

## Homily for Christmas Day (Gospel: Luke 2:1-14)

December 25th, 2022

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Anticipation and expectations are big aspects of today's celebration of the birth of our Lord.

Our four-week journey through Advent helped prepare us in anticipation of our Saviors birth as a baby in a Bethlehem stable. There were plenty of expectations leading up to this day as we have heard in the readings. However, we also learn that God's plan is not always our plan.

Caesar Augustus for instance was expecting his rule over the Roman empire to continue unfettered as he ordered a census to count everyone to make sure the proper taxes were being collected. He believed himself to be in control of the "whole world" – little did he know that was going to change in God's plan.

Mary and Joseph, having said yes to God's call to bring Jesus into the world, had their own expectations. Likely that included quiet family time in their hometown of Nazareth and the arrival of Jesus. However, they are required to head to Bethlehem for the census and end up being

there when it is time for Jesus to arrive. They were surely not expecting to begin their family out in a stable using a feeding trough as a crib, surrounded by animals, but that ended up being part of God's plan too.

The shepherds out in the fields were certainly not expecting the night sky to suddenly be lit up with a multitude of angels singing "Glory to God" and announcing the birth of a savior. In fact, as we hear in the gospel, they were already "keeping the night watch over their flock."

Shepherds were counted at the low end of society in those days. However, they were elevated in God's plan by being the first to hear of the birth of Christ.

All of this was God's plan – none of it was accidental or a coincidence – it was in fact intentional in fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies surrounding the birth of Jesus.

What about our own expectations? Things like...

- Getting the shopping done for the meals and presents
- Getting the house ready for family and friends
- Getting to the various Christmas parties, the kid's concert at school, plus of course the kids expectations approaching

Christmas such as gifts, and being with their friends, etc. – it can get very busy and sometimes distracting...

The world around us has expectations as well, such as how quickly everything can shift from Christmas to the next holiday – Valentine’s Day in this case – and yes – I have already seen at least one retail store making this shift last week even before Christmas arrived.

This time of the year requires patience on our part so we can not only prepare for the arrival of Jesus but to also celebrate His birth.

In fact, the church plans for that. While the world approaches Christmas as a single day on the calendar – we celebrate what is called the Octave of Christmas – an entire week of liturgies celebrating the birth of Christ. It allows us to hold onto Christmas in a very unique and purposeful way, while the world around us moves on. It begins today and ends next Sunday with the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.

We do this because just one day to celebrate the birth of Christ is too short – too quick. We take our time because God is now with us, God is now among us, and God is for us – for all time – and we should cherish

that gift in our lives not only on Christmas, but throughout this season and every day of the year.

That - is worth celebrating more than just one day on the calendar.

Then, to take our celebrations even further, after the Octave of Christmas - we are still in the Christmas Season until January 9<sup>th</sup> - when we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord.

Through all of this, we have an opportunity to reset our own expectations of this season and find ways to extend the celebration of Christmas.

Now, our live Christmas trees might be dried out by now if they went up shortly after Thanksgiving and will need to be dealt as we do not want fire hazards in our homes, but what about a new family tradition or two as part of the season.

For instance - here is something we can all try out this Christmas Season. Most of us have nativities in our homes so make it a special occasion on the Epiphany, that is on January 6<sup>th</sup>, when three wise men come to honor Jesus with worship and gifts. Gather the family around the nativity and bring the three wise men figurines out and place them in the

nativity scene. Then, share the gospel reading about their visit which you can find in Matthew, Chapter 2, in the first twelve verses.

Here at the church, on the evening of the Epiphany, we are having a special service to celebrate and learn more about the wise men's visit - another opportunity for a new tradition.

Something like these special family traditions or others that you decide on can really help us all focus and continue our celebrations of Christ's birth beyond Christmas Day itself.

So, on this Christmas Day and throughout the entire Christmas Season, we should rejoice and be glad, for our salvation has come in the form of a tiny baby born in a stable. Remember to also share this good news with our families, friends, co-workers, and others by showing the love of Christ to all those around us.

Two final thoughts:

First - God has a plan for each one of us and often it's not what we had in mind. Be willing to hear and trust His plan as Mary and Joseph did.

Second - Don't rush past Christmas but show the world that we are Christians by our love and actions all year long - both for Christ our

Savior who is born today and remains always among us – and for our neighbors wherever we encounter them.

Merry Christmas!