

## ***Christmas Eve Message 2022: "Expectations"***

### What do we expect from the Christmas season?

What comes to mind? What have we planned? Family time, get-togethers, a few days off, gift-giving, travel, but there is a deeper meaning in all those things isn't there? A deeper reason.

### What do we expect from coming to a church service at Christmas Time?

We look for familiar things in services at Christmas time: Christmas carols, scripture we don't often hear normally like Isaiah and the telling of Jesus' birth in the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel. And we expect the preacher to deliver a great sermon! (Frankly, that was my expectation too, but let's hope that preacher actually showed up this evening!)

### Our expectations are formed by the past. Remember past Christmases?

Especially in the last two to three years we have dealt with Covid, with cancelled services, with modified services. We have joined the "remote" world, with modified services, live and recorded.

Did any of us expect that our daily lives would be so radically changed? What happened to "normal"? How did that affect us this year?

### This year our expectations have been disrupted, distracted, and changed.

Are we able to carve out some time to welcome Christmas?

Has the "hustle and bustle" of the season frazzled us? Do our cell phones ringing and beeping interrupt us; regular work and responsibilities plus more all collapsed into fewer days?

How many of these noises can we describe in that wonderful phrase in 1 Corinthians as "a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" - unimportant really, but forcing its way into our lives?

### The Christmas Season is Also an Invitation

If we are not mindful enough we will miss the Christmas invitation. We are invited tonight to "come to Bethlehem and see" the newborn king, Jesus. We are invited to hear the angels, stand with the shepherds and the wise visitors from the East, to rub shoulders with the animals in the stable and to watch Joseph looking after wife and child, and watch Mary tending to the fragile newborn. We wonder if, in this moment, Mary and Joseph are still contemplating the words the angel Gabriel said to them about Jesus before his birth. And are we contemplating what those words mean to us?

Our Advent scriptures have told us, promised us, that God will be with us and take care of us...often in ways that do not fulfill our expectations.

If there is a lesson for us this year, as we continue to face uncertainty in our lives, let us expect the unexpected, but do so with the confidence that God is with us.

That lesson is our invitation this Christmas: Jesus was born for us and lived and taught not just in the past, but Christ is us today and into the future. We are invited to listen to the angels: "Be not afraid....be not afraid...." And let us continue to follow and listen to Jesus. May it be so. Amen.