

LIVING IN EXPECTATION**Genesis 3; Isaiah 11, Luke 1:45b-55**

Intro: I really appreciate Bill's launch of this series last week. He shared at that time that, for him, in his church tradition, observing Advent was unknown and studying the saints of the Church, the same.

My background is very similar to Bill's. I had no idea what Advent was – except that maybe it was something you did in order to increase air circulation. And the study and observance of the saints? If I knew anything about it, it was that was something Catholics did and what the Catholics did, good BIC boys didn't do. Fifty years later I know better. There is much to learn from these men and women of God and I include them in the Great Cloud of Witnesses who have gone before us and, in many ways they are to be emulated. As for Advent, my worship during the Christmas season has been enhanced by its observance since it is a way to keep my focus on the coming of Christ and appropriately off of the glitter and commercialization of the season. All to say, I'm grateful for this emphasis and have already learned a lot in just two Sundays.

Tomorrow, being December 6, is Saint Nicholas Day, so he is our saint for today. One of the reasons we are briefly looking at him is because, in our culture, we simply cannot get away from Saint Nicholas as Christmas. This is because Saint Nicholas is none other than Santa Claus. Well, at least, as our insert for today points out, St Nicholas is on whom our modern Santa Claus is very, very loosely based.

You can read the insert that gives some history on Saint Nicholas. As you do you will see that he was known for generosity and deep compassion that moved him to action. He obviously was a giver, and even though our jolly fat elf version of Santa Claus that we've had over the past 200 years is also a bearer of gifts, he has little resemblance to the early Christian Saint Nicholas. The modern Santa Claus expects girls and boys to be good girls and boys. He knows who's been naughty and nice, and those who have been naughty will receive coal, and those who have been nice will get exactly what they asked him for when they sat on his lap at Buehler's and answered his question, "Hi Johnny, what would you like for Christmas?" Then relinquishing Little Johnny to his mom or dad, he gives him a candy cane to hold him over until Christmas when, of course, what little Johnny had asked for would be under the Christmas tree. . . or NOT.

These kinds of promises are what build anticipation. Rare is the little kid, here in the west, who is not excited by the fact that Christmas is just 20 days away from today. Fiona's been anticipating it for a long time. She was happy on Thanksgiving night that the next big holiday would be Christmas! She also has been anticipating something that I'm going to give her. I wasn't aware of it, but she is expecting ME to give her a makeup kit. I only know this because her mom and her grandmother have been telling me that she's been telling them that I'm going to get this for her. I'm fairly certain that I can do that for her, but maybe like Saint Nicholas, or better yet, Santa Claus, I'm supposed to just divine that she wants a makeup set. Nevertheless, Fiona and many other kids are looking forward to Christmas morning with great expectation. And this particular Papa is on notice. Expectation is what we're going to talk about this morning. Specifically, living in expectation. Not the kind of expectation that a little girl has for a makeup set, or a little boy has for a \$500 video game, but the kind of expectation that causes us to sing:

*Come, thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.*

The people of the Earth are hoping. The nations of the Earth are desiring deliverance. The world is longing in their heart of hearts for joy. But in many cases they don't expect it. Life has been too hard. Tragedy has been too close at hand. Over the past two years sickness has stalked the planet. Despair is what characterizes so many.

In Genesis 3 (I'm not going to read it in the interest of time) we read how Adam and Eve ushered in despair as, in their gullibility and arrogance, they took the father of lies at his word and believed that they could have

God-like knowledge in the simple disobedience of eating the forbidden fruit. They fell for his deceit and ushered in what we know as The Fall.

The result was despair. For the first time and definitely not the last, humanity has been deceived by the evil one. But even though there is despair here, there's an element of hope in the fact that the garden wasn't locked or destroyed. Instead they were driven out and an angelic guard was placed to guard the Garden and the Tree of Life. (Genesis 3:23-24). Humanity had fallen, but God's plan for humanity was not over. His plan for redemption went into effect, and because of that, Paradise is what awaits the faithful in the future. We can live in expectation of that.

Interestingly, Eve, the first woman, was the one whom the serpent first encountered, and then she and her husband, fell into what we know as Original Sin. It's a blessing then, that the angel was sent to a woman with the promise of a Savior King. We heard Mary's song of praise earlier in the service and she is the woman I'm referring to. Yes, Mary was young woman and probably even a teenager. But her age didn't matter because she was left with the promise of deliverance for a lost race. We can expect that promise to be filled.

From Genesis 3 until Mary's receiving of the news that she would give birth to the Savior of humanity recorded in Luke 1, there were no less than 108 prophecies that God would send comfort and salvation for his lost creation. Comfort in the person of his Son the Messiah. The anticipated one. The expected one.

That began at Christmas, but we wait with expectation for his return.

One of those prophecies is in Isaiah 1, so let me just read a few verses from there: (Read Isaiah 11:1-10)

There are promises in them there shalls

- The promises made through the prophet 600 years before the arrival of Jesus Christ are still our promises today and they are evident in the word "Shall" Look at them. Not only do they indicate a future event, they also promise that it will be ongoing.
- The shoot from the stump of Jesse did arrive, a baby born to a couple from the tribe of Judah – the Tribe of King David, the son of Jesse. His name was Jesus. Prophecy fulfilled, promises kept.
- The Spirit of the Lord did rest on him. Literally. Listen, *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* Matthew 3:16-17 (ESV)
- Jesus was full of wisdom and understanding, even when he was just a child and speaking to religious leaders in the temple this was true of him. He came to glorify his father and his delight was indeed in the fear of the Lord.
- He is an advocate for the poor. He deals with equity the meek – in fact he is their defender. He will overcome the wicked. Righteousness is what he and his are known for.
- He shall be all these things and continue to be all these things. There's no end to his kingdom. And there will be peace on Earth. As we finish look at Isaiah 11:6-9 again. These are words of expectation:

*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze;
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.
They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:6-9*

Look at the shalls! The wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, the calf and the lion, and a child shall lead them! The cow and the bear – lying down together, in safety! Children shall safely play where only danger

once lurked. This all **SHALL** come to pass. This is what we can expect. This is the promise. This will happen because Jesus is coming again. With joyful anticipation we live in expectation for the fulfillment of that promise – not from Saint Nicholas and certainly not from Santa Clause – but from the one who sprang from the root of Jesse. Amen.