



The Advent of Jesus Christ:

The Expectation of Christmas

Luke 1 & 2; Matthew 1

Pastor Brad Wood

What happens when Christmas doesn't meet our expectations? This week's sermon takes us back to the very first Christmas—a night that turned every expectation upside down. We journey alongside Mary and Joseph, whose lives were radically transformed by God's plan in ways they never could have imagined: a young virgin facing shame and whispers, a righteous man feeling betrayed, a couple traveling while heavily pregnant only to give birth in a stable among animals. None of this fit anyone's vision of how the Messiah would arrive, yet this is precisely how God chose to enter our world.

Pastor Brad draws us into Luke chapters 1 and 2, alongside Matthew 1, revealing that Jesus came not as an earthly king with fanfare and glory, but in utter humility to identify with the broken, the outcast, and the brokenhearted.

The shepherds—society's lowest—who watched over the Passover lambs, were the first witnesses. Their presence renders a beautiful foreshadowing of the baby that would become the ultimate Passover Lamb. Isaiah 53 reminds us that He came to bear our griefs, carry our sorrows, and be wounded for our transgressions. The message is clear: Christmas was never about our traditions, our perfect gatherings, or our stress-filled preparations. It's about Emmanuel—God with us. When Christ is present, our Christmas is already perfect, regardless of our circumstances. This challenges us to release our grip on expectations and embrace the unexpected ways God shows up in our lives, bringing His perfection into our imperfection.

Key Takeaways:

1. The first Christmas was messy, unexpected, and far from perfect by human standards. It was, however, exactly what God intended.
2. Jesus didn't wait for perfect circumstances to come; He brought perfection into imperfection.
3. Christmas isn't about our traditions going according to plan; it's about commemorating Emmanuel—God with us.
4. Jesus came in humility to identify with every hardship we face and to conquer sin and death for us.
5. The only requirement for a "perfect" Christmas is Christ's presence.

5-Day Devotional and Small Group Guide

Day 1: When God Disrupts Our Plans

Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Devotional: Mary's life was forever changed by an angelic visit she never expected. She had plans: a future with Joseph, which included a simple, quiet life in Nazareth. But God's purposes transcended her expectations. Notice Mary's response: "Let it be to me according to your word." This Christmas season, consider what expectations you're clinging to. Are you willing to surrender your perfect plans to God's perfect purposes? The most meaningful moments often come when we release control and embrace God's unexpected invitations. Mary didn't understand everything, yet she trusted the One who did. Her willingness to say "yes" to the impossible brought salvation to the world. What might God birth through your surrendered obedience today?

Day 2: Perfection Comes to Imperfection

Reading: Luke 2:1-7

Devotional: The King of Kings was born in a stable—not a palace. The Creator of the universe was laid in a feeding trough—not a royal cradle. This wasn't a failure of planning; it was the heart of God's message. Jesus didn't wait for perfect circumstances to arrive. He came into our mess, our disappointment, our broken expectations. If your Christmas feels less than perfect this year—if circumstances have left you in a "stable" rather than the "inn" you hoped for—remember that Christ's presence makes any place sacred. The perfection we seek isn't found in flawless circumstances but in Emmanuel, God with us. Where you are right now, however imperfect, is exactly where God can meet you.

Day 3: The Humble King

Reading: Isaiah 53:1-6

Devotional: Isaiah prophesied a Messiah unlike any king the world expected: despised, rejected, and acquainted with grief. This passage reveals Christmas's ultimate purpose: Jesus came not to be served but to serve; not to receive honor but to bear our shame. He was "wounded for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniquities." Every moment of Christ's life, from stable birth to criminal's death, was marked by humility. This Christmas, consider how radically different God's kingdom is from worldly kingdoms. Success isn't measured by status but by surrender; greatness isn't found in power but in service. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him. Let gratitude for this humble King transform how you approach both celebration and sacrifice.

Day 4: God Sees the Overlooked

Reading: Luke 2:8-20

Devotional: God announced history's greatest event not to religious leaders or political powers, but to shepherds—society's outcasts, deemed untrustworthy and unclean. These men watching over Passover lambs became the first witnesses to the ultimate Passover Lamb. If you feel overlooked this Christmas, marginalized or forgotten, take heart: God specializes in seeing those the world dismisses. He doesn't measure worth by society's standards. The shepherds couldn't offer expensive gifts or impressive credentials; they simply came with willing hearts and spread the good news. Your circumstances don't disqualify you from encountering Christ; they may be precisely where He chooses to reveal His glory. You matter to God. He sees you. He comes to you.

