

*Advent devotions*  
*Immanuel Lutheran Church*  
*Sebewaing, Michigan*  
2020  
*Great Advent Expectations*



Dear Reader,

These Advent devotions focus on the great expectations that are associated with the Advent season. These expectations all find their end in the coming of the Christ who would offer Himself for you on the tree. May you receive Jesus as you read and study the Word.

In Jesus Christ crucified,

Rev. Michael Boyer ©2020

**November 29, 2020 Great Expectations of Peace**

*The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," says the LORD. (Isaiah 65.25)*

Advent brings the expectation of peace. Through the sin of Adam and Eve peace with God was destroyed in the garden. They broke the command of God and plunged creation into sin. The perfect peace had been shattered.

Where is the peace in your life? Do you not sin continually against God and man? You are no better than Adam and Eve in the garden. You place other things before the true God. You despise your neighbor and often want the worst for him or her. Do you genuinely love God with all your heart, mind, soul? Do you really love your neighbor as yourself?

Sin turns inward. Sinners want the best for themselves. They neglect their neighbor in need. They forget the spiritual welfare of those around them. They ignore God's commands by sinning against them.

Repent. You need peace with God. This peace is established not through your works but through another. The expectation of peace is given through the Christ, Jesus. He brings peace between you and the Father. As He enters

your flesh and dies in your place, He pays for your sins. He grants you this peace through the forgiveness of your sins. But how can you know you have this?

Through Baptism this forgiveness is given you. You are joined to the death of your Savior and your sins are washed away. You have peace with God. You live in a state of grace for Christ has covered all your sins. You have peace that this world cannot understand.

No matter what happens in life you have peace with the Father through the Son. You are forgiven. Amid suffering and even death you have peace. It is yours, given through Jesus, simply trust Him who loves you and has died for you.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I daily sin much and deserve nothing but punishment, yet in love You sent Your Son to die in my place. Grant me peace through the forgiveness of my sins. In His Name. Amen.

### **November 30, 2020 Great Expectations of Hope**

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.* (Isaiah 11.1)

The tree was cut off. Could there be any hope for life? It didn't seem likely. The house of David was no longer ruling the nation. The time of the kings had passed. The nation was occupied by foreign powers. The tree was cut down and all that was left was a stump.

From that stump a shoot comes forth. From the lineage of David a child is born. This one would be the hope of Israel. He would rule in the place of His forefather David forever. This was the hope that Israel needed.

Is there any hope? Your sins are evident before God. You should be cut off eternally before Him. The wages of sin is death; eternal death. You have sinned against God and man. You have broken down the holy law of God. He demands that you love Him and obey His Word. You have dishonored His Word in sin, going your own way. He demands that you love your neighbor. But this simple task you often don't do.

There should be no hope for you. You should be cut off forever from the love of God. But you are not. That shoot of hope comes forth. Jesus is born. He stands in your place under the punishment of the law. He lives the perfect life in your stead. He offers Himself in your place on the tree. He grants you hope through His death.

His is true hope. Your sins are forgiven through His death. How unlikely it seems that you would be saved from that dead tree! But there you are redeemed from eternal death and granted life. You are brought into the ark of the Christian church to love God and serve your neighbor. Such hope is yours in the stump of Jesse.

Prayer: Father, I have sinned against You and against so many of my neighbors in my life, You would be just to punish me, but You punish Your Son in my place. I thank You for the true hope you give me in the death that Jesus died, forgive my sins and grant me eternal life. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

### **December 1, 2020 Great Expectations of Freedom**

*So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* (John 8.31-32)

The Jews in the time of Jesus thought they were free. They had never been enslaved to anyone! Well, that wasn't exactly true and they knew it. They had been enslaved to Babylon during the time of Jeremiah. Eventually, they were able to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple. More recently they had been enslaved to Rome.

Rome still occupied Jerusalem. The Jews may not have liked it or wanted to acknowledge Rome's position, but they were enslaved. They would admit this on Good Friday as they cried out, "We have no king but Caesar (John 19.15)."

Obviously, you're not enslaved to anyone. You have no master but yourself and that's the way your sinful self likes it. Sinners refuse to admit that they are under the tyranny of the devil. They believe that they are free without any master, but their master is sin. You are not free but held captive by sin. Just try to stop sinning. How possible is it for you to break free?

Repent. Know that you cannot save yourself from your sinful condition. You are captive to your own sin. You should be separated forever from God. But that is not the way He wants it. Your God wants you to be free. Thus, the Father sends His Son in flesh. Jesus comes to set you free.

Jesus lives the perfect life in your stead. He bears your burden of sin to the cross. He takes the punishment your sins merited you. He is a slave to the will of the Father to set you free. And if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed! Your sin is paid for. You are no longer under the power of sin, but you are forgiven; set free through the work of the Son.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I am a slave to sin with no hope in myself for release, You have sent Your Son to set me free and He has. I thank you that Jesus has saved me and set me free. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 2, 2020 Great Expectation of Redemption**

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.* (Galatians 4.4-5)

It had been the hope of the Old Testament people for four thousand years that one would come to Redeem them. Eve expected her first child to be the Messiah, but he was not. Through the successive generations this one was looked for, longed for, and expected. Moses records generation after generation still looking. The writer of Chronicles does the same, father to son, each proving not to be the Messiah.

