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Lutheran Church of Our Savior

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FROM THE PASTOR...

(Several of you asked for a copy of the sermon I preached on December 2, the First Sunday in Advent. The text is Jeremiah 33:14-16 and it has been edited for length. I have also tried to update it to fit with these first days after Christmas.)

It is Christmas and he sits in his chair. He's only got the one chair, you see, and he sits there just like he has every day for the past five years. His roommate in the nursing home has gone to his son's house. How he wishes he had children, especially during Christmas time. But ever since his beloved wife died, he has no one. What kind of Christmas can he expect?

It is Christmas and she sits in her cold living room: alone. The children have been put to bed. Since their father walked out on them, every Christmas has been a struggle! But this one is the hardest. She just got laid off. She sighs, "Ain't no Christmas bonus if there ain't no work. Can't even turn up the heat; so how am I supposed to come up with money for presents this year?" She dreads the thought of going to church and seeing those other families happy together. She imagines them opening presents under the tree. "Sure they can sing 'Joy to the World' but what are we supposed to do." What kind of Christmas can she expect?

It is Christmas and the pastor sits next to her hospital bed. He knows for 90 years this woman struggled in life. Polio as a little girl; first husband killed in the Great War; first child miscarried; youngest child killed by a drunk driver. Now the creeping death ravages her body. She looks like a living skeleton. The pastor knows she won't see another Christmas. But she smiles and prays the Lord's Prayer with him. And inside he marvels at her strength, her inner peace; he is humbled by her faith... so he asks her, "What kind of Christmas do you expect?"

Every year we celebrate the first Advent (coming) of Jesus on Christmas and remember those people of faith who waited in expectation for God to send a Messiah to save them. The prophet Jeremiah wrote to folks who were going through a national crisis. And they were waiting... waiting for God to deliver them... waiting for God to send a Messiah, a Savior. The Babylonian Empire conquered their nation. Their cities overrun, their armies destroyed—the people were no longer free. And many of the people were dragged away into exile in Babylon. And with that as a background, Jeremiah tells the people about a day when a "righteous Branch" would grow up from the line of King David. Jeremiah comforts the people with the vision of a new king who would redeem the people and end their slavery and exile. But that day was off in the future and everyone who believed Jeremiah had

to wait in expectation for it to happen. We can look back from the other side of the cross and see Jesus is that "righteous Branch" Jeremiah talked about.

So many expected, so many waited, and yet so many missed seeing Jesus when he came. What happened? When it comes to expectations, we human beings seem to fall into one of two extremes: either we expect too much or we expect too little. A few years ago researchers at the Stanford University School of Medicine suggested women usually think jokes are funnier than men do because men expect jokes to be funny while women have lower expectations. While writing about this study, Internet humorist "Mad Dog" (I'm pretty sure that's not his real name) said: "women think jokes are funnier because they have lower expectations than men, which probably helps explain how women manage to put up with guys in the first place. Not that I'm complaining. Hey, there's nothing like having low expectations to make me look good... But the truth is, as humans we have high expectations. We expect good customer service, high quality products, and fair wages for workers. We expect our leaders will do the right thing. And tell the truth. We expect a movie sequel to be as good as the original, even though it's never happened. We expect a product that comes in a package which screams "New and Improved" to be, well, new and improved. And we expect the holiday season to be about love, friendship, and spirituality, not rampant commercialism. We expect the weather forecast to be accurate and airplane seats to be comfortable no matter how many times we've flown and know otherwise. We expect product claims that arrive by email to be true, vacations to be relaxing. Come to think of it, maybe it would be a good idea if we all lowered our expectations.

So many folks expected the Messiah; they were waiting for him. But so many folks still missed Jesus.

Maybe that's because some expected too much. Messiah can't come riding into the city on a donkey. Messiah has to be riding a warhorse and leading armies. Messiah can't be eating and laughing with sinners. Messiah is supposed to make the unclean pay. Messiah shouldn't be preaching and teaching peace and forgiveness and love and turning the other cheek. Messiah should be restoring the kingdom and destroying our enemies. Messiah can't be born to poor parents in a stable with animals and with only shepherds to witness. God wouldn't do it that way. There has to be more. Maybe they missed Jesus because



they expected too much. Jesus certainly didn't fit their ideas of the "righteous Branch" no way... no how!

