



This Changes Everything

Text: Various Passages
Care and Bridging Pastor Dan Slagle

1. Jesus was and is often shattering expectations. Read Jeremiah 23:5, 30:3, and 33:15 to get an idea of some of the passages 1st century Jews would have had in mind regarding the Messiah/Christ.
 - a. If you were a 1st century Jew living under Roman occupation and you came across texts like these, what do you think you would have expected the Messiah and his reign to be like?
 - b. In what ways was Jesus' birth and nature expectation shattering?
 - c. How about his life, death, and resurrection? What are your family traditions (like the setting out of a Nativity scene) that remind you of the story of Christmas in this season?

2. "Jesus didn't redefine reality so much as he returned it to the way it is supposed to be."
 - a. There are constant reminders around us that we live in a broken, fallen world. Often within our own bodies, dealing with health issues, or relational struggles. What's a recent reminder you've had that the world is not the way it's supposed to be?
 - b. Read Genesis 1-2. What words immediately come to mind when you read the Creation account?
 - c. How do you describe the way the original creation must have felt?
 - d. How would you describe the world and man's place in it as we see them in these chapters?

3. Read Revelation 21-22:5. In what ways is the last chapter of redemptive history, which is what Jesus truly came to make a way for, a return to the way things were supposed to be? In what ways is this expectation shattering to you? How is this different from the way we often think of when we think of the "next life"?

4. Jesus coming at Christmas changed our future, but our lives right here, right now. He came so that we might have life abundantly. Dan mentioned several areas that Christ came for:
 - a. Know God
 - b. Purpose and meaning
 - c. Victory over sin
 - d. Strength in seasons of pain
 - e. Enrich your relationships
 - f. Invite you to join him in the ongoing work of redefining reality (mission)

Are you experiencing life to the full? What area of Christ's abundance are missing out on?

Challenge: What is an area you would like to grow in your relationship with Christ in 2018?

Prayer: Many of the songs we sing at Christmas are also prayers. You can sing a carol and find yourself praying. Pray through these as a group.

Come, thou long expected Jesus,
Born to set your people free;
From our fears and sins release us,
Let us find our rest in thee.
—Charles Wesley

Purify my conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in me a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.
—Book of Common Prayer

“Glory to God in the highest and peace, good will toward men.”
—Luke 2:14

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing.
—Isaac Watts

What can I give him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him—give my heart.
—Christina Rossetti

STUDY DEEPER

Come, Thou Unexpected Jesus

This Christmas, do not be surprised if you find yourself worshiping Jesus where you did not expect to find him.

Often, when we expect to find him in the inn of festive holiday celebration, we instead find him in the stables of our suffering and sin. Jesus tends to show up where, and when, we least expect him. Apparently, his ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8).

Unexpected Savior

We see Jesus breaking expectations throughout Scripture.

Although the people expected the Messiah, the Son of David, to appear in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), they did not expect him to appear there as if by accident. Although they expected the birth of a king, they certainly didn't expect him to be born without dignity in a cave outside the city of David (Luke 2:4). Although they expected him to be hailed upon his arrival, they did not expect shepherds and pagan magicians to welcome him while the religious leaders — who knew the prophecies by heart — completely missed him.

The Jews did not expect him to grow up in Galilee (John 7:52), especially not in Nazareth (John 1:46), nor did they expect him to grow up the son of a simple tradesman. When he went missing for three days as a child, not even his parents expected to find him discussing theology in the temple with the rabbis (Luke 2:46–47).

Years later, no one expected him to suddenly appear as an itinerant rabbi with a school of disciples comprised of fisherman, tax collectors, and zealots. Nor did anyone expect him to confront the self-righteousness of pious Jews far more than the oppressive Roman occupiers. And they certainly didn't expect him to find more faith in a centurion than in all the people of Israel (Luke 7:9).

The immoral Samaritan woman never expected him to show up near her well at midday, or be the first recorded person to whom he declared himself as the Christ (John 4:25–26). The hopeless paralytic never expected him to come to the pool and heal him (John 5:2–9). The man born blind never expected to see him and discover that the Pharisees, for the life of them, could not (John 9:35–41). The widow of Nain never expected him to show up during the funeral procession and raise her son (Luke 7:11–15). Mary and Martha never expected him to not show up when Lazarus fell ill (John 11:1–3).

No one expected the Messiah, the Son of David, to be convicted of blasphemy by the council and executed without dignity by the Romans outside the other city of David. And no one expected him to actually rise from the dead three days later.

All these things had been prophesied. Jesus was long expected. But when and how and where and why he came were all unexpected.

Worship in Unexpected Stables

We tend to fill our Christmases with all sorts of expectations. But the biblical pattern teaches us that Jesus is not particularly concerned with our expectations and may ignore them altogether

because he's mainly concerned with our most desperate needs. We typically do not choose our most desperate places — the places of our fears and sins — as places to encounter and worship Jesus, but he does. He knows that these are the places we most need the thrill of hope.

This is why I expect to find Jesus in the sober celebrations of dear friends who, due to an aggressive cancer, may be sharing their last Christmas together.

This is why I expect to find him at the hospital bedside of a precious little boy, where his parents have kept faithful vigil since the traumatic brain injury three months ago.

This is why I expect to find him in the heartbroken home of a pastor I love who broke his marriage vows and in the heartbroken church whose Christmas worship will be full of unexpected disappointment and tears.

And this is why I expect to find him in the places of my own groaning: my sinful stumbling, persistent weaknesses, perplexing questions, and parenting quandaries that I am not wise enough to think my way through.

There's nothing wrong with enjoying pleasant holidays. But often it is not pleasant holidays that we need as much as we need profound hope. What we really need is hope that our devastating sins can be forgiven, that our shattered trust can be rebuilt, that our broken child's suffering isn't in vain, and that though our bodies waste away (2 Corinthians 4:16), death will be swallowed up in victory and destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:26, 54).

Love Exceeding Expectations

Jesus came into the world at a desperate time in a desperate way. It wasn't the way people expected him to come. It wasn't for the reasons they expected him to come. He did not come to meet their expectations but to love them in the ways they most desperately needed.

For Christ, Christmas is not about tradition but salvation; it's not about expectations but sanctification. Christmas is about love — earthy, gritty, sacrificial, even bloody love. When Jesus came, he did not come “to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). This was a love that no one expected — a love that exceeds all our expectations.

And this is the way he comes to you this Christmas: to love you in the ways you most need. That may, in fact, be why some of your expectations are not met: they aren't what you really need.

So look for him in the unexpected place. And it may be in the most desperate place, yours or another's. But know this: he will meet you in the place that will, if you trust him, cause his good news to eventually bring you the greatest joy (Luke 2:10) — the place you are most likely to really adore him.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/come-thou-unexpected-jesus>