But when the fullness of time had come God sent forth His Son. The time had not been right before. Finally, the great expectation was fulfilled. The Messiah had come. But what was He going to do?

Paul reminds us what He was to do. He was to redeem those who were under the law. He was to crush the head of the serpent. He was to gather up the faithful, as Noah was, lest they be swept away by the wrath of God. He would bring His people into the promised land, as Moses and Joshua had. He was to fulfill all the Old Testament great expectations by redeeming sinners.

Sinners needed redemption. Just as Noah needed salvation from the flood, Moses needed God to work those plagues, and Joshua needed God to throw down the walls of Jericho. So, sinners need God to act. We need the Father to send His Son. We need the Son, Jesus, to enter our flesh. We need Him to give Himself for us on the tree and destroy our dread enemies. All this He does to buy sinners back; to redeem sinners.

For you He has come. For you He has died. He lived under the law and was cursed with your curse that you would be saved. He opens the promised land of heaven for you.

Prayer: Father, I was dead in sin, but at just the right time You sent Your Son to redeem me from sin and buy me back from death. I now stand forgiven in His death for me. Grant me to serve my neighbor as myself and honor You with all I do. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 3 Great Expectations of Song**

*And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."* (Revelation 5.9-10)

It is expected that heaven should rejoice at the coming and work of the Christ. Heaven breaks forth into song, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." How can the angels not rejoice? They celebrate the birth of the Christ.

Heaven also celebrates the work of the Christ. The Father speaks of the work of the Son as He is baptized, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." And at the transfiguration the Father speaks, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him." The Father is well pleased with the work of the Son for the Son does the will of the Father. Heaven rejoices in the will of the Father.

Heaven still sings of the work of the Christ. Throughout Revelation the saints and those in heaven sing praise to the Christ. He is worthy, He has ransomed people for God through His blood, He has made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and through Him they shall reign.

Heaven sings of the Christ's coming and His work. Shouldn't sinners sing of Christ too? His birth was for you and He worked for you. He came to ransom you from your sin and your eternal death. He took the burden for you. You are redeemed by His blood.

Sing that new song with all the heavenly host. It is a song of what Jesus has done for you. You know the words for you know what He has done.

Prayer: Father, Your Son has saved me from my sins and from everlasting death. I sing of the work He has done for me, He has saved me and placed me into His Kingdom. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

#### **December 4 Great Expectations of Birth**

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.* (Micah 5.2)

It was expected that the Christ would be born. Eve thought this as she believed her first child was the Christ. It made sense, after all. God had just promised to send the Christ, born of woman. She gave birth, so shouldn't this child be the Christ?

Cain was not the Christ. But through the successive generations the faithful waited for Him to be born. He would come. Isaiah told how the virgin would conceive. Micah told where this Christ would be born; but you, O Bethlehem Ephratha! He would come.

What a marvel that it was expected that God would be born. How could the ever present, all powerful, eternal, all knowing God take on flesh? How could He be born? Yet, the saints expected because God had promised.

At just the right time the expectation became reality. The Christ was born in Bethlehem of a virgin. This was expected. But could they know why this must be? The Christ had to be born so that He could live under the law. He had to fulfill your lacking righteousness. He needed to remove the sin of the land in a single day as Zechariah foretold. He needed to bring that great and awful day of the Lord as Joel spoke. He needed to be the suffering servant that Isaiah knew would come.

The Christ was born for you. He took on flesh for you. He needed to take on flesh to offer that flesh for you on the tree. This was expected of Him; it was the will of the Father. He was born for you and He died for you. This is reality.

Because of the work of the Christ you are forgiven. You are born anew through Baptism and joined to His death. The sins which meant your eternal death were placed on Him. Because of Him, you live.

Prayer: Father, You sent Your Son to be born into this sinful world and take on my sin, through Him I am forgiven. Grant me to live as Your child loving my neighbor at all times. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

#### **December 5 Great Expectations of Humility**

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* (Zechariah 9.9)

A little odd that the king should come on a donkey. A donkey isn't exactly a symbol of power or majesty. Donkeys are rather humble. No armies in Zechariah's day would use donkeys in battle. Nor would any king in Zechariah's day ride into their cities on a donkey.

But this king was different. He would come in humility. He would make a covenant of blood with the people (Zechariah 9.11) and set the prisoners free. He would end war and bring peace (Zechariah 9.10). He would grant his people to shine like jewels in a crown (Zechariah 9.16). Zechariah clearly sees the work of this king.

It was expected that this king would come in humility. He would come in humility and do extraordinary things for his people. Zechariah longs for this humble one to come and work for the people of God.

Jesus fulfilled those expectations of humility. He came, taking on flesh, humbling Himself. He lived under the law. He was born and lived not as a prince of nations, but as a commoner. He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday on that donkey. He came to exalt Himself in death. He came to humble Himself under the weight of sin and be crushed in the place of sinners.

