

Christmas Service

Title: Home for the holidays. I hope you feel right at home. We're family. So welcome to my home.

One of the most fun and beautiful things about Christmas is that teaches us that God often does the most unexpected things in the most unexpected ways!

For generations the Jewish people had been looking forward to the coming of their Messiah. They expected a warrior king and they got an infant in a manger.

Isaiah 55:8-9

“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord.

“And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.

⁹ For just as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so my ways are higher than your ways
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

But expectations are a tricky thing. If they're not met, it can often lead to misunderstanding, disappointment, worry, fear.

2020 has felt a lot like that.

2020 began with great expectations. This was 2020, the year of vision. At the end of last year, we announced our 20-year vision. We had some incredible things we wanted to accomplish as a church!

But by mid-March Covid-19 hit and shut everything down. 2020 did not go like we expected.

In my family, we had big expectations for the year. We had a big trip planned, we had season tickets to the Broadway shows at the

brand new performing arts center, holidays, vacations, family, even work! We had a picture of what this year would look like.

I didn't expect to preach my first ever Christmas service this year.

2020 did not meet our expectations. I suspect for most of us, unless you make masks or hand sanitizer, this year was disappointing.

But here's what I'm convinced of, the beauty of Christmas:

Jesus did not come to meet anyone's expectations. He came to exceed everyone's hopes and dreams.

But if we don't understand why he came, and what he came to do, there's a chance we'll live in disappointment, in depression, in anxiety, when what God has for us in this season is peace and joy and hope!

So we're in this moment now where we are celebrating Christmas, the birth of Jesus, the moment where he came into the world. But I want to ask a simple question. Why did he come? I think if most of were honest there are moments where we've questioned is he really the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. This is the passage we talk about almost every Christmas. But this year has been hard.

You are not alone. Others in the bible struggled with their expectations as well. The Jewish people in general expected something very different than a baby in a manger and many struggled believing he was the Messiah, the long awaited Savior that had come for them.

John the Baptist. – Matthew 11

Lazarus family. – John 11

In Jesus time, many expected him to develop a civil religion, to rule with a sword. And many of us want the same thing today. We want him to come in and fix all of our circumstances. I'm convinced if we don't understand why Jesus came and what He came to do it will be very difficult for us to experience peace and hope, to celebrate what Christmas really means for us. There will be a gap between our expectations and our reality. And that's where disappointment lives So here it is:

Jesus didn't come to bring more religion. This is what the pharisees expected and they wrong. He didn't come to fix our situation through our circumstances. This is what many of us often expect. Jesus came to restore a lost relationship.

The beauty of this is, God knew that our circumstances wouldn't bring us peace, or joy, or hope... but being connected to peace itself would.

John 14:27

²⁷ "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.

I want to take the next few minutes and show you exactly how Jesus said he would accomplish this.

1. Jesus came to do the will of the Father (God)

John 6:38

38 For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will.

This means we won't always like it, but we can trust Him.

John 16:33

³³ I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”

In Matthew 11 after John the Baptist if he's really the Messiah or if they should look elsewhere, he says blessed are those who don't walk away or who aren't offended on account of Him.

2. Jesus came to reveal truth

John 12:46

⁴⁶ I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the dark.

Luke 4:18-19, 42-43

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the oppressed will be set free,
¹⁹ and that the time of the Lord's favor has come.^[a]”

⁴² Early the next morning Jesus went out to an isolated place. The crowds searched everywhere for him, and when they finally found him, they begged him not to leave them. ⁴³ But he replied, “I must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God in other towns, too, because that is why I was sent.”

This means we can know truth. There is a path to walk. Freedom is available. But we'll have to choose to walk it.

Matthew 7:13-14

¹³ “You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell^[a] is broad, and its gate is wide for the many

who choose that way. ¹⁴ But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it.

3. Jesus came to bring judgment

Not just information is right or wrong, but our actions.

John 9:39

³⁹ Then Jesus told him,^[a] “I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see^[b] that they are blind.”

Mark 2:17

¹⁷ When Jesus heard this, he told them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners.”

Luke 19:9-10

⁹ Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man^[a] came to seek and save those who are lost.”

This means there is an opportunity for forgiveness and healing, but we must admit we’ve sinned, that we’re broken, sick, lost.

Difference between judgement and condemnation. ->

4. Jesus came to make a way

Mark 10:45

⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

This means anything is possible, because Jesus is for us and gave his perfect life as a ransom so that we wouldn't have to pay the price for our sins!

5. Jesus came to bring us to a decision.

Matthew 10:34

³⁴ "Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword.

This means we have to make a hard decision.

In this moment, Jesus makes it clear he's come to bring us to a decision. Before he came, there was an excuse, but now truth is clear and available and we have to decide, will we follow Him, live in relationship with Him, in the light? Or will we live our lives the way we want to, for ourselves, in the darkness. This will cost us something, but if we do it we gain everything.

Jesus coming is great news, but really only if our expectations are right. If you make a decision to follow Him, to live in relationship with him, then you can experience peace and joy and purpose even if the world around you falls apart and your circumstances don't change. But if we expect to have peace without being connected to him, we'll experience tremendous disappointment. Our expectations and our reality will not match. God's answer to suffering is not to fix our circumstances but to connect us to Him.

John 10:10

¹⁰ The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

If he's not wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, he can not be your prince of peace.

Peace is not found because Jesus came.
Peace is found when we decide to follow Him instead of asking Him to follow us. He came not to give us more religion, but to restore the very relationship where peace and hope are found.

He is the way the truth and the life.

So you've got to make a decision. Jesus didn't just come and live a normal life. The Bible teaches us that he came and lived a perfect life and then died like we read earlier, as a ransom for our imperfection.

Isaiah 53:5

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.

Then after he died, 3 days later after being placed in a tomb, God brought him back from the dead and give him new life.

An unexpected twist in an incredible story.

If we'll confess with our mouth Jesus is Lord. And believe in our heart that God raised him from the dead, we can be saved, we can have a relationship with God, we find hope and peace and joy for eternity. Will you take that step today?

What's next? For those of you that have already begun a relationship. Maybe you haven't felt that peace this year.

1. Learn to be with Him, become like Him, and do what he did.
 - Engage (church, small group, 21 days)

2. Leave the rest to Him. His thoughts are higher than ours.
Expect the unexpected. God works in all things...
 - Expectations