

December 25, 2023 (Christmas Day B)

Micah 5:2-5a

“Merry Christmas – Expect the Unexpected!”

As I tried to look at the events and sacred texts of Christmas once again this year – something struck me that I hadn’t really noticed or thought too much about before. The way things played out – when GOD sent His SON into this world to save us – *was not at all what anyone expected.*

Do you think Mary – *expected* to be the virgin mother of God Incarnate? Not in a million years. Do you think Joseph thought HE would be called upon to care for and raise the Son of GOD? Nope. Do you think the sleepy poor shepherds *expected* God’s angels to appear and tell *them* the Good News? Do you think anyone (maybe even the angels) *expected* the Great King to be born in a BARN and left out with the animals?

I don’t think anybody expected things to play out as they did. And – when you look back at the ancient prophets – didn’t they all basically tell us to ***expect the unexpected here?*** Isaiah told us He would not just show up one day – out of the clear blue – as a fully grown man and ready for action (as one might expect). No – a virgin would conceive and give birth to a Son. And – while He would be the greatest and most glorious / all powerful King who would crush His foes and rule for all eternity (as one might expect) Isaiah also told us He would be a poor man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. He told us He would die as an executed criminal and then be buried in a rich man’s tomb. Then . . . He’d rise victorious. Hey – *expect the unexpected here*, when God sends His Son into the world.

Even the context of Isaiah’s prophecy about Immanuel is unexpected – it came right as he was rebuking wicked king Ahaz. Likewise the context of this prophecy from **Micah** is rather unexpected too. He was living 700 years before Jesus and he had just been talking about how the Assyrian army was coming to attack the land and humiliate the king. You never hear verse 1 of Micah 5 on Christmas: ***“I Marshal your troops now, city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel’s ruler [King Hezekiah] on the cheek with a rod.”*** They were threatening to destroy the people of Jerusalem . . . oh, and by the way, here’s an unexpected prophecy about how the Messiah will one day come to save us all:

Micah 5:2–5 (NIV 11)

2 “But you, Bethlehem [in the clan of] Ephrathah [that was to distinguish it from the other Bethlehem in Zebulun, up near Nazareth], though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins [that’s not a great translation. He had no origin at all] are from of old, from ancient times.”

He would not come from the royal palace in Jerusalem as one might expect – but rather from a humble little village called ***Bethlehem***. This was the city of David – the great king – yes, but not even David was what people really expected. He was the youngest of Jesse’s sons – a humble shepherd boy, the last one anybody in the family expected to be the king of Israel. No one expected him to stand up to (let alone to defeat) that great and powerful ugly dude named Goliath.

David’s unexpected life foreshadowed his descendant who would be *way MORE unexpected!* A child, who was, as the same time, in His very essence – Almighty GOD. The word “origins” should be translated, *“his goings out / his coming forth / his proceedings – in other words: He was there way back at the beginning.”* THIS ONE was **active** before time began and involved in the creation of the universe. And He – was resting there, in Bethlehem, in a manger – because there was no room for ***this*** King in the inn.

Expect the unexpected – as we see right here in the next verse: **3 Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.**

Israel would be abandoned?? What? *Why?* Because Israel would abandon this King and reject Him when He arrived. The Jewish faith – following the lead of the unbelieving Pharisees and Sadducees – rejected Him as their King. He was not, after all, what they expected. Therefore, Christ went out to the Gentiles and gave all nations an opportunity to come and be a part of the chosen family of God – through faith and adoption in the waters of Holy Baptism. I doubt anyone expected this period of time to last for over 2000 years of history, but, with God . . . you can expect the unexpected.

Micah goes on to describe Him: **verse 4 He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of**

the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. 5 And he will be our peace. *And you also never hear the rest of verse 5 – because Micah goes back to talking about the Assyrian invasion.*

He stands (like David) as the Shepherd King. It's an oxymoron because shepherds were at the bottom and kings were at the top – He is both. He rules in *strength* and *majesty* – shown in unexpected ways: in humility as the Lamb of God to die for the sins of the world. He was the High Priest of God – who at the same time was the Sacrifice of atonement for mankind. He is the eternal KING – who died as a lowly criminal. The Blessed One became a curse and was hung on a tree – all of this, for His people, that they might live securely in His global and eternal Kingdom.

This too is not what people expect – it's not an earthly security for our lives, homes and possessions / it's not an outward peace at all. It's ultimate security in our STATUS as His children, standing by faith and in His grace, baptized into His Holy Name – and shielded forever by His glorious power.

His *greatness* goes out to the world in a MESSAGE – the **Gospel** / the Word of God – under the banner of the cross (a symbol of brutal execution) – reminding us of the greatness / the power / the salvation found in His death and resurrection. For the believer Christ is **PEACE** – not *earthly* peace that never seems to happen, and never lasts if it does, but peace with God found in His blood and the forgiveness of our sins.

We get to look back, and see how Jesus (in a glorious and unexpected way) fulfilled all the Spirit's words and predictions, just as Mary said – He blasted the rich and arrogant – and lifted up the poor and humble. He called the religious leaders hypocrites, and praised the faith of the Canaanite woman who begged for mercy. He said the repentant tax-collector was justified before God, and that the proud Pharisee was still in his sins. He proclaimed His Divine Nature and ancient heritage when He said, **“Before Abraham was born, I AM”** (John 8:58) – and they picked up stones to kill him. He swore under oath at His trial that He was indeed the promised Son of God / the Messiah – and they condemned Him to death. He rose as He predicted, but even the disciples (who heard Him speak of it) did not *expect* it. He ascended 40 days later and sent His followers out (after Pentecost) to carry on a Gospel ministry that was not what any of

them expected – and wound up costing them everything, even their very own lives.

Right down to today, Scripture describes the Son of God in a way that people don't expect. Some think of him as a “good luck charm”, or as a “life coach”, or a human prophet, a mythical character, or one who accepts people in their sin and unbelief. Or maybe just a good example for us to follow. Go to Scripture – He is not at all what people would naturally expect.

As Christians we know Him rightly – we respect and honor Him as King and worship Him in humility and with repentant hearts. But, sometimes we might go home and **expect** things to go smoothly in life . . . and instead we often find trouble, challenges, struggles, hardship, pain, and disappointment. Hey – *expect the unexpected*.

Get **BACK TO THE WORD OF GOD** when things go upside down in life. There you find unexpected and amazing grace – forgiveness / acceptance / a secure position in His family / wisdom / the power of Baptism and the Real Presence of our Savior in the Lord's Supper / there you find promises and strength to face the unexpected challenges of life in this world. People out there might not really expect that God Almighty is present and working right here in our humble little church . . . *but HE is here!*

Why does God operate this way? I don't know – He's running the show. It seems He's on a quest to separate out the wheat from the weeds / the sheep from the goats – those who trust Him no matter what, and those who give up and abandon Him when it's not what they hoped for, wanted, or expected.

We don't know what the dark road ahead of us will look like in this life. However I think I can tell you with confidence to **expect the unexpected**. Right up through the events of Judgment Day we'll be hearing / or saying, *“Wow – that's not what I expected!”* But – you'll continue to see that all God's Words and prophecies DO come true in every way – therefore trust Him / stick with Him and His Word – He kept His promise when He came as a baby in Bethlehem, and He will keep His promise to return in glory. In the end we will understand and see that God's plans and purposes are even and always better than anything we ever could have ever expected! **Merry Christmas – expect the unexpected – amen.**