Jesus humbled Himself for you. This was what Zechariah had so desired. This is what sinners needed; what you needed. Jesus humbled Himself to take on your sins. He died in your place. He saved you.

Still He comes to you in humble means. Through water, bread, wine, and Word. He comes to you to forgive your sins and strengthen your faith. How blessed you are to expect your King to come to you in humility.

Prayer: Father, You promised to send Your Son to us in humility, and so Jesus took on flesh and rode into Jerusalem to die for my sins. I thank You for the redemption He won for me and that He still comes to me to forgive my sins. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 6 Great Expectations of Life**

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7.14)*

Life was to come. All was pale death before this Life. In this One was Life, and the Life was the light of men. Men had given up Life for death. Adam and Eve traded life with God for sin and sure death. Everyone born of woman since had been born with sin and under the curse of death.

But Life was coming. He was coming to trample on the head of the serpent and bring life to sinners. The virgin would conceive and bear a son, and call His name Immanuel. God would come. The I AM, the Life, would come to His own.

This was expected and necessary for sinners. Sin leads to death; eternal death. All born after Adam and Eve are sinners. All sin and all die. The Lord Himself must come; life must come to those in the valley of the shadow of death.

The Immanuel was born. The angels proclaim the great good news. The shepherds visit the manger. Magi from the east traveled to the house. The Christ has come! The life of men has arrived.

He is the one of God. Begotten from the Father from all eternity. Born of the virgin, overshadowed by the Spirit. He has no sin; He is life. Yet, He chooses to surrender that life. He gives His life for sinners. He takes their sin and their death. He suffers their punishment on a tree.

The life of the world dies that sinners would live. Jesus dies that you would live. He dies for your sins, He dies for you. Jesus has overturned your death. He brings you life and light. Expect this life and light to come!

He grants you life through the forgiveness of your sins through Baptism, Word, Supper. He gives freely to you the victory He has secured. It is yours! You have life, eternal life, through Him.

Prayer: Father, Your Son is the life and light of men, He has laid down His life for me on the tree and died for my sins, He forgives me even now through Word and Sacrament, grant me to live in His love eternally. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 7 Great Expectations of Resurrection**

*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. (Job 19.25)*

How can there be any resurrection? The natural order of things seems to be that death rules. How can the dead be raised? How can there be any hope for those whose skin has been thus destroyed? Death reigns as sin reigns.

Amid death Job has great expectations of resurrection. He feels the oppression of the evil one as his family and wealth have been taken away. What can his friends do or say to comfort him? As Job sits in sickness and sores, waiting to die, he has great hope of resurrection.

Job's hope runs through the Redeemer. This is the one who was to buy back sinners from death. He would satisfy the gaping mouth of death and the grave. He will fill it with His own death, buying back sinners with His death.

The Redeemer came. He did the work of redeeming sinners. He gave His life on the tree. This was expected. For sinners like Job salvation came. Jesus was rejected and hung on the cross. He suffered under the weight of the Father's wrath. He redeemed you, paying for your sins and your death.

Jesus stands over devil and death. He has conquered. He descends into hell on Easter Sunday, proclaiming victory in the camp of the enemy. He was raised, victor over death and grave. He has conquered.

His victory is given to you. Through His Word you are declared forgiven and granted this victory. Through the Means of Grace you are given this victory. You shall not die, but live, for He is the God of the living. He has redeemed you! This was the hope of Job and is the hope of sinners even still.

Prayer: Father, You have given Your Son to die on the tree, crushing Him under the weight of Your wrath against my sins that I would be forgiven. I thank You for bringing this forgiveness to me in my life that I would not die but live eternally. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 8      Great Expectations of Rejection**

*The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.* (Psalm 118.22-23)

Advent expects rejection. Amid the great hope and joy of the Christ promised and born, rejection looms large. The Old Testament foreshadows this rejection calling the Christ a man of sorrows (Is 53.3), Zechariah calls upon a sword to strike the shepherd (Zech 13.7), and Zephaniah reminds us that God has prepared a sacrifice (Zeph 1.7).

How often Jesus reminds us of this by teaching His disciples that He "must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again (Mark 8.31)." Jesus reminds His disciples this to show that He is no helpless victim. He goes willingly to the tree.

Advent, the coming of the Christ, expects this rejection. He must be rejected, He must suffer, He must die. This was what He was born to do and this He does for you.

Because your sins were so heinous before the Father and there was no way for you to make them up before God, the Christ came. He took on flesh for you. He lived the perfect life for you. He was rejected and died for you. He rose for you. He does this out of love for you.

The Old Testament people looked forward to this rejection of the Christ and we look back. We know our sins were put there, on Him at the tree. And now we are forgiven through His rejection. Because He was rejected we are accepted by the Father, forgiven through the Son. We stand as the redeemed children of God through the suffering of our Lord.

Knowing His rejection we know His love. He willingly died for you to bring you to the Father, that you would be with Him eternally.

Prayer: Father in heaven, You willed Your Son to be rejected in my place as He took my sins. Grant me to live in the forgiveness won by Jesus each day of my life, that I would love my neighbor as myself. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 9      Great Expectations of God with Us**

*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.* (Isaiah 7.14)

The Old Testament people knew that the one who was promised had to be great. He would have to deal with sin and repair the relationship between God and man. Who could do this thing? No mortal could save mankind. Someone unique, special, had to come.

