get a DVD of the Christmas Eve service. If there is interest, I would like to know with enough time to get the discs made and sent out or given to someone to deliver. I am looking for as many ways to be able to include everyone in this service as I can. I'll be putting all of this together soon.

If you know someone who would like to receive printed information every week, please let me know. If you come to this online, feel free to share it.

The church is still active and working, and as such, still needs your financial support. Please contact me or the church treasurer for options. Thank you for your continued support.

Please see the CDC website for information on the Coronavirus or the IDHP website for information about the current Illinois situation and restrictions.

Please stay safe. You are all in my prayers. I will keep you updated as best I can. If you have any questions, feel free to contact your Church Council Chair or myself.

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