

# The Great Unexpected Expectation

## Luke 2:1-20

### INTRODUCTION

Imagine ...

- You are outside. It's midnight – a beautiful night. The stars are twinkling. You sit down and lean up against a tree. The kind of tree with big spreading branches. A good climbing tree. Your dog is curled up, right there beside you. The night is so peaceful that your eyes slowly start to close. You are not supposed to sleep. You are on guard duty! Your job is to protect this herd of sheep that is bedded down around you. But the night is so still. And so peaceful.
  - Then suddenly the sky lights up and an angel appears. At least it looks like an angel! You've never seen an angel before.
  - Are you awake or asleep? Is this real or a dream?
  - Oh, it's real!
  - And then the angel tells you that you and your fellow shepherds have been selected as the first people to see the Messiah who has just been born in nearby Bethlehem.
  - You! Of all people, you! Imagine! How unexpected that news would be.

Imagine ...

- You and your two best friends are upstairs in your country's national observatory. You love looking at the stars. You've done it long enough that you can predict everything that will happen in the skies throughout the year. You have charted everything you have ever seen. And you marvel at how flawlessly consistent it all is. You know the skies had to have been created by some Great Master Designer.
  - Then suddenly there is a bright flash, and a new star appears in the sky.
  - Nothing like this has ever happened before! If it had you would have known about it and you would have documented it. You pull out all your charts. It's not there.
  - And just as suddenly you mind remembers an ancient Hebrew text that you once read about a light in the darkness that would announce the arrival of a King. That's what this was! A prophecy was being fulfilled. And you got to see it first!
  - You! Of all people! How unexpected!

Imagine ...

- You are working quietly in your kitchen, prepping the evening meal. Snapping beans. Peeling potatoes. Something routine like that. There is no other noise in the house. You are alone with your thoughts, maybe thinking about how wonderful your wedding day will be. It's less than a year away, but you can picture every detail as if it has already happened. Your husband-to-be is "good catch." Everybody says that. The two of you are going to have a great life.
  - Then suddenly you are not alone. A powerful voice interrupts your musings. "Don't be afraid," the voice says. That simple sentence only heightens your anxiety.

- Then this voice tells you that you have been chosen to be the mother of the Messiah. And in a miraculous way you will soon become pregnant.
- “But I’m not married!” The words just blurt out of your mouth.
- Imagine. You. Of all the young women in the world, God chose you. You never expected that!

Imagine...

- You are at work in your shop. You are covered with sawdust from the sandpaper you have been rubbing over the headboard of a new bed that you are building. It's a gift. A wedding gift for your fiancée. She is the prettiest, sweetest girl in town. Every young guy wanted her, but she gave her heart to you. No doubt about it, you are luckiest man in town.
- For weeks everyone has been patting you on the back and saying “Congratulations!” But today seems different. The men are just giving you knowing glances. With disgust in their voices, the women have abruptly canceled their furniture orders. Then you overhear one of them whisper, “Look at him acting so innocent. His fiancée is pregnant and he wants us to believe nothing is going on.” What? She’s pregnant? Oh no. It can't be true. Can it?
  - That night your mind is still racing as you try to go to sleep. If this news is true, what you are going to do? You love her, but a pregnancy ... That's a deal breaker.
  - Then suddenly in the middle of the night, as you are tossing and turning somewhere between sleep and sleeplessness, an angel interrupts your dreams. It is true, he tells you. But despite how bad it seems, this is actually good news. Her baby is the Son of God. And though you won't be his biological father, you are to raise him as if you were his real dad.
  - You. A simple carpenter. Given the task of being a dad to God's Son. In all the plans you had made for your future, you never expected that.

During this Advent season we have talked about all the EXPECTATIONS that surround the Christmas story, and how what people EXPECTED came about in UNEXPECTED ways, through unexpected people at unexpected times.

- The Jewish people in Jesus' day fully EXPECTED a Messiah. That wasn't the issue. It just that Jesus didn't turn out to be the Messiah they expected.
- In the same way, I think, that we also EXPECT God to work in our world and sometimes in our lives, but often the way He does that is rather UNEXPECTED.
  - And sometimes we miss what God is doing because we were expecting something else.

This week I read an article titled:

### **What to do when you receive an unexpected gift?**

Consider this to be the public service portion of tonight's service.

The “expert” who addressed that question was Lizzie Post, granddaughter of the famous etiquette writer Emily Post. Lizzie writes:

When that (unexpected) gift comes your way and you have that moment of, 'Oh my gosh, I don't have anything in return,' say (to yourself) 'That means I need to focus on the gift that's being given to me. I need to focus on this moment, say thank you, praise the gift, compliment the generosity.'

Lizzie's advice has good application for us tonight. You and I have been given an UNEXPECTED gift. Isaiah's prophecy tells us:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is **given** ... (Isaiah 9:6)

He didn't come wrapped in pretty paper and ribbon. We didn't find Him under a tree. No, he was:

... wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. (Luke 2:12)

Because you and I have done this "Christmas thing" before we forget that Jesus is really someone UNEXPECTED.