Isaiah foresaw this. He foretold that a virgin would conceive and bear a son, and would be called Immanuel; that is God with us. God would come. Men could not restore the relationship; men had destroyed that relationship. Adam and Eve sinned in the garden. Since their sin each one of us was born with sin and has lived in sin.

That original sin, that we are born with, condemns each of us. We all are born enemies of God; sinners. From that very nature comes our actual sins, sins we commit daily in our life. We tear down the righteous law of God by our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds.

Your sin means that you cannot have a right relationship with God. He demands perfection and you sin continually. You do not love God with all your heart, mind, body. You do not love your neighbor as you sin. You bear the fruit of your nature, sin.

The virgin shall conceive and bear a son and call his name Immanuel. God must come! The Father sends His Son in time. At just the right time the Son is born. He is perfect as His Father. He keeps the law in your stead. He lives the perfect life to lay down His life for your sins. He is God with us.

Even more He is still God with us. He still comes to you through Word and Sacrament. He still grants you forgiveness of your sins. All this He does that you would be with Him forever. That He would be your Immanuel.

Prayer: Father, You have sent Your Son to take on Him my sin and pay the full price, I thank You that Jesus is with me even still. Grant me great comfort and joy knowing all that Jesus has done for me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 10          Great Expectations of Joy**

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. (Isaiah 9.2-3)*

The deep darkness of sin settled over the whole land. From each person the darkness of sin comes forth. Sin pervades the whole earth. For this reason, God destroyed the world with a flood. The judgment of God should be poured out upon sinners. There should be no light, no hope.

Yet, joy is promised. Even to those dwelling in the deep darkness of their sins! A great light shall come. Isaiah realizes that this light comes not from the kings nor the might of nations. This light is sent from God.

“The light shone in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it (John 1.3).” How contrary to appearances. The darkness seems to have won the day. It engulfed all people. It swallowed up the Christ. He came to seek and save the lost, but was rejected. He was betrayed, mocked, beaten, and crucified. Has not the darkness won?

Amid the deep darkness of Good Friday the light shone brightly. The Christ hung on the tree, paying for our sins. There was the light of the world! There was the joy that Isaiah foretold. Even more than joy before the harvest, even more than joy dividing spoil of war is the joy of the death of God.

Through His death sinners are saved. Sins are placed on the Christ and He pays the price. He takes the darkness in Himself and grants us light. In Him we have joy in this dark world. In Him we have joy amid pain and loss. In Him the darkness of death is turned to life. All this because He has died for you.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I live in the darkness of my sin, shine the light of Jesus' death upon me, forgive me my sins and grant me life eternal in the joy of paradise. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 11          Great Expectations of Love**

*We love because he first loved us.* (1 John 4.19)

Love must be acted upon someone else. Love cannot just stay in the heart, but must help and serve another. God is love and we should expect God to love.

God loves as He created the world. He gives all things to man and woman. He invites them to be fruitful and multiple and fill the earth. He gives them His perfect creation. He invites them to have a relationship with Him.

God loves as He promises to come and save humankind from sin. He loves as He continues to preserve the lineage of the Messiah and foreshadow His coming. God loves by coming to earth, being born of the virgin and taking on flesh.

God loves as He is baptized in the Jordan to take up your sin and fulfill your righteousness. He loves as He shows compassion on the crowds by healing, feeding, driving out demons, and raising the dead. He shows love by journeying to the tree. God knows what is coming, but in love He continues.

God loves by laying down His life for sinners. His love is action and acted upon another; you. He loves you to create you and to redeem you. His love for you is seen through what He does. We should expect God to love and He does.

God expects you to love. You know what He has done for you. You know how God has loved you. He has given you all you have and are and forgiven your sins. So love.

God expects you to love not because you must, but because you want to love. The Gospel should motivate you to love your neighbor as God has loved you. Love cannot just sit in your heart. You must show forth that love to others. Love must be given. So love because you have been loved.

Prayer: Father in heaven, I know how much Your Son has loved me as He took my sin and gave Himself for me on the tree, grant me to desire to love my neighbor and help in any way I can. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 12      Great Expectations of Harmony**

*May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus.* (Romans 15.5)

The harmony between God and man was broken in sin. God could not grant man to live in harmony. This is seen in the curse God placed on man, woman, and creation in Genesis 3. How could God put up with sinners? How could He have a relationship with them? The world had no harmony.

But harmony was expected. This relationship was promised to be restored. A Savior would come to bring harmony between God and man. This Savior would restore the relationship and forgive.

On the hills of Bethlehem the angels proclaimed this great news, peace between God and man. The Savior had come! Harmony would soon be restored. The Savior lived the perfect life. He promised to bring harmony between sinners and the Father.

This harmony was restored but not in the way sinners would have expected. The Savior died in the place of sinners. He took on Himself the sins of all and suffered our fate. He paid for our sins under the wrath of the Father. Through His death the harmony between God and man was restored.

