



Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

In the two and a half years we have lived in Mongolia, we have learned to expect the unexpected. This is certainly true at Christmas time. Our first year, we were surprised that everything went so smoothly. Last year we expected things to be like the first year. We ordered our presents online and had them shipped well within the allotted time the Post Office said they would arrive. They trickled in between Christmas Day (yes the Post Office was open) and sometime after New Year's.

The first year we were surprised to find that someone was selling turkeys. Bernie was more than slightly shocked to find out that he had to pay \$42 for it. The dilemma of whether to shell out that amount was solved the following year, when we were flabbergasted by the \$100 price tag. You see we had learned in that year to ask before we order. So, there was no turkey or ham, the traditional meal of Christmases past.

This year we have been blessed with the opportunity to celebrate the Christmas season once again with friends and family in the US. We have looked forward to familiar sights and sounds, smells and tastes that are associated with the holiday. Our first Sunday here, we were privileged to be in our home church in Franklin, TN. We were particularly moved by the Christmas medley performed, particularly as the opening song of the medley is one of our favorites, "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus." It seems that song is something of a theme that expresses what God has been saying to us this year.

Christmas time seems to be especially a time of expectations, some met and some unmet. Children here in America certainly have expectations of what presents they will receive. Parents, unwilling to let their children feel the pain of unmet expectations, go out of their way to make sure that happens. We confess to being part of that scenario as far as it has been financially feasible. However, we scratch our heads over the measures some will go to make it happen.

As we look closely at the arrival of our Lord on this earthly scene as told in the book of Luke, we find that His entrance was also surrounded by expectations, although often not in the way expected. We would like to take a moment to share some of these with you in hopes that God will speak to your heart as He has to ours.

Luke 1:13 "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John." This wouldn't be that unexpected, except as we see later, Zechariah and Elizabeth were well past the child-bearing age. Perhaps they were expecting, hoping God would answer their prayer for years, but Zechariah's surprise would lead us to believe they had given up hope of a child.

Luke 1:46-48 "And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.'" Mary's awe at being God's chosen vessel to bring the Messiah into the world makes it evident this was certainly a role she was not expecting. As a matter of fact, that humility is what qualified her for the task.



Born To Set Thy People Free

Luke 1:59-61 "...And they would have called him Zechariah after his father, but his mother answered, "No: he shall be called John." And they said to her, 'None of your relatives is called by this name.'" Sometimes obedience to God will not meet the expectations of friends and family.

Luke 2:25-30 "Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon...and it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ...and when the parents brought in the child Jesus...he took him up in his arms...and said...for my eyes have seen your salvation..." The Holy Spirit had promised Simeon that he would see the Messiah. But was he expecting this child that belonged to a peasant family?

That is the Christmas story, isn't it? The three magi knew they were looking for a newborn, but surely they expected to find him in a palace, not the humble home of a carpenter. That truth should continue to amaze us, year after year. Our Savior, the King of Glory, left heaven where he had no need of sleep for a feeding trough or a bed. Mary, at the least, surely expected to give birth indoors. The vigilant shepherds may have been on the lookout for a bear or a lion, but most definitely were not expecting the appearance of a choir of angels to interrupt the night sky with their pronouncement.

"Expect the unexpected" is a phrase that has never been truer than it is in description of our great God. We are called to expect Him, to trust Him, to believe Him, to wait for Him. We are also wise to not put expectations on Him of how He will come. Expect Him to answer prayer, but not when or how. Expect Him to use us, but don't expect to share the glory. Expect Him to guide us, but don't expect everyone to understand what we're doing when we follow.

Our hope for you this Christmas is that you will expect God to reveal Himself to you in new ways in the coming year; that your unfulfilled hopes He has given will be revived; that your unmet expectations will be surrendered and repented of, if necessary. Our prayer is that you will expect and accept no less than His name and His renown expressed in your life.

As for us, we continue to covet your prayers. Bernie's dad was attending an event where everyone was asked to present a Christmas tradition from another part of the world. He asked us, "How is Christmas celebrated in Mongolia?" Our response, "It's not. Christmas is pretty much like any other day. That's why we are here." So, as we return in January for the last 18 months of our first term, we go expectantly. We choose to put the who, what, when, and how in His hands, knowing that it will probably not look like what we expect. This, for us, is the safeguard from disappointment and discouragement.

Our Father, we pray that you will work in all of us, according to your will. We pray that this Christmas, and in the coming year You will reveal yourself to us and manifest yourself through us far more abundantly than we could ever ask or expect for your Glory. And, like Simeon, may we expect that our eyes will see Your salvation that You have prepared.

Merry Christmas from the Andersons
Bernie, Renee', Jonathan and Cori