

One of the things that you hear people ask at this time of the year is, “How was your Christmas?” When you see people that you don’t see very often, discussions of Christmas celebrations can go on for weeks. Decorations are taken down but we like to relive the excitement of the season. When the question gets asked, “How was your Christmas?” you sometimes have to stop and think for a moment. If you want to answer honestly, your answer probably depends a bit on how your expectations for Christmas were realized. This could apply to a Christmas get-together with the family or it could apply to the gifts that you got or maybe it could apply to the trip that you had taken over the holidays. We all have great expectations for events like this. If everything went the way you had hoped, then you could say that you had a great time. Of course you know that things don’t always work out the way you hoped they would. You may not have gotten what you wanted for Christmas, someone may have gotten sick or you might have gotten caught in the wild weather that we have been having.

Our Gospel lesson for today talks about the realization of expectations. As the disciples of John had their first encounter with Jesus, they seemed certain that He was going to live up to their expectations as the Messiah. As we look at this early event in the ministry of Jesus, may you find yourself excited about what Jesus means to you. May you be ready then to tell someone, “We have found the Messiah.”

The people of Jesus’ day had expectations about the coming of the Messiah. This had been an important part of the faith and the lives of God’s people for centuries. The promise of someone who would come to be the Savior of the world was the foundation of Israel’s relationship to the Lord.

When John the Baptist began His ministry of preparing the way for the Christ, it became clear to some that the Messiah would be coming very soon. In his preaching, John helped the people to see the purpose for the coming of the Messiah. One day, Jesus came to John to be baptized. The Baptism of Jesus included some amazing events that showed John and the others who were there that Jesus was the Son of God and also that He was anointed with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus came around again the next day, John did not hesitate to point Him out as the Lamb of God.

With their expectations raised, two of John’s disciples began to follow after Jesus to learn more about what their teacher had been telling them. Think about what they had seen and heard. From their youngest days they no doubt had heard about the Messiah in their local synagogue. Now this unusual desert preacher and baptizer was pointing out a man in the crowd who was the Son of God. John testified that the signs promised by God had pointed to Jesus. The Holy Spirit came down on Him in the form of a dove. He was proclaimed to be the Son of God. John called Him the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. What more would they need to be convinced that this was finally the Promised One?

They decided that they would see for themselves. They followed Jesus and asked if they could spend some time with Him. We are told that they spent the rest of the day listening to Him. We can only imagine what that day was like. It must have been wonderful. As far as the text tells us it was just Jesus and these two disciples. One is

identified as Andrew and the other was probably John, the writer of the Gospel. In the time that they spent with Jesus, they were convinced that John the Baptist was correct. Jesus was truly the Messiah. Their expectations were realized.

Most people have expectations about God and His promise of a Savior. That statement may sound a little strange. Listen again. Most people today have expectations about God and His promise of a Savior. We know that the Savior came into the world and the world has just celebrated His birth. Isn't that what Christmas is all about? We certainly hope that's what Christmas is all about but in many cases, the birth of the Savior is far from the center of the Christmas celebration. Many people are still looking for a Savior and I don't just mean the Jews. In our world today it has become very common for people to think about God on their own terms. God becomes for them a product of their own desires and expectations. Many see God as simply as dispenser of all good things. I'm sure that many of you are familiar with the little candy dispensers that shoot out a little candy every time you tip back the head of some cartoon character. For some people God is nothing more than a great Pez dispenser who is ready to give you whatever you want whenever you want it. In that kind of thinking, the Savior is one who stands ready to pull you out of any kind of problem that you might have. He is good to have around but you don't really expect to need Him. As a result of that faulty kind of thinking, many people have some rather unrealistic expectations of Jesus. Their expectations are completely self-centered. What they fail to see is the real reason that Jesus came into the world.

Too often people see their needs as purely physical needs. All they think of is life now. If Jesus can't solve my latest financial problem or doesn't make my other problems go away, what good is He? This kind of self-centered, materialistic thinking is more common than we would like to admit. You don't want to admit it because you know that it is found in each one of you. Your sinful nature wants to hang on to that selfishness that is a part of our inherited sinful condition. It doesn't want to admit that there is a real problem that is not going to be fixed by the granting of all of your earthly wishes. The nature of that deeper problem was the basis of the preaching and ministry of John the Baptist. He called people to repentance. He baptized people for the cleansing of their sin. He pointed out Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That's the problem. It's sin. Sin brings separation from God and eternal death. That's pretty abstract and hard for people to understand. It's the truth and you know it when you hear the Law of God whether it is proclaimed to you from God's Commandments or whether you are listening to the voice of your conscience. The law of God condemns us and when you are honest with yourself and with God you see that your greatest need is for forgiveness and reconciliation with God. Nothing else in this life matters much without peace with God.

That peace comes to you through Jesus, the Lamb of God. He has what you need the most. Through His perfect life, He satisfied God's requirement of perfection. Through His suffering and death, He satisfied God's requirement that sin be punished by death. By sacrificing His life, He became the true Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. When the Holy Spirit comes to you through the message of that Good News, you are given the faith to believe and trust that Jesus is the Messiah, the Promised One, the

Anointed One who brings God's pardon and with that, a peace that helps you to deal with all of life's problems. You can face them and deal with them because you know that the worst problem has already been solved. You have been made right with God through your Savior Jesus Christ. With the peace that comes from knowing that nothing can separate you from the love of God that is yours through Christ Jesus, what can the world do to you? God has promised to provide you with all that you need and He shows you how He keeps that promise every time you hear the Gospel, every time you remember your Baptism and every time you receive the Lord's Supper.

Andrew had great news to share and he shared it with his brother. He had found the Messiah, the long-awaited Messiah. You, too, have found the Messiah. He has found you and made you His own through the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Means of Grace, the Word and the Sacraments. By that same Spirit's power you can share the Good News with those around you. You can be like Andrew and all the others who went to their friends and family and said, "We have found the Messiah. We have found the Savior. Come and see." Amen.

And the peace which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.