Are you expecting too much from God? I went to Google and typed in "Expect a miracle." I got 1,550,000 hits. But doesn't expect-a-miracle thinking imply we should count on divine intervention to solve our problems for us? Don't we often expect God to act in certain ways and do certain things for us? When God doesn't always do what we want or act the way we expect we miss seeing his hand working in our lives. Just like those folks who missed Jesus. Their expectations got in the way. What kind of Christmas did you expect? Do you expect too much from God? Have you turned Jesus into a spiritual Santa Claus with his bag of gifts, checking his list twice? If you've been nice he'll open that gift bag for you! And if Santa Jesus doesn't give you what you asked for then Jesus isn't for you, God has failed you, let you down.

Actually, we can't expect too much from Jesus because he always exceeds our expectations. So maybe we miss Jesus at Christmas not because we expect too much but because we expect the wrong things. Jesus comes to you wanting a relationship with you on his terms. And the gifts he brings are peace, love, forgiveness, meaning for your life. His gifts are always better and more than you ask for.

Maybe some of those folks missed seeing Jesus because they expected too little. Who expects Messiah to be an ordinary man and yet more? God in human flesh! Who could expect the great God of creation to stoop so low as to take on human skin? Who would have expected the God of the parting of the Red Sea and the power behind all the Egyptian plagues to come here as a helpless baby? Who would expect Messiah to die cursed as a common criminal on a tree...to carry a cross; pour out his blood for the sins of all, absorbing God's anger and punishment? And who could expect to find an empty tomb on a bright Sunday morning? Maybe they missed Jesus because they expected too little.

Did you expect too little from God this Christmas? Expect the baby of Bethlehem to bring peace... not always happiness... but peace; deep down—the peace of knowing God wants to have a relationship with you... the peace of knowing God is not angry with your sins but forgives, restores, loves...Are you expecting too little from God this Christmas? Expect Jesus to walk this life alongside you. Expect Jesus to laugh with you, cry with you, carry you through life's struggle. Expect that in your last hour, the Messiah will come to take you home to the place he has prepared as he promised. Expect your grave to be empty one day as his was empty on Easter. Expect him to fulfill his promise. "Because I live, you will live also."

What kind of Christmas did you expect? Has God become too far away for you to care? Jesus has come. A baby to die for your sins: A baby to bring you back into God's family. The cross tells you if you were the only one who needed him, Jesus would still come. That's how much God loves you.

It is Christmas and he sits in his chair. He's only got the one chair, you see, and he sits there just like he has every day for the past five years. Suddenly he hears voices... singing...Hark the Herald Angels Sing...The choir from the local Lutheran Church is caroling. He

imagines them singing just for him. A young girl smiles and says, "Blessed Christmas. Jesus loves you." And the old man knows it is true. He remembers because of the manger and the cross, he will have an eternity of Christmastimes with his beloved wife and friends and relatives unknown and unmet. And he sings with them. As he sings, he knows he is not alone... never alone... because Emmanuel has come... God with us is here... God with him.

It is Christmas and she sits alone in her living room. The children come down the stairs to the tree. She sees their sleepy faces and she realizes God is with her in them and the love they all share. She knows in her heart that Christmas is about faith and family, not presents and trees and lights. She thinks about the Christmas church service and remembers all those other folks at her church have their struggles and hurts and pain too and she knows they are all her family now too. The Christ child has made them so. She does not face the season alone. Jesus is with her in her children's smiles and the fellowship of her church. He is Emmanuel after all... God with us... God with her.

It is Christmas and the pastor sits next to her hospital bed. He asks her, "What kind of Christmas do you expect?" she smiles weakly and says, "Pastor, Jesus has carried me through all the trials of my life and I know he will never fail me. I expect to spend Christmas at home with Jesus, just like he promised." He is Emmanuel after all... God with us... God with her.