We have peace with God through the forgiveness of our sins. We have peace with God through what the Savior, Jesus, has done. Our relationship with God is restored. Sinners can come before God to receive from Him mercy, life, and salvation.

But this is not just harmony between God and man, but between men. Having been forgiven through Jesus you have the privilege and joy of loving your neighbor as yourself. You get to help and support your neighbor. You get to pray for him and speak well of him. Harmony between men is restored through Jesus.

Prayer: Father in heaven, because of my sin I lost a relationship with You. You have sent Your Son to restore that harmony through His death. Grant me to rejoice in all You have done for me and live in harmony with my neighbors. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 13      Great Expectations of Death**

*He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." (Genesis 22.2)*

There were expectations of death. Ever since the first sin, it was expected that death would come. Death did come soon. Cain killed his brother Abel. Death came to all because all sinned. But God promised blessing and life to Abram. A son was promised and descendants numerous as the stars or grains of sand.

That son was born, Isaac, and all looked well for Abram. But death was expected. God told Abram to go to Moriah and sacrifice Isaac. What happened to those promises of life? What happened to all nations being blessed through this descendant? Isaac was as good as dead during that three-day journey to Moriah.

Abram bound his son to the altar and was about to strike before God stopped him. Isaac was given back, and a ram was sacrificed instead. Life won the day.

But still death was expected. The Father would give His only Son. It was expected that all nations would be blessed through this Son. The Son journeyed on as was the plan of the Father. He traveled to the tree. He was bound on the altar of the cross. This time there would be no substitute, no ram caught in the thicket. Jesus would die.

Through His death all nations would be blessed. Jesus was the sacrifice for sin, the willing victim. He paid completely for sin under the wrath of the Father. He was the sacrifice for your sins. There was no other way. All the blood of animals could not save you, nor would your own blood. Only the blood of Jesus, the perfect Son of God, could save. This was all expected by the Father, the death that Jesus died, that you would be saved.

Prayer: Father, You planned to send Your Son to die upon the cross for my sins. Grant me forgiveness through Him. I have great expectations of Your love and forgiveness granted me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 14      Great Expectations of Happiness**

*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." (Isaiah 52.7)*

Happiness was expected by Isaiah. Amid the wicked kings and the theological rebellion of the people Isaiah was being an optimist. Who would think that the dark days Isaiah lived through would ever lead to happiness. There was little good news being proclaimed. There was little hope of salvation. There were few worshiping, claiming, "Your God reigns."

But Isaiah was looking forward. He was looking toward the man of sorrows. That one who would be pierced for our transgression, stricken, smitten and afflicted. He would be crushed under the weight of sin and the wrath of the Father. How could this bring happiness? How could this be good news?

This man of sorrows would bring peace. He would bring, he would be, good news of happiness. He would publish salvation. All this Jesus came to accomplish. Amid the reign of sin and death Jesus was born. His birth brings happiness. The joy of God coming to His own for a specific purpose. This happiness is displayed through the miracles that Jesus performs and the way He treats sinners. He proclaims peace.

True happiness is found at the tree. What sinner would think that the torture of Jesus and His death could bring such joy? As Jesus is rejected, sin is paid for. Happiness and peace with God is granted. This happiness is located in the Word and Sacraments. As we receive the benefits of the death that Jesus died. This is good news! This is happiness! Our God reigns over sin and over death. We come to the Divine Service ready to be forgiven.

Prayer: Father in heaven, amid my sin and the gloom of this world You bring happiness unto me through all that Jesus has done. By His death I am forgiven and dwell in eternal joy. I praise You for your love to me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 15      Great Expectations of Reunion**

*And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. (Luke 15.20)*

The prodigal son from the parable (Luke 15.11-32) knew that the reunion would be a painful one. He had behaved badly... well worse than badly. He wanted his father dead. He had wasted all his father had given him. Now he had nothing. As he prepared to return home he prepared an apology as best he could.

But when he was a long way off his father saw him, almost as if he'd been waiting for his son to come back. The father ran to him, kissed him, and clothed him in forgiveness. The lost son was found, the dead son is now alive!

Jesus reminds us of the way it is between sinners and the Father. Sinners know how the reunion would go. On the Last Day what excuse could we offer for our sins? The Father knows them all and what could we say? We should be condemned to hell eternally. We should not be treated as His children.

But while we are far off from God, He runs to us. He humbles Himself for us and clothes us in undeserved forgiveness. He does this by sending Jesus to die in our place. Unexpected forgiveness is given to you before you do anything. It's Gospel; God working for you.

Now you live in the house of God as His child. You work, not under the law, but under grace from your Lord. Your work of serving your neighbor is not burdensome but a privilege. You bring Christ to those around you through word and deed. You are not on the outside looking in, but on the inside welcoming others to join. This joyful reunion continues in each Divine Service as Christ comes and forgives sinners, even you.

