

+ Luke 2:22-40 + What Did You Expect? +
+ 4th Sunday after Epiphany: The Presentation of Our Lord + 2 February 2014 +

You could say this weekend is full of expectation. Last night's Syracuse-Duke men's basketball game was hyped for months. They already started selling "Beat Duke" shirts three months ago. They had a crowd of 35,446 people—the largest on-campus crowd ever. So after all that build-up, did it meet expectations? For Syracuse, it didn't disappoint as the team pulled off the win in overtime. Many said it exceeded their expectations.

Of course, for the rest of the nation, this weekend is all about the Super Bowl this evening. Whether you're a Seattle or Denver fan or not, most of the nation will gather with friends and family for parties with big TVs and lots of munchies just to watch a football game or at least the commercials. Last year an estimated 108 million Americans watched the Super Bowl. It's no wonder one person recently described Super Bowl Sunday as the biggest American holiday since Abe Lincoln declared Thanksgiving Day a holiday.

The media hype machine has been going into overdrive for a couple weeks now—"This is going to be the greatest Super Bowl in the history of the Super Bowl", but it's a game. Like so many before it, this Super Bowl is likelier to be a disappointment than a classic. Perhaps the commercials won't live up to the hype. Perhaps the game will be a blow-out or even boring. Like so much in our lives, when our expectations are high, we end up disappointed with the results. A job doesn't pan out. A relationship falls apart. A new home or car has problems. We look back on what turned out to be disappointment and ask ourselves, "**WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?**"

What were expectations like when Mary and Joseph came to the temple with their 7-week-old son Jesus? After all, expectation for God's Anointed to come and rescue his people from the Romans was high, but the census that had brought so many there was over. Things had calmed down around Jerusalem. Most non-locals had gone back home, but here was this poor, Galilean couple walking six miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem with their son barely 40 days old. Perhaps Joseph was able to have Mary and little Jesus ride on a donkey. Still it was six miles over rocky roads with an infant.

Why were they traveling to Jerusalem? Being faithful Old Testament believers, Mary and Joseph had to travel to the temple. The Old Testament laws required that about forty days after the birth of a child, a sacrifice had to be made for a mother who had fully recovered from childbirth. Since this law applied to every family, the laws made it possible for poorer families to sacrifice two doves rather than two expensive lambs. They were also to consecrate their firstborn son for service to the Lord or symbolically "buy him back" from the Lord, but Jesus would be devoted to God's service.

So the day finally arrived. Mary would be purified and Jesus would be presented to God, consecrated for his service. No one noticed when Joseph and Mary and the baby came to the temple courts. They looked like so many other poor families that visited the temple every day. Joseph carried a small cage with two doves in one hand while guiding the donkey that carried his family with the other.

When they woke up that morning, what did they expect? "Well, we have to get up early to make the trek up to Jerusalem. We have to make sure we purchase the doves for sacrifice, and of course, we have to make sure we carry out the Law's requirements. Perhaps we'll get home before sundown."

Yes, they knew who their Child was. There was no doubt of that, especially after angels had told them who this Child was going to be—"**the Son of the Most High**" (Luke 1:32), the One who was going to be named Jesus because he was going "**to save his people from their sins**" (Matthew 1:21). There was no doubt, after shepherds had come to worship their Son, actually God's Son, on the night of his birth. Yet Mary and Joseph's expectations probably weren't very high that day. They were probably more practical at that moment, not unlike those of any new parents learning to live with a newborn.

There was another whose expectations were sky high when he woke up that morning. In Jerusalem, there lived an old man named Simeon. He was a "**righteous and devout**" follower of the true God. "**He was waiting for the consolation of Israel**". Like other Old Testament believers, he didn't know when the Messiah was going to come and save his people from their sins, but unlike those believers, Simeon had an advantage. The Holy Spirit had revealed "**that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Christ**". What a promise! What a reason for expectation! He had waited so long hoping that each new day he would see the Lord's Anointed, but each day came and went without fulfillment, that is, until that day. Somehow the Holy

Spirit let Simeon know that it was time to see the Christ. Imagine how high his expectations were at that moment. “Finally! After all these years, I will finally see my salvation, my deliverance, my Lord and my God!”

