

GREAT EXPECTATIONS—UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES

Luke 2:8-21

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

²¹ On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

INTRODUCTION

Giving and receiving gifts at Christmas may be the two things that make the holiday most stressful or most enjoyable—it kind of depends on expectations and outcomes.

An American Express survey about Christmas gifts found that the fruitcake was chosen most often (31%) from a list of "worst" holiday gifts. It even finished ahead of "no gift at all." When asked how to dispose of a bad gift, 30% would hide it in the closet, 21% would return it, and 19% would give it away. This suggests that the Christmas fruitcake might get recycled as a gift for the host of New Year's party. *Resource*, Mar/Apr, 1990.

How do you respond to a disappointing gift?

Try to imagine the possible feelings and expectations the shepherds had when the angel of the Lord announce to them that a Savior had been born. The Jewish people had waited thousands of years for the promised Messiah and had many preconceived ideas about who he would be and how he would come. However, in spite of the writing of the prophets, we know they didn't expect what they got.

I. THE SHEPHERDS COULD HAVE COMPLAINED JESUS WAS THE WRONG SIZE.

A. The Messiah was a baby! They needed a king and military conqueror.

B. What they received was an infant and a poor one at that.

II. THE SHEPHERDS COULD HAVE COMPLAINED THE SETTING WASN'T RIGHT.

Listen to verses 10 and 11 of our text: “But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”

The angel had them on the edge of their seat so-to-speak. But then threw them a curve by saying in verse 12, “This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

A. Messiahs aren't born in barns?

B. Messiahs are born in poverty?

III. INSTEAD, THE SHEPHERDS REJOICED THAT THEY WERE INCLUDED AS RECIPIENTS.

A. They were able to look beyond the natural, the unexplained, the unexpected and understand the value of the gift.

B. Their humble understanding of themselves and their own needs opened their hearts to the gift.

Conclusion

In his book *Growing Strong*, Charles Swindoll writes, Some gifts you can give this Christmas are beyond monetary value: Mend a quarrel, dismiss suspicion, tell someone, "I love you." Give something away--anonymously. Forgive someone who has treated you wrong. Turn away wrath with a soft answer. Visit someone in a nursing home. Apologize if you were wrong. Be especially kind to someone with whom you work. Give as God gave to you in Christ, without obligation, or announcement, or reservation, or hypocrisy.

Charles Swindoll, *Growing Strong*, pp. 400-1.

The best gifts are the ones that we were not expecting. Even greater, are the gifts that are so nice, we could not have afforded to get it on our own. Like the gift of Jesus. Jesus is the gift that allows us to have a right relationship with God. We are not capable of creating this relationship on our own, we must have the “gift” of salvation, unmerited grace. When Jesus went to the cross it built a bridge to God that even if we could find engineers wise enough to build it, we could never be able to do on our own what it takes to be able to cross it.

It might not have been what humanity was expecting, but it was the right gift.