In these days after Christmas did you see the mystery in the manger? Did you see Immanuel is God with us? If not, what kind of Christmas did you expect? ❄️

January Birthdays

Jan 01	Gregory Amaral
Jan 03	Diana Montiso
Jan 06	Hannah Tate
Jan 09	Elizabeth Rust
Jan 11	Thomas Heuchert
Jan 14	Georgiann Willie
Jan 16	Donna Finlay
Jan 17	Joni Kohr
Jan 18	Arlin Weiting
Jan 21	Jocelyn Graham, Crystal Shaffer
Jan 22	Terry Murdock
Jan 24	Julie Miller
Jan 25	Joretta Borcher, Megan Morgan
Jan 26	Katherine Lee, Sharon Weiting
Jan 30	Ernest Heuchert, Jr.

January Anniversaries

Jan 01	David Munger & Molly Williams
Jan 03	Terry & Jill Murdock
Jan 21	David & LaDene Hersman
Jan 26	Dick & Debra Scholar

JANUARY SUNDAYS

Jan 06 – Christian
Education Board
Jan 13 – Foley Brothers
Jan 20 – Anita Lange
Jan 27 – Dawn Schofield



Jan 06 8:15 am Comm. Svc.
Jan 06 8:30 am SS/Bible Study
Jan 06 10:45 am Comm. Svc.
Jan 13 8:15 am Worship Svc.
Jan 13 9:30 am SS/Bible Study
Jan 13 10:45 am Worship Svc.
Jan 14 6:00 pm Men's Club
Jan 15 February Ministry Schedule Due
Jan 15 9:30 am Tabitha Quilting Group
Jan 17 7:00 pm Council Mtg.
Jan 20 8:15 am Praise Svc./Comm.
Jan 20 9:30 am SS/Bible Study
Jan 20 10:45 am Praise Svc./Comm.
**Jan 20 9:00 am February Newsletter
Deadline**
**Jan 21 Martin Luther King Day – Church
Office Closed**
Jan 26 10:00 am Upward Bound Snow Day
Jan 27 8:15 am Worship Svc.
Jan 27 9:30 am SS/Bible Study
Jan 27 10:45 am Worship Svc.



MOWING IN JANUARY

Jan 5 – Bill Williamson, Arlin
Weiting
Jan 19 – Reese Riddiough, Keith
Almond, Nathan
Schofield

CHOOSE YOUR BIBLE STUDY

The following Bible studies become available this month:

1. **Women's Monday Night Bible Study** begins **January 7 at 6:30 PM.** Call Karen Lamoreaux (805) 714-4635 or Debbie Heuchert (805) 264-4599.
2. **Small Group Wednesday Morning Bible Study** starts **January 9 from 10:00 to 11:30 AM** in the Fireside Room. Contact Rudy or Cheryl Stowell at (805) 937-3654.

CHILDREN'S CORNER

A fresh start

Baptism is a blessing because it changes us and gives us hope.

Directions: Write the boxed letters in the squares below. Then unscramble those letters to form two words that complete the Bible verse and represent the gift of baptism.

We were there**f**ore buried with him
through bapt**i**sm into death in order that,
just as Christ was rais**e**d from the dead
through the gl**o**ry of the Fath**e**r,
w**e** too may live a _____.

Roman**s** 6:4, NIV

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Answer: f i e l e w n u; new life

SIGN UP FOR ALTAR FLOWERS

If you would like to donate altar flowers, the 2019 Altar Flower chart is posted in the church narthex. Now is a good time to sign up, especially if you would like to remember a special day that is important to you. Remember, only one flower arrangement per Sunday and Christmas. Please call Connie Hathaway (937-9675) if you have any questions. **Cost: \$25 payable to Altar Guild.**

Dave and Julie Bickel
554 Ruffner Lane
Clarkdale, AZ 86324



New Address

TRUST
yourself
TO THE
God
WHO MADE YOU



Our Mission

“Responding to God’s love, Lutheran Church of Our Savior desires to reach more people for Christ by proclaiming Him, by growing in faith, and by caring for all people.”



Sunday Worship – 8:15 AM & 10:45 AM
Sunday School & Bible Class – 9:30 AM

*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that
whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*
John 3:16