There was another that morning who had different expectations. An elderly prophetess by the name of Anna had her own expectations that day. She was 84 years old—quite old for that time, and even able to trace her family line back to Jacob’s son Asher. Many years before, she had been married for seven years, but her husband had died. So as a widow, **“she never left the temple, but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.”** Perhaps she had a room at the temple where she slept at night. She was simply happy to see a new day of grace and expected to have another good day filled with worship and prayer and praise for her Lord.

All kinds of expectations were going to meet that day in the temple courts, and only old Simeon knew how high they should be, but not even he realized how an infant would utterly exceed them all.

When Mary and Joseph entered the temple courts, they didn’t expect to have a very excited older man come rushing up to them. By God’s grace, their parental instincts didn’t kick in as Simeon snatched up the child and did the unexpected. He cradled that bundle of divinity in his arms and praised God with an ancient song. **“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”** As Simeon cradled the Son of God in his arms, he knew that the child staring up at him was the Savior for all people and for himself. His Savior had come—the Lord’s long-promised Anointed, and now he could go home to heaven. His expectations were blown away with pure joy and peace.

All Mary and Joseph could do was stand there in wonder and amazement. All their practical expectations fell by the wayside as Simeon reminded them who their Child really was. He **“blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: ‘This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.’”** Their little boy would be so influential in the lives of people that many would either reject him or be led to believe in him, and a time would come when Mary would grieve. Thirty years later, she would see her Son crucified and dying on a cross, but he would be her Savior too.

Simeon handed the little boy back to his mother and departed in peace, but elderly Anna had seen all the excitement. She had seen and heard Simeon rejoice and she realized that today wouldn’t just be a good day to worship the Lord, but the greatest day in her long life. **“Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God...”** For decades she had worshiped here in the temple, but now the Lord had allowed her to see her Savior in the flesh. So she did what we all do with good news. She told people about him. She **“spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.”** Her expectations were blown away with joy.

Mary and Joseph weren’t the same as they fulfilled **“everything required by the Law of the Lord”**. What a day that had exceeded every expectation. What a day of joy as they carried their Son, their Savior home.

What did you expect when you came to church this morning? Did you have high expectations like Simeon as you got ready for the day? Did you get excited to see the Savior today when you came to worship? Or did you have different expectations like Anna? Did you look forward to coming to God’s house because you’d have another opportunity to worship and pray and praise on another day of God’s grace? Or did you have practical expectations like Joseph and Mary—happy to come to church, but far too focused on the practical, on getting here and getting through it and getting home? Or were your expectations even lower? Did you come here to do what you’re supposed to do, but now let’s get on with the game?

We all have different expectations. We have different expectations of what God has for us and what we hope to do in his service. What expectations do you have for a church like ours? What expectations do you have for worship? What expectations do you have for our God, for our Savior Jesus Christ? Far too often, those expectations are low and self-centered. What’s this church or this worship service or this sermon or even God himself going to do for me? What do I get out of it? Will they do what I expect? With expectations like that, you can be sure that you’ll be disappointed.

Yet what do you find when you come to God’s house, when you come to worship, when you read God’s Word? Like Simeon and Anna and even Mary and Joseph, you find Jesus. You find the Lord’s Anointed. You find the One presented to the holy God to serve on your behalf, the One who came to fulfill all of God’s Law in your place even as an infant, the One who came to sacrifice himself for you, the One who came to save you.

In spite of our self-centered, low expectations, we find Jesus who exceeds even the highest expectations. We find Christ in his Word—fulfilling and saving. We find Christ in his Holy Supper—forgiving and giving life. We find Christ giving peace and life and eternal salvation. We find the Fulfiller of all our expectations. We find the Consolation and Comfort of God. We find the Savior of the nations, yet ours, and the Lord of our lives. We find the One who changes our lives, who motivates us to serve and speak, who purifies us of all our sins, who never lets us down, who never disappoints us.

So on this weekend full of expectation, no matter who you cheer for or what you're hoping to see and do, go with Mary and Joseph to God house. Rejoice with Simeon in the presence of your Savior, and then depart in peace ready to share that good news like Anna with everyone you know and love. The long-expected Savior has come for you and for us all. Amen.