Prayer: Father, You have sent Your Son to die on the tree and grant me forgiveness. Through Jesus I am forgiven, I rejoice in the weekly reunion I have with my Savior. Grant me to be His witness in this dark world. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 16      Great Expectations of Fulfillment**

*My eyes long for your salvation and for the fulfillment of your righteous promise. (Psalm 119.123)*

In beautiful poetry the psalmist of Psalm 119 extols the virtues of the law of God. The psalmist loves the testimonies of the Lord and the psalmist rejoices in God's commandments. The Word of God is the psalmist's light by which he walks.

The commandments of God are so delightful because they reveal the character of God. God is holy and His law reflects His holiness. The psalmist delights in the holiness of God. The only way for the psalmist to know God is through His Word, that Word of law.

The psalmist desires the fulfillment of the Word of God. The delight of the people of God is the fulfillment of the Word of God and His promises. He promised to send a Messiah to fulfill the law in the stead of sinners. However much sinners delight in the law of God they cannot fulfill it.

Sinners sin and the Messiah was promised for sinners. He would come, delighting in the law of God, fulfilling the will of the Father. This one would write beautiful poetry amid suffering and death. He would delight in the law to take sins upon Himself and pay the full price under the just demands of the law. He would pay for the sins of all sinners.

How sinners long for the fulfillment of the Word of God. We live on the other side of the cross than the Psalmist, but still we long for fulfillment. The Christ has come. He has paid for our sin. He has given us forgiveness through Baptism. But still there is fulfillment to come.

The Christ has promised to come back. He has promised to perfect our bodies and grant us life eternal in the glory of heaven. How our eyes long for the fulfillment of the promises of our Lord!

Prayer: Father in heaven, You have given me Your law that I would know Your character and see my sins, grant me to understand my failure under the law and delight in the fulfillment of Your promises accomplished by Jesus upon the tree, still I long for the fulfillment of your Word on that Last Day. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 17      Great Expectations of Contentment**

*For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12.10)*

When the Christ came the people of God should have been content. He was the one expected; the one the people were searching for through the generations. He would bring peace with God, restore our relationship with the Father, and grant eternal life. How could sinners not be content when the Christ comes?

Paul reminds us, who live on this side of Good Friday, to be content. Paul was content living amid the weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. He was content to be weak. Paul could be content because he knew what Jesus had done for him. For Paul, Jesus was weak upon the tree, taking all of Paul's sin and paying the full price. Jesus rose for Paul and lived for Paul. He came to Paul and forgave him granting new life in Jesus. Paul could be content.

Paul knew that his weaknesses drew him closer to Jesus. The weaker he was the more he would need to rely on Jesus. The weaker he was the more he knew he needed God's Word and prayer. The weaker he was the closer he was to his crucified Lord. Paul located his contentment not in what he was feeling or experiencing, but in what Jesus had done for him.

Paul teaches us to be content. We locate our contentment in Jesus and what He has done. Has Jesus not died for you? Has He not fulfilled all the promises and come to save you? Has he not forgiven you your sins? Does He not give you this gift so often through the Divine Service? You can be content in Christ Jesus even as Paul was.

Paul used his suffering to draw closer to Jesus. You use your suffering to draw closer to Jesus also. Amid suffering be in the Word. When difficulty comes receive the Supper. Be content repenting of sin and receiving Jesus.

Prayer: Father, amid all the turmoil of this world I am content in Jesus, He has worked my salvation for me and grants it to me freely, I am content in His work. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 18      Great Expectations of Shepherds**

*“And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.” (Jeremiah 3.15)*

Shepherds lead the sheep. The whole house of Israel acted like sheep. They followed, often blindly, wherever the shepherd led them. The shepherds, the leaders, in Jeremiah's day were leading the sheep of Israel to false gods and false security.

The worship of false gods would lead the true God to bring judgment in the form of the Babylonian army to destroy His people. God would bring shepherds after His own heart. Those shepherds would give the people the law of God to direct them back to God and right worship. Those faithful shepherds were the prophets.

Even more, Ezekiel longed for that one righteous shepherd to come. “I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD (Ezekiel 34.15).” God would come. How much better would it be for God to come, Himself!

This was expected. God would come. He would lead His people. He would give them law and Gospel. He would worship rightly. And so Jesus spoke, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10.11).” Jesus is that Shepherd promised. He told the people the law, reminding them of sin. He gave them Himself (the Gospel). He fed and nourished sinners with the knowledge and understanding of what He has done.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, laid down His life for the sheep. For those wayward sinners, the perfect Son of God gave His life. The Shepherd paid the price for the sins of the sheep. He paid the price for your sins.

The Good Shepherd leads you to the verdant pastures of His Word and Sacrament that you would worship rightly. That you would confess your sins and receive the death of the good shepherd.

Prayer: Father in heaven, You have given me a Good Shepherd, one who has laid down His life for my sins, grant me to realize my need for Jesus and receive Him who has died for me, grant me also to remind others of all Jesus has done. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 19      Great Expectations of Sadness**

*Thus says the LORD: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." (Jeremiah 31.15)*

There was loud lamentation and bitter weeping. The people were destroyed by Babylon. God had left them, and they were no more. The army of Babylon swept in and destroyed Jerusalem. All that Jeremiah had foretold had happened.

These same words were remembered by Matthew. When Herod realized he was tricked by the magi, who sought Jesus, he became furious. He had all the male children in Bethlehem two years old and younger killed. There was loud lamentation and bitter weeping.