- The Jews of old expected a Messiah, but they didn't expect Jesus.
- And there is really no reason why you and I should expect Him either.

You see, like everyone else in the world, we were ...

... people walking in darkness (who) have seen a great light (Isaiah 9:2)

Or in the words of Paul's letter to Titus, we are a people who need a someone ...

... to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:14)

That's what we need. But it is not what we deserve. That wickedness cut us off from God ...

Your iniquities have separated you from your God ... (Isaiah 59:2)

Eternal separation. That's what we deserve, and that's what we should expect.

But the UNEXPECTEDLY GOOD NEWS of Christmas is ...

... God treats us much better than we deserve, and because of Christ Jesus, he freely accepts us and sets us free from our sins. God sent Christ to be our sacrifice. Christ offered his life's blood, so by faith in him we could come to God. (Romans 3:24-25, CEV)

That's so UNEXPECTED. Undeserved and unexpected.

Bobby was getting cold sitting out in his back yard in the snow. Bobby didn't wear boots. He said he didn't like them, but the truth was he didn't own any. He only had that pair of thin sneakers he wore. They had a few holes in them, and they did a poor job of keeping out the cold.

Bobby had been in his backyard for about an hour already. And, try as he might, he could not come up with an idea for his mother's Christmas gift. He shook his head as he thought, "This is useless. Even if I do come up with an idea, I don't have any money to spend."

Ever since his father had passed away three years ago, the family of five had struggled. It wasn't because his mother didn't care or try, there just never seemed to be enough. She worked nights at the hospital, but the small wage that she was earning could only be stretched so far.

What the family lacked in money and material things, they more than made up for in love and family unity. Bobby had two older and one younger sister, who ran the household in their mother's absence. All three of his sisters had already made beautiful gifts for their mother. Somehow, it just wasn't fair. Here it was Christmas Eve already, and he had nothing.

Wiping a tear from his eye, Bobby kicked the snow and started to walk down to the street where the shops and stores were. It wasn't easy being six years old without a father, especially when he needed a man to talk to. Bobby walked from shop to shop, looking into each decorated window. Everything seemed so beautiful and so out of reach.

It was starting to get dark and Bobby reluctantly turned to walk home when suddenly his eyes caught the glimmer of the setting sun's rays reflecting off of something along the curb. He reached down and discovered a shiny dime. Never before has anyone felt as wealthy as Bobby felt at that moment.

As he held his newfound treasure, a warmth spread throughout his entire body, and he walked into the first store he saw. His excitement quickly turned cold when salesperson after salesperson told him that he could not buy anything with only a dime.

He saw a flower shop and went inside to wait in line. When the shop owner asked if he could help him, Bobby showed him the dime and asked if he could buy one flower for his mother's Christmas gift. The shop owner looked at Bobby and his ten-cent offering. Then he put his hand on Bobby's shoulder and said to him, "You just wait here and I'll see what I can do for you." As Bobby waited, he looked at the beautiful flowers, and even though he was a boy, he could see why mothers and girls liked flowers.

The sound of the door closing as the last customer left jolted Bobby back to reality. All alone in the shop, Bobby began to feel alone and afraid. Suddenly the shop owner came out and moved to the counter. There, before Bobby's eyes, lay twelve long-stemmed, red roses with leaves of green and tiny white flowers all tied together with a

big silver bow. Bobby's heart sank as the owner picked them up and placed them gently into a long white box. "That will be ten cents, young man," the shop owner said, reaching out his hand for the dime.

Slowly, Bobby moved his hand to give the man his dime. Could this be true? No one else would give him a thing for his dime! Sensing the boy's reluctance, the shop owner added, "I just happened to have these roses on sale today for ten cents a dozen. Would you like them?" This time Bobby did not hesitate, and when the man placed the long box into his hands, he knew it was true. As he walked out the door, he heard the shopkeeper say, "Merry Christmas, son."

When the owner returned inside, the shopkeeper's wife walked out. "Who were you talking to back there, and where are the roses you were fixing?" Staring out the window, and blinking the tears from his own eyes, he replied, "A strange thing happened to me this morning. While I was setting up things to open the shop, I thought I heard a voice tell me to set aside a dozen of my best roses for a special gift. I wasn't sure at the time whether I had lost my mind or what, but I set them aside anyway. Then just a few minutes ago, a little boy came into the shop and wanted to buy a single flower for his mother with one small dime. When I looked at him, I saw myself many years ago when I, too, was a poor boy with no money to buy my mother a Christmas gift. A bearded man, whom I never knew, stopped me on the street and told me that he wanted to give me ten dollars. When I saw that little boy tonight, I knew who that voice was, and I put together a dozen of my very best roses."

Nothing about the gift of God in the form of the baby is deserved or expected. Yet ...

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)

### **APPLICATION**

So according to Lizzie Post, what do we do when we receive an unexpected gift? Three things:

Say thank you. Praise the gift. And compliment the generosity.

Please bow your heads, and let's do that right now. (Pray)

Amen.