

**Isaiah 9:1-7
Matt. 1:18-25**

Dec. 24, 2017 10AM

**Advent “Hope”
Expectations**

What do you hope for at Christmas? ... When I was a child I hoped to get toys, treats. Later on I expected maybe clothing ... I doubt that has changed much for children today. I also expected a Christmas tree with lights, cookies and home-made candy that my mom made only during Christmas season. What are your expectations for Christmas?

Expectations Past

The faithful of Israel had hope in God and many expected a Messiah – a Savior who would free them from oppresion and brokenness. Their expectations colored their hope with visions of a great and mighty warrior king, looking back to an era when Israel was powerful and a player among the nations. In Jesus’ day Israel was a shadow of what it had been in previous eras. Rome was the dominant power of the day and many in Israel wished to be free of Roman rule. It would be a miracle.

Yet, most people, Jew, Greek, Roman, and others mostly didn’t expect life to change dramatically. They expected tomorrow to be pretty much like yesterday.

Expectations Today

Recently, I did an internet search for “Christmas Expectations” and the first page showed up with these at the top: *Harry & David’s Christmas Shopping; ManCrates – Awesome Gifts For Guys And Men; Best Gift Ideas of 2017; Candy Hunter*. Maybe Christmas expectations haven’t changed a lot. Christmas is loaded with expectations, isn’t it? ... shopping, decorating and entertaining. Some of us knock ourselves out trying to make it the “perfect” Christmas, despite that nagging feeling that the perfect Christmas is happening in someone else’s house, not our own. During this season of peace on earth, good will toward others what prevails in your household? What are your expectations for Christmas? [Perhaps you’re hoping that this year your children will be cheerful, patient, cooperative, and thoughtful of others; or that they won’t be pulling ornaments off the Christmas tree and opening presents saying, “I already have this.” If that’s how they are from January to November, you might have a shot at it in December. Otherwise you’re asking for a miracle.]

Christmas is packed with expectations for most of us. But does anyone expect something significantly different to happen ... like real changes in our world, or our community, or in our lives? How about peace in the Middle East? That’d be a miracle. The end of injustices, end of human trafficking, religious persectiion, racism, terrorism, wide spread abortion, drug and alcohol addictions

... I'm sure you can think of other things. Ending all that stuff sounds like it'd take a miracle.

Most everyone will arise the day after Christmas expecting it to be like any other day. Technology has changed, but changes in human relationships ... not so much. It seems that people go on acting, speaking, living in predictable ways.

Expecting a Miracle

One of my favorite Christmas movies is "Miracle on 34th Street." It's about a little girl of a single mom, who wishes she had a dad and a nice home. She meets Santa Claus at Macy's and this man insists he really is Santa Claus – he calls himself Kris Kringle. Mom and little girl are skeptical. Santa is taken to the mental hospital and there is a trial regarding his identity. Long story short, the Post Office redirects all the letters to Santa to the courthouse where Kris is on trial. With this evidence the judge declares him the real Santa. And on Christmas day the little girl, her mom, and mom's boyfriend follow a note left by Kris. The note leads them to a house given to them for their home. It's like a miracle...

That's what Christmas really is: a miracle from God, that would change the world and life ... change for the better. It was a miracle that brought hope came to the world. Christmas is all about miracles.

1. The ***miracle of a virgin birth*** – when an angel announced to Mary that she would conceive and bear a son who would be the Son of the Most High she replied, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" Indeed ... we still ask that question. But what's so amazing about a virgin birth? Creation itself is amazing; so is every birth. Is it not possible that God, the Creator, could assume human form without human pro-creation? Why can't God do the astounding? The point of virgin birth is this: Jesus is not a product of human evolution or the highest achievement of humanity. He is the intervention of the transcendent God from outside of human history. He was more than a good man and prophet. He was God incarnate in human form.

2. The ***miracle of Emmanuel (God-With-Us)*** - to suggest that God could become a man is preposterous to many. It is blasphemy to Jews and Muslims. But to those who hear the announcement of God-With-Us it is hope and salvation. Why couldn't God become fully human? The Creator of it all can do as he pleases. The Almighty is too loving not to become one of us. In Jesus the terrifying splendor of the Almighty meets us on our own turf. "*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*" Jesus said (John 14:9). Miraculous!

3. The ***miracle that God gave himself for us*** - God came to us and *for us* in Jesus. The baby Jesus grew to be a man (who was yet God) who died on a cross along with all our sins. Since God had assumed all of creation into himself through Jesus, then through Him he could assume all of the sin and brokenness,

and end it there on the cross. *“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins”* Matt. 1:21. Jesus means “God saves.”

It is a miracle, yes, but through Jesus, physical and spiritual death is overcome and one day we will share in his resurrection. In a sense God, Creator of the universe, allowed Himself to be humiliated for our sake. Isn't that a miracle?

Your Christmas Miracle

So, what are your expectations this Christmas? Do you hope for anything new or different to happen in this world? How about in the church, or your Christian faith and life? Dare we expect a miracle? Did you know that our expectations affect our behavior? I have heard many people express low expectations for themselves: “I’m no good at math, or English, or science, or languages, or relationships, or remembering names ...” or whatever. So they made choices to fulfill their own expectations – you know, the old “self-fulfilling prophecy.” To rise above their low expectations would be like a miracle. Most of the time low expectations arise out of mistaken identity. Are you one of those people? Even if you're not, you might ask yourself “What’s my true identity? Who am I anyway?”

Maybe this will help: If the Milky Way galaxy were the size of the entire continent of North America, our solar system would fit in a coffee cup.” 39 years ago NASA launched the Voyagers 1 & 2 spacecraft to study our solar system. For almost four decades they have been speeding away from the earth at about 100,000 miles an hour. They have departed our solar system, and are now in deep space, yet still sending information to scientists at JPL Pasadena, CA. When engineers beam commands to the spacecraft at the speed of light, it takes over 16 hours to reach them 20 & 16 billion miles away. Our solar system with our sun and planets, is but one of several hundred billion other stars and systems in the Milky Way. And the Milky Way is one of perhaps 100 billion such galaxies in the universe. To send a light speed message to the edge of the universe would take 15 billion years. The awesomeness is just mind-boggling!

Looking up at the night sky, long ago the psalmist said, *“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?”* Psalm 8:3-4. Who are we, who are you, who am I, in this limitless universe?

The most incredible thing about Christmas is this: God, who is big enough to speak all of creation, the whole, vast universe, into existence and hold it in the palm of his hand; this God has personally been among us on earth. At just the right time he took on human flesh; born into this world like you and me. It's a miracle, really, because the Creator, the Mighty One who stretched out the stars and galaxies, cares for you and for me so much that He came in person to meet

us on our own turf. And not only that, He came to personally pay the price of your sins and mine so that we might enjoy life as He intended.

Maybe you wonder why you are here today. Maybe you don't really want to be here tonight. Maybe you came because someone in the family brought you, or you came to see and hear a friend singing or playing. But this Christmas God is acting in your life – the fact that you are here, at worship, is a sign. You came here because the Sovereign of the universe knows you, cares about you, has a purpose for you. Trust Him. At just the right time you were born for just the right purpose.

It might be a miracle for you to realize today (tonight) your true identity: God's beloved, redeemed by His sacrifice. It's a miracle that God still comes to us with the offer of a better life. God has entered this world, so that we, without fear, may meet Him in person. It's a miracle when that happens.

So, today (tonight) may this God of miracles ...

“... the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” Romans 15:13.