

“Expect the unexpected” Matthew 11:2-11 Gaudete in Domino 2025

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, “It wasn’t what I expected.” Whether you are young or old, a man or woman, a girl or a boy, you have probably experienced something that caused you to have that reaction. Perhaps you were feeling a little adventurous, and you ordered something at a restaurant that you never had before. Or it might have been a movie, or a television program, that you heard about. You tried the food, watched the show, and at the end all you could say was, “it wasn’t what I expected.”

Since Christmas is less than two weeks away, I guess it would make sense to apply the statement, “It wasn’t what I expected,” to both the upcoming holiday and the related tradition of giving gifts. As you reflect on past Christmases and past Christmas gifts were you ever left saying something like that? Things didn’t go as planned. The gift you had your heart set on didn’t meet your expectations. One of the goals of the Advent Season is to align our expectations for Christmas with the blessings and gifts God wants us to enjoy. It’s interesting that if we look at our Gospel Lesson for today, we notice that the same thing needed to happen around the time of the first Christmas. God’s people, and it seems that even John the Baptist, had misguided expectations of what the Savior came to do and even about the kind of Savior they needed.

These verses of our Gospel Lesson for this Sunday present us with a puzzle that has challenged believers for centuries. Did John the Baptist really have doubts about Jesus? Was John, who had identified Jesus as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” beginning to question that conclusion? I think the evidence points to real doubt on John’s part. Jesus didn’t seem to be doing what John had hoped he would, right? Where was the fire and brimstone preaching? Why wasn’t Jesus shaking up the sinful status quo? “He’s not what I expected!” That seems to be the bottom line for John when it came to Jesus.

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But before we look at John’s expectations of Jesus let’s focus on the people’s expectations of John. The Baptizer had one job in life. He was supposed to prepare the way for God to come to his people. We might say he was supposed to use the bulldozer of God’s LAW to make a spiritual highway into the hearts of God’s people. The purpose of his fiery preaching was to bring demolition to sin hardened consciences and the dynamite of God’s LAW to rebellious hearts.

But as we might expect many of the people didn’t have a positive reaction to John. Jesus addressed that in our Gospel Lesson. “As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see?” John was not swayed by popular opinion, he was not like a reed swaying in the wind! No, he stayed focused on his work of preparing the way for Jesus. He did that even though he wasn’t what the people expected.

Jesus continued to describe the ministry of John the Baptist. Listen again to what Jesus said to the crowds that day. “Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.” Jesus acknowledged what many thought about John. He was a prophet. But Jesus added the fact that unlike all the other prophets that had come before John was really the “final” prophet. And he was the one who immediately proceed the coming of the Messiah and prepare God’s people to receive him.

Although John’s voice was silenced by King Herod’s executioner his ministry continues. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can hear John’s preaching. What would John say to us today? “You fine folks who claim to be Christians! If you are what you claim to be then produce fruit in keeping with repentance. You sit here in church with your spouse but you that’s just a facade. Where’s the love and

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forgiveness? I hear you talking about friendship and fellowship but you hold grudges against other members in your congregation or against the poor or those who aren't like you. At work you don't talk and act any differently than anyone else. Like the people I preached to on the banks of the Jordan River you are stingy and selfish. You won't share the blessings God has given you. And you say to yourself, 'I go to church. I'm a good Christian.' Out of the acorns littering your driveway God can raise up better Christians than any of you! And what about this Christmas thing? You say that Christmas is about Jesus but you spend your time and money on the holidays as foolishly as your neighbours who don't know any better. Time and time again I have heard you say, "Jesus is the reason for the season," and yet your stomachs and your pleasures seem to be the reason behind the season. John isn't hear to tells us we're all okay. No, today he call us to repent! He says, "Prepare the way for the LORD!" If we expect the unexpected from John and more importantly, accept the unexpected the Holy Spirit will prepare us to again receive Christ this Christmas.

Now let's look at how we can expect the unexpected from Jesus this Christmas. Remember that it seems that even John may have looked at Jesus as someone he didn't expect. He sent his disciples to Jesus with a question. Matthew tells us, "When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" Although John was a powerful prophet he was still a sinner. He too could fall into despair. It certainly is possible that his expectations of Jesus might not have lined up with what Jesus was saying and doing.

So Jesus sent word back to John. "2 When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples 3 to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" 4 Jesus replied, "Go back and report to

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John what you hear and see: 5 The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” Jesus was pointing John to an Old Testament prophecy from Isaiah. As the Messiah Jesus was doing exactly what the prophets said he was going to do.

Do we expect the same from Jesus this year? Everything Jesus said he was doing we need for him to do for us again this Christmas. We need him to heal our spiritual eyes and ears. We need him to make us walk and even run in the Lord’s strength. From the leprosy of sin we need to be cured. Out of spiritual death we must be brought to life. And we are the poor who need the good news. Through his Word Jesus comes to us to do what only the Messiah would do.

Then Jesus added the thought that those who accept him as he is and who he is will be blessed. We hear Jesus’ words of caution, “Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.” We can’t say for sure that Jesus wasn’t what John expected but we can say Jesus wasn’t what most of the Jews expected. Many of them wanted a military or political leader who would restore the glory of earthly Israel. Others wanted Jesus to endorse their hypocritical lives. Even the disciples struggled with having right expectations of Jesus. With wrong expectations of Jesus a person could fall away from faith and be lost forever.

The right expectations for what Jesus offers us is important. When we celebrate his birthday we are saying thank you to him for what he was born to do for us. But Christmas will leave us disappointed if we look for something that Jesus does promise us.

“It’s not what I expected.” When it comes to Christmas that can be true in so many ways. Maybe this Christmas will be the best one ever for us. Or perhaps it will fall short of our expectations. “It’s not what I expected.” That certainly seems to be

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true of many Christmas gifts as well. Analysts expect that nearly half of all Americans will return at least one gift that they receive for Christmas this year.

What about us? Are what John and Jesus brought what we are searching for this Christmas? May the Holy Spirit enable us to expect the unexpected from John and Jesus. From John we hear a call to repent and change our lives. From Jesus we are given all that we need for our soul. With those expectations in mind the holiday we will soon celebrate will be the blessing God intended to bring us through both. Amen.