Sadness accompanies the coming of the Christ. It is a reminder of the sort of world that Jesus is entering. The Christ comes to a world full of sin where every inclination of the hearts of men are only evil continually. Jesus enters a world of death and destruction. And this is why Jesus comes.

He comes to overturn death and bring hope to the hopeless. He comes to grant peace with God to sinners. He comes amid the sadness of this world to bring true hope. Such hope is found in what Jesus does for us.

Jesus, true God, takes on flesh. He lives the perfect life. He is beset with sorrow and tragedy on every side. He is tempted by the evil one continually, yet He sets His face to go to Jerusalem. There He offers His perfect life for sinners. Amid the sadness of that Good Friday great hope is found!

Jesus gives sinners hope through His death. He takes the punishment meant for us. He pays the price! He gives hope covering us with His victory. Our worst enemies are defeated through His cross and resurrection.

Prayer: Father, Your Son has come and defeated sin for me. He grants me eternal life through my Baptism into Him. Grant me to trust Jesus that I live in great hope amid the sadness of this world. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 20      Great Expectations of Turning**

*"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." (Malachi 4.5-6)*

It was expected that sinners would turn to God. But how could this be? How could sinners turn to God? Steeped in sin they could never turn to God. Would this Elijah be able to convince them?

Throughout the Old Testament the buildup of excitement about the coming Christ was real. He is coming! He will redeem His people! Malachi prophecies that this Elijah would come first and turn the hearts of the people.

John the Baptizer was that Elijah. He prepared sinners for the coming Christ. His birth in Luke's Gospel reminds us that the Christ is coming and coming soon. As John stood in the Jordan river baptizing for repentance he prepared sinners for the coming Christ. That Christ would come and be baptized to fulfill all righteousness.

John reminds us how to prepare the way for the Christ. That is to use the law rightly. To show ourselves our sin through the mirror of the law. To acknowledge our sin and admit who we are for the Christ has come for the sick, not the healthy. John reminds us to turn from our sin to the Christ.

The Christ took on Himself our sin. He paid the full price on the tree. John points to this as he sent his disciples to the Christ. See the person and work of the Christ, Jesus. He is true God, that is, the sufficient sacrifice; He is true man, that is, able to die. Turn from your sin to the Christ- repent.

Jesus takes your sins and grants you forgiveness. He turns your condemnation into forgiveness. By the turning of the Father's wrath on the Christ you are forgiven. As you turn to God in sorrow over sin you are assured that you are forgiven.

Prayer: Father, I know my sins before You, I have broken Your holy law, I am sorry, forgive me and grant me eternal life not by my works but through the work of Jesus the Christ. In His Name. Amen.

## **December 21            Great Expectations of Affliction**

*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.* (Isaiah 53.4)

Shouldn't the Christ bring good things? Should not there be peace on earth and good will toward men? Yet, Isaiah calls Him afflicted. The Christ would carry our sorrows and bear our griefs. He would be stricken and smitten by God. Is this how it should be?

This is not what sinners want. Sinners do not want the Christ to suffer because that means our sins are that bad. The consequence of sin is eternal suffering, eternal death, in hell. This price must be paid, and the Christ comes to pay that price. He must, *must*, suffer.

The Christ brings affliction. He will be hated, rejected, and afflicted with your sin. He comes to bear your sins upon the tree. He comes to be afflicted with your punishment. So count the cost of your sins and see the price paid by the Christ. He suffers each one of your sins for you.

Does this not afflict you? Should not your sins afflict you under the law of God? Do they mean so little that you feel nothing as you sin? Repent of your sins. Repent of your sinful nature. The Christ comes to be afflicted for you because your sins are that bad and there is no other way to obtain your salvation.

The Christ is afflicted and dies in your place, the willing substitute, that you are forgiven. You may have certainty that your sins are paid for through the death that Jesus died. His affliction means your salvation. You need not be eternally afflicted with your sins for He was afflicted in your stead.

Now the Christ brings good things to you. He brings you forgiveness, life, and salvation through His Word and Means of Grace. These are yours freely given! Even while you are afflicted with suffering in this world you are assured of your salvation.

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son was afflicted on the tree for me and on account of my sins, grant me forgiveness from the riven side of Jesus and wash away my sins, grant me eternal life in the glories of paradise. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 22            Great Expectations of Silence**

*Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.* (Isaiah 42.1-4)

The Messiah would be silent. He would not lift up His voice or make it heard in the street. But the voice of Jesus contained such power. While the storm raged, He slept. Jesus slept until woken amid the fear of the disciples, then He spoke and calmed the storm. Powerful demons met Him but fled as Jesus said but a word. Even death could not stop Him, "Lazarus, come out."

But Isaiah sees this servant as one who would not speak. On Thursday as Jesus was before Pilate and Herod and then Pilate again, He did not speak. Like a lamb before it's shearers He is silent. He goes willingly on. Faithfully He would bring forth justice.

