

Advent Promises and the Expectant Church
Expect no other Savior; Expect what has been promised.
Matthew 11:2-10

TEXT: *When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

When I was young my parents took us on a two-week road trip, traveling up the east coast from New York City north to Nova Scotia, then returning to Michigan along the St. Lawrence Seaway. One of sights I looked forward to seeing was Plymouth Rock where the Pilgrims landed in 1620. My Dad promised that we would see it. My expectations were formulated by my own imagination and those old fashioned Saturday morning cartoons that portrayed Plymouth Rock as something along the lines of the Rock of Gibraltar.

Dad's promise was kept but my expectations were shattered when after hours of driving out of our way to see the famous Plymouth Rock we saw a wrought iron fence surrounding a stone, not even half the size of our 1962 Pontiac with the date, 1620, chiseled in it. I have also heard that others, like me, had greater expectations of the famous location known as Plymouth Rock.

Advent is the season of promises made. Christmas, Lent and Easter are the season of promises fulfilled. As we consider the promises made throughout the Old Testament its good for us to keep in mind that our expectations remain focused on their fulfillment of Jesus' humble birth, His death and resurrection. It's important that we do this so that we do not make the mistake of so many, back then and even today, of having expectations that are unreal. For when this happens faith can be lost.

Advent Promises and the Church's Expectations. Expect no other Savior; Expect only what has been promised!

The prophets of the Old Testament had foretold it. Isaiah wrote: *Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.* No beauty or majesty to attract the attention of those looking for a mighty king, a destroyer of evil! In fact, Isaiah urges us to temper our expectations of Jesus to within the parameters of a normal human being. In fact the One to be born of the virgin would be born in a stable. He would be a "man of sorrows" and "familiar with suffering." We would not esteem him as Lord and King.

I say “we,” because we still tend to have expectations that are not according to Scripture. Jesus himself makes it very clear when He declared: ***I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*** Jn 14 Yet we are surrounded by so many people who argue that since God is a God of love He would surely find another way for those who do not know or believe in Jesus! Do we stand there giving our own thoughts on the matter, or do we quote these famous words of Jesus Himself as a warning to them that there is no other Savior? According to Jesus whose blood was shed to redeem all mankind from sin and hell, there is no other Savior. There is no other way. What the world likes to call those other “great religions of the world,” Muslim, Jew, Buddhist, are roads leading souls to hell.

John the Baptist was six months older than Jesus. They first met when the virgin Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth who was six months pregnant with John. The Bible says: ***At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!"*** Lu 1 The Holy Spirit enabled the unborn to know and recognize his Savior even while Jesus was in Mary's womb! From then on be assured that John's mother and father trained him well in his divinely-appointed role as the prophesied forerunner of the world's only Savior!

And yet it is John who seems to wrestle with misplaced expectations. The Bible says: ***When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"*** Since God was sending ONE Savior, John did not want to be wrong. He probably didn't expect to spend these most important years of his ministry locked up in prison, but there he was! Could he have been wrong? Is there another way? Then again it is possible that John sends his followers to Jesus with this question for them to hear Jesus' answer for themselves. It's that important for all to know that all Scripture from the Fall in Eden to Good Friday and Easter Sunday that Jesus is the ONLY Way, the ONLY Truth, the ONLY Source of hope and life.

Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me." We are surrounded by so many who have fallen away from the hope of salvation because Jesus is not the kind of Savior that they expected.

May none of us fall away from God's only Savior. Instead, let us keep our expectations of salvation limited ONLY to what has been promised us in Jesus' name.

The Bible says: ***As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you."*** He asks the people what made them go out into the desert to see and listen to John the Baptist? Is he some “hot-shot” evangelist? Is he a great motivational speaker? There are many today who look for churches and preachers who offer them just that sort of thing. They like the feeling they get when the music is upbeat and the

speaker is entertaining. They like to feel good about themselves and to hear that God loves everyone no matter what they think and do!

That would be good if it were true! The message of John the Baptist was the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sin. Where there is no repentance there can be no forgiveness even though Jesus would win forgiveness for all mankind on the cross. But unbelief lets go of that precious gift. Jesus himself declared: ***God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*** Jn 3 In order that no one should ever let go of this most important gift of salvation, the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name, God has given us the Ministry of the Gospel, Baptism and the Lord's Supper to keep His Church in the one true faith until life everlasting in heaven.

I know that my Old Adam is never going to be content with the Ministry of the Gospel. It will always question how the water of Baptism can do such great things. It will never have the kind of hunger and thirst for the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper as it hungers and thirsts for all pleasures and treasures of this life in this world. But let us confess the sin of our sinful natures and trust in the promise of God's forgiveness through Jesus! Let us not forsake the fellowship and worship where the Gospel is preached as some are in the habit of doing! Let this ministry of the Gospel be the most important thing in our lives so that none of us are ever deceived by the misplaced expectations of those who do not believe.

Instead, may we all set our hearts on the promises yet to come through Jesus our Savior and wait with high expectations for the glory, happiness and joy that is soon to come for all who believe in His name. Amen.