

BEYOND EXPECTATIONS

Salvation through Jesus Christ far exceeds anything humanity could ever have expected.

KEY POINTS

- ❖ At Christmastime, children (and a lot of adults too) have great expectations about the gifts they'll receive from their family and close friends. But in many cases, what they receive is so disappointing, it ends up being returned or exchanged for something else, or re-gifted to someone else at the first opportunity.
- ❖ But, every once in a while, a gift is received that is so overwhelming it brings you to tears or makes you scream with delight.
- ❖ In Matthew 2:1-8, we read of an incident that took place 2,000 years ago: Jesus' birth.
- ❖ It wasn't a secret affair that nobody saw coming. Herod quickly remembered that the advent of "the Christ" was an expected event as soon as he heard what the wise men were asking.
- ❖ This word "Christ" means "Messiah," "Anointed One," or "Chosen One." And when Herod asked where the Christ was to be born, the chief priests and scribes were immediately able to tell him that their Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, as prophesied in Micah 5:2. This was David's birthplace and the birthplace of his descendant who would rule forever (see Isaiah 9:7).
- ❖ But there's one very important point to the coming of the Messiah that King Herod, the chief priests and elders missed (or ignored), despite all of their wisdom, knowledge, status and learning.
- ❖ Listen to the angel's message to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born: "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11).
- ❖ Israel fully expected their Messiah to come one day as a king and saviour in a military/political sense. The angel identified Jesus as a Saviour, but said nothing about armies or politics.
- ❖ The religious leaders were able to say where Jesus would be born, but they didn't recall or tell Herod anything about another powerful prophecy from Isaiah 53:1-11.
- ❖ This was also in their scriptures but didn't seem to be among their expectations. Jesus went beyond their expectations to become, as the apostle John records, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).
- ❖ There is no doubt Israel would have been very happy just to have a military saviour, but Jesus had 'much bigger fish to fry'—He had come "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Matt. 18:11).
- ❖ So, now that we've seen that Jesus came to go beyond the expectations of the religious crowd, we need to respond appropriately (Is. 54:6-7), even as we celebrate His birth.

KEY SCRIPTURES: Luke 2:1-14;
Matthew 2:1-8; Isaiah 9:7; Titus 2:11-14

- ❖ We really should have had no expectation of pardon for our sins, but this was always in God's plan. Even from Old Testament times He said: "Come now, and let us reason together.... Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Is. 1:18).
- ❖ Paul followed up on this thought in his letter to Titus (2:11-14).
- ❖ This is totally beyond any expectation we could have had but was eternally in the will and plan of God. The work of salvation the angel told the shepherds about is the same salvation Paul wrote about over 60 years later. And it's the same salvation Jesus is offering to us today.
- ❖ What is *your* story, *your* testimony? How has God gone beyond *your* expectations to bring *you* to salvation?
- ❖ Zacharias the priest received a miracle of healing at the birth of his son John. After a God-imposed period of muteness, he was able to speak once again. His first words encapsulated the work that Jesus was born to do (see Lk. 1:68-79).
- ❖ There is no doubt that the day will come when Jesus comes to defeat all the enemies of His people and establish His righteous, eternal kingdom. But Zacharias told his baby son to go before the face of the Lord to give the knowledge of salvation to His people. This was not to save them from their enemies, but so they would receive remission of sins and get out from under the shadow of death.
- ❖ Our rightful expectation is death as the wages of sin. Jesus went way beyond this expectation and has given us "the gift of God [which] is eternal life, in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION TOOLS

1. What is your response to the two questions asked in the lesson: What is *your* story, *your* testimony? How has God gone beyond *your* expectations to bring *you* to salvation?
2. Are there any other encounters in your life where God has gone beyond your expectations? Again, share your story, your testimony.
3. Give God thanks!

PRAYER TIME

God, You have been so, so good to me! Thank You for going far beyond my expectations. Amen.

WEEK OF SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2021

NOTES

Meditate as you read through/listen to this week's message. If it helps, use symbols for your notes.

✓ (Reminds me/Confirms) 🌱 (New idea) 🗨️ (Think about)

! (Do this) ❤️ (Speaks to my heart) ➡️ (Must share)

PRAYER NEEDS/THANKSGIVINGS

Go deeper with your Life Group family.
CONNECT-REFLECT-DISSECT THE
WORD

Start-up: Had you ever received a gift that was much more (or less) than you expected? How did you react?