This justice would be the wrath of God met by His love upon the tree. Justice is done over against sin. Sin is judged on this servant and He is punished in the place of sinners. Where are His complaints that this treatment is not fair? Where are His loud objections? He remains silent. Saying, in weakness, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

It was expected that the coming Christ would be silent. In humility He died in silence on the tree. But He remains silent no longer! He speaks you clean. That powerful word that stopped storms, drove out demons, and raised the dead is spoken to you. It creates life in you and grants you forgiveness.

So you, do not remain silent. Speak of what the Christ has done for you. He has died for you and granted a sinner like you forgiveness.

Prayer: Father, Your Son willingly was the silent victim paying for my sins at the tree, grant me voice to speak and sing your praises that others would know all that You have done for me. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 23            Great Expectations of Good News**

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound. (Isaiah 61.1)*

The Christ would be anointed to bring good news to the poor. He would bind up the broken hearted and proclaim liberty to the captives. He would open the prison to those bound. That sounds like quite a task! But it was expected for the Christ to do.

Jesus was anointed with your sin through His baptism in the Jordan by John. He was anointed to take up your sins and live the perfect life in your place. Is this not good news for the poor? Someone has come to help! Where sinners could do nothing about their sins this one can and does!

He binds up the broken hearted and proclaims liberty to the captives. He binds up our sins and pays the full price for them on the tree. This was why He was anointed with your sin, to pay for it. He binds you up in forgiveness through Baptism, He washes you clean. Through His death you receive life! This is proclaimed to you through the Word and the Sacraments. This is *given* to you through the Word and Sacraments. It is yours!

He comes to open the prison for those who were bound. He does this through His death. Through His death the prison of your sins is gone. That which dragged you down to hell is no more. You are set free! See how death could not hold Him. He burst forth from the tomb on Easter. Death has no more power over you either. You are set free through His victory over sin and death.

It was expected that the Christ would do all this. He has. He has died for you and gives you forgiveness through His Word and Sacraments. It is yours freely in Christ Jesus.

Prayer: Father, I rejoice that the Christ was expected to come and set me free from all sin and from eternal death. I thank You for sending Jesus to do all this for me, grant me to live in Jesus eternally. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 24            Great Expectations of the Christ**

*For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. (Zechariah 3.9)*

The Christ would come. It was foretold; it was promised. But what would this Christ do? He would not be a moral teacher, He would not come to encourage people, He would not come to give ease and wealth. Zechariah tells us what the Christ would do: He would be engraved with sin.

Sin would be written upon Him. He would take the sin of the land on a single day upon Himself. He would be engraved with sin, it would be written on Him and He would pay for sin. He was the stone with seven eyes (all seeing- seeing your sin), the stone the builders rejected. He would remove the sin of sinners.

Zechariah expected the Christ to do all this to save sinners. And so, the Christ has done it. He was engraved with the sin of sinners; engraved with your sin. Your sins were written on Jesus, the Christ, at the tree. The Father wrote on His Son your sins. Jesus took them in His body on the cross and paid the full price. What price? He paid for your sins with His perfect life.

You are forgiven. Your sins were written on Jesus and paid for. They are no longer yours but His, and He grants you His righteousness. Jesus fulfills the expectations of the Old Testament people. Their expectations were the promises the Son delivered to them from the Father. The Father promised that the Christ would accomplish the forgiveness of sins. This is yours for the Christ was engraved with your sins. You are forgiven!

Prayer: Father in heaven, Your Son was engraved with my sins upon the tree, You wrote them all upon Him and Jesus paid the full price for my sins. Grant me forgiveness through Jesus and grant me to live as Your child. In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

## **December 25      Great Expectations of Jesus**

*And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. (Luke 2.7)*

Was this what was expected? Was it expected that Jesus, God's Son, would be born in a small town? Was it expected that God's Son would be born in a stable and laid in a manger? Was it expected that there would be no place for Him or His parents at any inn?

The Father expected this. The Father had planned this before time began. He knew that He would send His Son for sinners to save them from their sins. He knew this as He willed all creation into being. He knew this as He rested on the seventh day and made it holy.

The Son expected this. He expected this as He did the will of the Father by creating. He knew this as He rested on the seventh day for He would rest, dead, on the seventh day. He knew this as the Father sent Him time and time again to the people of the Old Testament to promise to come.

The Spirit expected this. The Spirit waited to bring the Son as He waited for the Son to complete the work of creation. He pointed to the Son time and again for the Old Testament people. He expected all this as the Son was born in time and the Spirit waited to bring the Son to sinners.

The triune God knew. It was the will of the Father that His Son would come. And so, the Son, Jesus, was born. His humble birth reminds us of the way He will die. He comes to serve not to be served. He comes to suffer for sins of sinners. Therefore, the Son takes on flesh; to give that flesh on the tree for you.

The Son is born for you. This marks the beginning of His state of humiliation. He humbles Himself for you. He lives for you and He dies for you. He is raised to life on the third day for you. This was expected by the Father for He knew what you needed. Because of your sins you needed a Savior. So, Jesus was born for you.

Prayer: Father, I thank You for sending Your Son in flesh, I rejoice that Jesus gave Himself on the tree for my sins, wash me again with His forgiveness. In His Name. Amen.