

On the calendar, it's December. In American culture, it's the holidays, or maybe even the Christmas season. In the church, it's Advent.. In light of that, the question is, “What do you expect?”

Here are a few things you might expect this time of year. You might expect to see Christmas trees, lighted and decorated, in various places. In the church you might expect to see Christmas trees along with an Advent wreath with colorful candles. You might expect to hear familiar Christmas carols and holiday music, and that expectation has crept backwards to where some stations have been broadcasting a Christmas soundtrack even before Thanksgiving. You might expect there to be wish lists, parties, and charities to give to, cards to send, shopping runs to execute, and presents to wrap. You might expect there to be Christmas themed programs on TV that you might expect someone will watch with you. You might expect to go to church on Christmas Eve to sing Silent Night by candlelight and you might expect to hear readings from Luke chapter two and John chapter one and readings from Isaiah like “for to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given.” And all these expectations are pointed at Christmas, those two days, the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup>. In the midst of all that, let me ask you this question: This December, are you expecting Jesus to show up?

One thing you may not have been expecting was to come to church on December 1<sup>st</sup> and hear about Palm Sunday. You might suspect that something went wrong as the bulletins were being assembled, but not so; this gospel reading is an option for the first Sunday in Advent. How come? Let me be simple and clear: the overall theme of Advent is: Jesus is coming. No matter where you live on the timeline of history, this has always been true. Isn't that something? It's true for us. We believe that someday, Jesus will return on a cloud with power and great glory, with the sound of the trumpet and the voice of an archangel. Jesus is coming—we're waiting. Before Jesus was born, people were waiting on the promise, Jesus is coming. Old Simeon late in Luke 2 was told he would not die until he saw the Lord's Christ. Jesus is coming—Simeon was waiting. Even during the 33 years Jesus was in the world, there was a sense of excitement and anticipation, everywhere He went; Jesus is coming. And that's exactly what was happening in today's gospel lesson. The word spread fast. Jesus is coming. The grown-up Jesus is coming; coming into the capital city, Jerusalem; coming at Passover time, and it all begs the question, what did the people expect? Here comes Jesus, Hosanna! Save us now, Jesus! But he's riding a donkey...If people were expecting Jesus to come with military might, they were quickly disappointed. If they expected Jesus to go straight to the Roman Government Headquarters to start the revolution they would've been let down. And if that didn't do it, any hopeful expectations about Jesus would've almost certainly been dashed by his death on a cross. And then, expectations about his death would've had to have been completely reworked when people started seeing Him alive three days later! So, these two things absolutely go together: Jesus is coming. And when Jesus comes, expect the unexpected.

Which takes us back to the original question. This December, are you expecting Jesus to show up? This Advent and Christmas, do you expect the real Jesus to show up; to make a splash; to have an impact on everything else you're so busy doing?

I'm here to tell you, you can. You should. And here's what I mean: you always have Jesus speaking to you in His Word. That's one of the major reasons we make such a big deal about being in God's Word around here. When you deal with Bible, you are hearing Jesus' voice. But that's not all. On a day like today, we come to the altar to eat and drink and in so doing we receive Jesus. He is present. He is the real host, and He gives Himself. This is the ultimate answer to the question: why should I go to church? Jesus shows up here in his words and at his table. Wherever two or three people gather in His name, there He is. And when you stop to think about it, there's nowhere Jesus is not, or cannot be, which leads me to my other point.

The other point being, expect Jesus to show up this December especially in the places where things don't go as planned. When you're taken by surprise, start looking around for the telltale activity of Jesus. Remember Palm Sunday? Jesus shows up, but nothing goes the way people thought it should, and it all seems to collapse with this death; his followers even go into hiding. But on Sunday morning, he rises; He lives again, and it starts to become clear that what Jesus wants to do is more mysterious and more wonderful than anyone can possibly imagine—and that the only person who really knows what's going on is Him!

That's what it's like when you are looking for the presence of Jesus in your everyday life. Expect the unexpected. Something may happen this month that you would never have predicted. Jesus will be in that situation, even if it seems awful, to twist it into something good. Someone may come into your life during this season, that Jesus wants you to help, and that may surprise you too. And it will end up blessing you more than you could dream of now. In twenty-three days, God willing, you and I will celebrate a birth that pushed against expectations. The King of Kings is born in the animal barn, and it's one of the best things ever.

Expect Jesus to show up this Advent and hang on! Hang onto Him.