

ADVENT II MIDWEEK
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ADVENT EXPECTATIONS

Intro. It was too quiet in the house. Elizabeth was all alone. She had been married for many years, but her husband was a priest and it was his appointed time to serve in the temple, so he had left her for a time to go to Jerusalem. Her father was also a priest who had done the same thing. So it wasn't like she wasn't used to it, but she was still alone. Other women would have their children and grandchildren to keep them company at home, but not Elizabeth. That blessing had been denied her. And she had accepted that fact over the years. But she no doubt did wonder what would happen to her in her old age. Children were the Social Security of the ancient world. But Elizabeth didn't have that safety net and neither did she have the joy of spending her time with her children and grandchildren. I wonder how Elizabeth and her husband had struggled with their infertility. I wonder how often had Elizabeth prayed to the Lord as Hannah did in the Old Testament (1 Samuel). Did Elizabeth ever cry out with the anguish of Rachel 'Give me children, Lord, or I shall die' (Gen. 30). Or was Elizabeth more like Old Testament Sarah (Gen. 18) simply resigned to the sad truth that she was never to be a mother. My brother Jim and his wife Jane haven't been able to have children due to the fact Jim was in the Vietnam War and affected by the poison, Agent Orange. It seems unfair because Jim and Jane would have made such great parents. My wife's sister Sue and her husband Duane didn't have children for years though they wanted kids. Than after many years of marriage along came our nephew Ben, a surprise for whom we teased Duane about immaculate conception. The sadness came when Duane was crushed to death a few years ago in a machinery accident, leaving Sue to raise their long expected son as a single parent. God's ways are certainly not our ways. One thing we do know about Elizabeth she didn't give in to bitterness or anger at not having a child. Luke describes her as upright. Elizabeth lived the life that she had in the faithfulness of God, expecting God's will be done. Soon the day came for Zechariah to return home. Elizabeth no doubt tidied up the house and probably fixed a nice meal. She was ready to see and talk to her husband. But when he returned, Zechariah couldn't speak. He seemed excited about something and made gestures but she couldn't make sense of what he was trying to say. Can you imagine her surprise when shortly after this, she became pregnant? She probably thought of all kinds of explanations for the symptoms, but not pregnant. Against all odds Elizabeth was with child. For the next 5 months, she stayed in seclusion away from other people. Perhaps it was so that she wouldn't have to explain over and over again about

her miracle pregnancy. But in her heart Elizabeth knew, the Lord was working. She broke her seclusion when another pregnant woman visited her. Her relative Mary came to stay with her, both Elizabeth and the baby in her womb were filled with the Holy Spirit. Elizabeth was learning a life's lesson, which we're never too old to learn: **God's grace will always exceed our human expectations!** And that is what I want to talk to you about a little bit this Advent service.

I. What are you expecting for Christmas? Advertisers spend a lot of time and money at this time of year, hoping that people will 'expect' their products.

If we buy into all that media hype, our expectations are easily disappointed. Some are disappointed when the perfect gift isn't waiting for them under the perfectly decorated Christmas tree. Some even know a deeper disappointment when they put their hope in other people. This will be the year that things are different. Maybe this year we will have that perfect 'Home for Christmas' holiday, all the relatives will behave themselves and they won't push each other's buttons. But what happens? Other people fail our expectations again and again and again this year. Or perhaps you are expecting something different from yourself this season. This Christmas I'll do better. I'll stay within my budget. I won't give into those temptations of all that calorie food and keep to my diet. But how do these expectations of ourselves turn out? No different than our expectations of other people. Because we are all sinners who fail each other and ourselves time and time again.

II. Thinking about all of these expectations, it seems to me we easily become like Elizabeth. We may settle for the expected. I don't want to be disappointed, so I will set my expectations low. The less I expect from others and from myself and even from God, the happier I will be. And you know, this attitude actually may be commendable if we are really satisfied with what we've been given. But generally what can appear to be satisfaction with life's expectations is actually concealing a much different attitude. I'm expecting to be disappointed, so I won't be so disappointed. But then aren't we just caving in to plain ole' cynicism and skepticism? Aren't we guilty then of settling for failure – when we don't have to?

You know I can understand that attitude when it comes to dealing with other people they do disappoint us or I understand that attitude when it comes to dealing with ourselves we disappoint ourselves and other people, but do we need to bring that same attitude to our expectations with our God? What should we expect from God?

III. Well first of all as cynical, skeptical sinners we should expect God's judgment and condemnation for our sins. We complain about any adversity and feel sorry for ourselves when we face any problems

failing to see we're the root of those adversities and problems most of the time. We try to pretend that others are worse sinners than we are and think somehow we aren't as sinful as the other guy, so we set expectations of others which we think we are able to keep.

But when we measure ourselves to God's perfect expectations of His Law and not our own self made expectations, we see what we all truly are: sinners. Whom shouldn't expect any blessings or favor from God, only His condemnation and punishment. But that's what makes God's grace so awesome. As the theme of my message said God's grace will always exceed all of our expectations. God's grace loves us even as the sinners we are. Not because of who we think we are or what we think we have done, but because of who God is = our Savior, our Jesus. When we know Jesus, God incarnate, born of the Virgin Mary to be our Substitute we can actually expect to receive far greater than we could ever expect to receive. Because of Jesus we can expect to receive forgiveness, salvation, love, resurrection, life, full life = eternal life.

God's grace truly does exceed all human expectations!

IV. Elizabeth had resigned herself to what she thought was her fate: she would be childless. But the God of grace and blessings, our same God, caused Elizabeth to conceive. Despite her old age, despite the age of her husband Elizabeth became pregnant and bore whom we know as John the Baptizer. Elizabeth herself was a testimony that God could and God does work miracles far beyond what we expect. But God did not stop there. When Mary came to visit Elizabeth, by the power of God the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth and the baby in her womb were some of the first human beings to recognize and greet the incarnate Savior of the world, our Savior, Jesus = the greatest unexpected gift of God's grace. You and I, being the sinners we are should expect to receive nothing from God, but God's eternal damnation in hell. But God's gracious gifts continue to exceed our human expectations. In stead of God's wrath and condemnation and damnation we receive grace upon grace upon grace. Instead of rejection from God we receive love and acceptance and mercy and forgiveness time and time again. Instead of eternal punishment, we receive Jesus' vicarious punishment for us upon the cross where He took our sin and suffering and death and gave us His forgiveness, assurance and life. And still God keeps on giving freely and graciously. We can expect to receive God's grace absolutely every day of our lives. We can expect to receive day by day God's Means of Grace, His Word and Sacrament, into our empty hand of faith like Elizabeth received a baby in her empty, old womb.

Conclusion What are you expecting for Christmas? I'd love to say all your expectations will be met. And actually they will be! If your expectations are in other people or in yourself, you can expect and will be

greatly disappointed and should expect to become cynical and skeptical. But when it comes to our Lord and Savior Jesus, you can expect something totally different and it will not cause you to become cynical and skeptical with God. You can expect Jesus' love, Jesus' grace, Jesus' mercy, Jesus' forgiveness. As Elizabeth learned:

God's grace will always far exceed our human expectations. Amen