

What Do You Expect to See and Hear? December 11, 2022

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Advent is a season of preparation. And along with that preparation comes an eager anticipation and joyful expectation. So, on this third Sunday in Advent, Gaudete Sunday, with two more weeks till Christmas, we take a look at what we expect, not only during the season of Advent but also at Christmas. Because, while much of the world's expectations are centered around getting the best gift, or the most gifts, or the perfect gift, the reality is that worldly expectations often come with disappointment. There really is no gift or present in this world that can truly satisfy all our needs. However, the true gift of joy is Christ our Savior, and the salvation He brings to us by faith.

In last week's Gospel reading, we heard about John the Baptist out in the wilderness and calling people to repentance. But in this week's reading, he is in prison and is near the end of his life. He had been doing the work of the kingdom, calling people to repentance—calling out even Herod, who ruled over Galilee for the Romans, to repent. But when Herod heard it, he had John thrown in prison. John was no longer able to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near." And he was no longer able to baptize.

So, while being in prison, John the Baptist sent word by his disciples to Jesus. He asked Jesus, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" This might seem a little odd because John had proclaimed Jesus to be the very Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And he

had testified, that Jesus is the Savior, the Light of the world. So, we might expect him to send a message like, “Get me out of here soon!”

But then again, sitting in prison, most likely isolated from other believers, John the Baptist might have begun to have doubts. He may have envisioned something different and might have been wondering if this was all there was to his life—whether he preached the message that he was called by God. And, of course, he did!

We too might have doubts from time to time as well. Because Satan uses doubt to tempt us, just like he did in the Garden when he said to Eve, “Did God really say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” Not only Satan but the world also uses doubt to get us to behave a different way or believe in something different so that it might better control our thoughts and actions. And even our own sinful nature uses doubt to get us to believe that God could not possibly fulfill all that He has promised to us.

While John was isolated and alone in prison, he sent his disciples to Jesus. Today, we do not have to send someone else to ask Jesus questions on our behalf. Instead, as individual believers, we can boldly and confidently ask Jesus directly through prayer. Because God not only invites us to pray to Him anytime and anywhere, but He promises to hear us. And, He promises to answer all our prayers, according to His will.

Our Lord Jesus answered John, saying to John’s disciples, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up” (v.5a). Miracle upon miracle. Because Jesus is not just a carpenter’s son. He is not

just Mary's son, or just someone from Nazareth. Jesus is the very Son of God! And there's even more, because "the good news is preached to the poor" (v.5b).

While people could see, hear, and walk again, and the dead were even raised to life, the greatest miracle of all was that the Good News of God's Kingdom was being preached to the poor, especially to all those who are poor in spirit. They, along with all of us, can rejoice because not only did the Word of God go out from John's mouth, but God's Word did not stop going out when Herod threw John in prison. God's powerful message continued to be shared through His own Son, Jesus. And, as He says in our text, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me" (v.6).

As John's disciples returned, Jesus asked the crowds, "What did you go out to see? A Prophet? Yes, more than a prophet" (v.9). And He goes on to testify to them about John the Baptist, "This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you. Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet he who is the least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he" (v.10-11).

John was the last of God's Old Testament prophets that foretold of Jesus' coming because there are no other prophets between John and Jesus. So, why do you suppose Jesus said that even the least is greater than him in the Kingdom of Heaven? While some might say that John was under the old covenant, we might remember our baptism, how having faith like a little child, even like that of little Hailey who was baptized this morning, makes us ready and prepared for the Kingdom of God.

Because, while we might feel that they have a strong faith or at times maybe a weak faith, the most important thing is that we have saving faith. Knowing and believing, by the Grace of God, that Christ is our Savior, and that He has covered all our sins. And while we might strengthen our faith by studying the Word of God, it is by His Grace that we receive saving faith. And while we might not want to put ourselves in the same category as John the Baptist, we are all sinners who are saved by His Grace, because of that miracle of miracles, which we call the Good News.

So, what do you expect to see or hear, as we prepare for the coming of our Lord? While some of you might anticipate and even expect lots of presents under the tree at Christmas, the true gift of joy is Christ our Savior, and the salvation He brings to us by faith. He is the light who comes into the world. And you can expect to hear God's message of salvation continue to be proclaimed here at Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church. Because it is by His Grace, that His light comes to dwell in our hearts, that His light might be seen in our lives and shine out into the world around us.

And while doubt can creep into our lives from time to time, we have the joy of knowing that we can reach out to God through prayer and expect that He answers our prayers according to His will. Because, Christ died for all our sins, and He is interceding for us, so that we can look forward in faith with an eager anticipation and joyful expectation when we, along with all those loved by God, will see Him face to face in the joys of paradise.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.