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Luke 1:26-32
Slow Down, Pay Attention: David

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Luke 1:26-33 New Revised Standard Version

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.  And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.  He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

There is so much to do before Christmas. Decorations to put out, cookies to make, presents to buy, cards to send. There is so much preparation for Christmas, so much expectation. It is important to remember that when you have expectations, you are sure to have disappointment. Maybe you don’t get what was on your list. Or your family dinner didn’t go as you expected. Christmas has all of these expectations.

This will be the year that we won’t spend too much money. Or this will be the year that we will be refueled and ready for the new year. Or this will be the year that God will do something to us. Or this will be the year that we will be able to let all the worry and the stress go and simply enjoy.

Every year it isn’t Christmas for me until I am holding my candle and singing Silent Night. Then it is Christmas. How many people are holding their candle and they aren’t able to enjoy the moment, they don’t feel God’s presence, they are too worried about the next thing. We expect certain things of things, of the world, even of God. We have all of these expectations, and where there are expectations there are disappointments. Even when it comes to God, we have all of these expectations and where there are expectations, there are disappointments. The key to happiness may be low expectations. Low expectations of ourselves, low expectations of others, maybe even low expectations of God.

There is one character in the Christmas story who teaches us about expectations. It is a guy who was dead about 1000 years before Jesus was born. It is King David. You remember him, the one who killed Goliath? The one chosen to be King of Israel, the most powerful King of Israel. He wasn’t perfect, he sinned in big ways, especially with Bathsheba and her husband Uriah who David had killed. David is the most famous, most written about person in all of the Old Testament.

David is not usually associated with Christmas. If you read the Christmas story in Matthew and Luke, Mary’s name is mentioned the most. David’s name is mentioned the second most. We hear David’s name mentioned in our scripture for today. READ SCRIPTURE. A little farther along in Luke 2:2-4 we hear these words, “In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.  All went to their own towns to be registered.  Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.” And then we have the angel appearing to the shepherds, “The angel angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” (Luke 2:10)

The son of David, to receive the throne of David, in the city of David, to come from the house and the family of David. For a guy who has been dead for a 1000 years, his name appears in the Christmas story a lot. Why? Why do the writers of Luke and Matthew want to remind us of David when we are talking about the birth of Jesus? David’s story is found in the 1 and 2 Samuel and in 2 Samuel 7:12 we hear a promise that God makes David. “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.”

For the next 1000 years, the people of Israel held onto this promise. David’s line is going to continue forever. Jerusalem would stand forever. God is with us and God is not going to give up on us. That was true for about 400 years, until it wasn’t true anymore. The Babylonians came in 587 B.C. and the King went into exile and the city and the temple were destroyed. God didn’t do what they had expected God to do, but the people still believed in the promise. One day an anointed one would come back and throw off the rulers of Israel, and they would rebuild the temple and they would rule over their own kingdom again. Year after year, for 600 years, God did not do what the people had expected God to do. Until 600 years later in this small town of Nazareth when the angel came to Mary and said these words, “And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.  He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.”

This is it. For 1000 years the people had been waiting, and now it is here. All the hope that people had in what God would do, God is finally doing it. And then Jesus is born in the middle of nowhere, to an unwed mother. God didn’t do what people expected God to do. And then Jesus grew up and went about teaching and preaching and eating with tax collectors and sinners. That is not what we expected God to do. Jesus marched into Jerusalem and instead of overthrowing the government and setting up a kingdom, he died on a cross. This is not what we expected God to do.

David reminds us that God made promises and God keeps God’s promises, but not in the way that people expect. God does what God says God is going to do, but not in the time that we think it ought to be done, not in the way that we think it ought to be done. God gives us what we need, but not always in the way we want.

David teaches us about expectations. I have a lot of expectations. I have expectations about how my children should behave and act and respond in any given situation. I have expectations about how people should drive. I have expectations of my coworkers and what they should be doing. I have expectations of you as church members as to what you should do and what you should care about. I have expectations about how everything in the world ought to work.

Life would be so much easier if the world would work the way that I expect it to work. Life would be so much easier if people would act the way that I expect them to act. But the world doesn’t work that way. And people don’t work that way. I would venture to say that all of us have expectations about how the world should work and how people should respond. Expectations are a way to control what we want, and what we desire, and what we think ought to be true.

David reminds us that we do the same thing when it comes to God. We have expectations of God and instead of waiting to see what God would do in our lives, instead of being open to what direction God is nudging us, we approach God with a list. We come to God with a set of requests about what we would like to be true in our life. We go to God with our predetermined plan for life and ask God to make it come true. We come to God with ideas about where we ought to be and what we want to accomplish and we ask God to bless us in getting there.

And then God doesn’t follow our plan for life or give us the things that are on our list, and we get disappointed, we get frustrated, and sometimes we even stop believing in God all together. David reminds us that Jesus isn’t Santa Claus. You don’t get to bring God a list of what you want and God brings it to you on Christmas morning. Jesus isn’t magic. Jesus isn’t a genie in a bottle where you rub it and your wishes and desires come true.

God in Christ came into the world to fix and redeem and forgive and reconcile. God in Christ did not come to grant us our wishes. God in Christ did not come to fulfill what we want to be true or to make real our plan for life. God is not us, but God in Christ is present with us and always with us.

David in the Christmas story reminds us that God shows up but not in the way that people expect. God did something world-altering in Jesus. Jesus was the one that was hoped for, Jesus was the Messiah, Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise. But in God’s way, not our way.

We have so many expectations of Christmas, about what we are going to get, and how it is going to go, and what we are going to feel. David reminds us that Jesus is a Messiah on God’s terms not ours. There was this song about twenty-five years ago by country singer Garth Brooks called, “Unanswered prayers.” The chorus said, “Sometimes I thank God for unanswered prayers. That just because God doesn’t answer doesn’t mean God doesn’t care. Some of God’s greatest gifts are unanswered prayers.” Unanswered prayers are not a sign of God’s absence from your life. Waiting is not a sign of God’s abandonment. If you are hurting, or grieving, or sad, if you don’t feel any joy, it is not a sign of God’s disfavor. If life is not going as you thought it would, it is not a sign that God is not real.

Our expectations are still there, but when we have expectations, we are sure to have disappointment. It is not going to work out as we hope. Life will not go exactly as we had planned. Normally when we feel out of control, we try to hold on with everything that we have. I hope today we will open our hands and hearts and be more open to receive God’s presence with us right now. We can let go of the control that we want to have in telling God how we want God to save us and bless us in our life.

It is so easy to clench our fists and to close our eyes and to try and hold on tight. It is so easy to want to be in control and to tell God how we want our life to go. This Christmas may we open our hands and be more open to receive God’s presence with us right now. May this be the posture of our hearts this season. May our open hands be a reminder that whatever happens, God is with us. May we be open to receive whoever God puts in our life without an expectation of who that person is. May we be open to respond to a call that God places on our life without an expectation of what that call will be. Today is a day of new beginnings and God can forgive us and give our life meaning and purpose and direction. I invite us to open our hands as a reminder that we are open to God today, with the only expectation that God will show up. We know this because God is already there. Thanks be to God, Amen.