

*Expecting Jesus*

Luke 1:26-38

Whitefish UMC

Fourth Sunday of Advent, December 21, 2008

- † Expecting. That’s the polite term that my mother and her friends used to describe someone who was pregnant. When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would become the bearer of God’s Son by the power of the Holy Spirit, who do you think she was expecting?
- † I can’t imagine what went on in Mary’s mind and heart as she received the angel’s announcement, can you? For those of us who have been pregnant or have expected the birth or arrival of a child in our family, could we imagine who that baby would be, would become?
- † Even in our own families, we never envision just an ordinary baby, but a precious, exceptional child, right? But what about when that child grows up? Who are we expecting then?
- † Now, another question: what’s your favorite Will Ferrell Christmas movie? Yes, it’s a trick question. I expect you to answer “Elf” of course. But I offer for your consideration this clip from another Will Ferrell film, “The Ballad of Ricky Bobby, or Talladega Nights:” (view “Dear Baby Jesus” segment)
- † Of course this scene is funny, and we can laugh at Will Ferrell as Ricky Bobby for his insistence on praying to “dear tiny Jesus, golden fleece diapers with your tiny, fat, balled-up fist...” even as his wife interrupts him with “Jesus *did* grow up—you don’t always have to call him baby.”

- † “I like the Christmas Jesus best when I’m saying grace,” he says. And so he continues his prayer: “Dear 8 lb, 6 oz., newborn infant Jesus. Don’t even know a word yet. Just a little infant, so cuddly, but still omnipotent. . . . Thank you for your power and your grace, dear baby God. Amen.”
- † But did you notice that everyone at the table has a different version of the Jesus they envision—from a Ninja, sword wielding fighter to a lead singer for a rock band with outstretched Eagle arms to just a man with a beard?
- † Maybe you haven’t noticed, but the many nativity scenes we have displayed in the church are missing an important figure. Several of the children have noticed, though. At parents’ night out, several of the boys asked “where’s the baby Jesus?” Stella, Jennifer’s granddaughter, asked the same question.
- † When I told her that the baby Jesus would come on Christmas Eve, she replied: “Well I’ve got him in my manger at home, and that’s the way I like it.” And of course she is not alone.
- † We love to picture Jesus as a baby, and that is as it should be. It helps us identify with Jesus’ humanity, with his ordinariness, with his entering the world just like we did.
- † A cuddly Jesus with a tiny, fat, balled-up fist is appealing to us. We love babies, even if they don’t wear golden fleece diapers. And who wouldn’t love an omnipotent, grace-giving baby that gives us a gorgeous spouse, perfect kids, money, success, and good friends?
- † And that image of the coming Messiah isn’t so far from the one that the people in the first century expected, accounting of course, for the differences in time and place. For Mary’s cultural contemporaries

looked for a ruler riding forth on a golden steed, wielding a sword that would avenge the people's oppression and restore them to the golden era of King David.

- † But who was it that the angel Gabriel promised to Mary and now promises to us? First the angel calls Mary “favored one.” And then he comforts her by saying, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”
- † What an amazing gift this is, to be favored by God—fully accepted and supported. “The Lord is with you,” the angel says. God is not some abstract, out-there figure, but will become “God-with-us—Emmanuel.”
- † The promise of Emmanuel is a powerful promise, because it means that God is with us now and will be with us always—through stress and sickness, conflict and confusion, failure and frustration, despair and even death itself. Sometimes that's the only thing we can be sure of, for eventually everything else, everyone else, will disappoint us in some way.
- † As the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:39, nothing in all creation “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” So the message to Mary and to us is that this Jesus will be with us, in every time and place and situation.
- † Then the angel Gabriel says, “And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.” Yes, our brothers and sisters south of the border call him “Hey-soos”, but his Hebrew name was Yeshua, which means “God saves.”
- † The child Gabriel promises will be the Savior that the people have longed for, but not the one who will save us from unattractive

- spouses, disappointing children, betrayal of our friends, failure to achieve financial success by waving a magic wand and making it all look different.
- † The Savior who is promised is the one who will indeed reverse the conventional wisdom and order of things: who will welcome the outcast, heal the brokenhearted, free the oppressed, forgive us and ask us to forgive one another.
  - † It's the savior of even a lowly young woman in a nowhere town who by all rights ought to be rejected by the outwardly righteous folks. It's the savior of the shepherds who are on the bottom of the pecking order in their world, of the tax collectors and the prostitutes and all the other unsavory people.
  - † Who else does Gabriel promise to Mary and to us? "He will be great, and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David." That doesn't sound much like a powerless baby with tiny, fat, balled up fists, even if he is omnipotent, all powerful.
  - † "Of his kingdom, there will be no end," says Gabriel. Are we willing to receive the kind of ruler of our lives who gives the directive: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you?"
  - † Will we adore the ruler who says, "If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also?" Are we likely to follow the one who commands, "Give to everyone who begs from you?"
  - † No, it's much easier to worship a powerless baby, or even an omnipotent one with golden fleece diapers. But if we love our

enemies, do good and lend without expectation of return, we will acting as obedient servants of our powerful ruler.

- † “Your reward will be great,” promises Jesus, “and you will be children of the Most High.” That doesn’t mean you’ll always win, always be appreciated, always get what you want. It does mean that you will always be loved and accepted by God.
- † How can this be? And that’s the same question that Mary asked, that we ask today. Gabriel speaks of the role of the Holy Spirit and how it has already worked wonders in the life of Mary’s cousin Elizabeth, who we heard about last week and who is pregnant herself in her old age.
- † Gabriel concludes with these words, “nothing will be impossible with God.” Nothing will be impossible with God, we wonder?
- † And then Mary takes a deep breath and makes a stunning leap of faith, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Mary says “yes” to what God wants to do in her life, and this decision reveals that she is the favored one, willing to put her complete trust in God.
- † Mary calls herself the servant of the Lord, and in so doing foreshadows the kind of Savior her son will become: the servant of all, even the one who suffers in obedience to his highest values and calling.
- † Once again, who is the Jesus you expect this Christmas? I love the story one of my friends told about her granddaughter who refuses to keep the baby Jesus from her nativity in his manger. She takes him out and puts him in her dollhouse with the other family members there. She feeds him pretend spaghetti, has him go to work with the

pretend dad in her dollhouse, has him go to school with the pretend kids.

- † Some of you may have seen the Jesus action figure that you can get in joke stores or on the internet. He's not dressed in combat fatigues like a lot of other action figures, and he doesn't have super powers like the transformers and other popular toys.
- † But Jesus did indeed become an adult of action and of prayer. He had no comfortable home filled with golden light. His family were all of those who sought to follow him and to serve the least of the people of God. His success came to be symbolized by a horrible instrument of torture, the cross.
- † But despite unspeakable violence and death, even that cross held no power over him. Instead another angel told another Mary to not be afraid, that the love of God was more powerful than death itself.
- † And so Jesus walked again among his friends, preparing them breakfast, meeting them in a locked room where everyone cowered behind the closed door. He met them on a long road as they walked in grief and despair.
- † Jesus meets us, too, in our times of ordinariness, of fear, of grief, of despair. And that is the Jesus I welcome again into my life and our world this Christmas. What about you?
- † May your Christmas dreams welcome the Christ into not just your nativity scene, but into your everyday, walking around life. Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus! Amen.

Sources:

“Dear Baby Jesus Prayer” from “Talladega Nights” on  
[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

The idea for this sermon came from this week’s entry in *Homiletics*.