Day 5: Christ With Us Makes It Perfect

Reading: Matthew 1:18-23; Hebrews 4:14-16

Devotional: Emmanuel means "God with us"—the promise that transforms every circumstance. Jesus didn't just visit earth; He experienced our full humanity. He knows betrayal, disappointment, physical pain, and shattered expectations. Hebrews assures us that He "sympathizes with our weaknesses" because He faced every temptation we face. This Christmas, whatever you're walking through, you have a High Priest who understands. The perfection of Christmas isn't found in flawless celebrations or met expectations—it's found in Christ's presence. Mary pondered all these unexpected events in her heart, recognizing God's faithfulness despite the confusion. Let this be your Christmas meditation: Jesus is with you. In joy or sorrow, abundance or lack, His presence makes it perfect. Come boldly to His throne of grace.

Practical Applications:

1. **Prayer: Let Go of One Expectation:** Identify one expectation you have for Christmas this year and intentionally release it to God. Ask the Lord to replace the anxiety about that expectation with gratitude for Christ's presence.
2. **Reflection: Practice Pondering:** Like Mary, take time each day this week to sit quietly and "ponder" what Christ's coming means for your life. Journal your reflections.
3. **Scripture Study: Share the True Account:** Read Luke, Chapter 2 and tell someone this week about the real first Christmas—the mess, the humility, and why Jesus came. Use it as an opportunity to share the gospel.
4. **Accountability: Simplify and Refocus:** Remove one Christmas activity or obligation that is causing stress, and replace that time with worship, prayer, or serving others.
5. **Thankfulness: Reach Out to Someone Unexpected:** Following Jesus' example of coming to the outcast, invite someone who might be alone or struggling to share a meal or activity with you this Christmas season.

Small Group Guide: The Expectation of Christmas

Discussion Questions:

- How does the reality that Jesus was born into poverty and humility challenge our modern expectations of what Christmas should look like?
- Mary and Joseph faced public shame and rejection because of their obedience to God. What does their response teach us about trusting God when His plan differs from our expectations?
- Why do you think God chose to reveal the birth of the Messiah to shepherds, who were considered the lowest in society, rather than to religious leaders or the wealthy?
- In what ways does the messiness and imperfection of the first Christmas comfort you when your own Christmas doesn't meet your expectations?

- Jesus came not to establish an earthly kingdom but to bear witness to truth and free us from sin. How does this reshape your understanding of what Christmas truly commemorates?
- Pastor Brad mentioned that the shepherds watching over Passover lambs were sent to see the ultimate Passover Lamb. What is the significance of this connection between Jesus' birth and His eventual sacrifice?
- Isaiah 53 describes the Messiah as despised, rejected, and a man of sorrows. How does this prophecy shape our understanding of why Jesus was born in such humble circumstances?
- Mary pondered and kept all these unexpected events in her heart. What can we learn from her example about processing when God's plan unfolds differently than we imagined?
- Pastor Brad stated that the only thing needed for a perfect Christmas is that Christ is present. What is a practical way that we can shift our focus from our expectations to His presence this season?
- Hebrews 4:14-16 assures us that Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses because He experienced every trial we face. How does knowing Jesus came to identify with the outcast and brokenhearted impact how you approach Him with your own struggles?

Further Discussion Questions:

- What stood out to you most from this message? Why?
- How do you think Mary and Joseph felt when their lives were turned completely upside down by God's plan? What does their response teach us about obedience and faith?
- Why do you think God chose shepherds—the "lowest of the low"—to be the first visitors to Jesus? What does this reveal about God's heart and priorities?
- Pastor Brad mentioned that the shepherds were watching over the Passover lambs. What is the significance of this detail? How does it point to Jesus' ultimate purpose?

- What expectations do you typically have for Christmas? Where do those expectations come from (family traditions, culture, social media, etc.)?
- Have you ever experienced a Christmas that didn't meet your expectations? How did you respond? Looking back, can you see God's presence in that experience?
- Read Isaiah 53:3-5 together. How does understanding that Jesus was "acquainted with grief" and experienced rejection change how you view your own disappointments?
- Pastor Brad stated: "If Jesus remains with us, then no matter who we are with, where we are, or what we're facing, your Christmas is still perfect." How does this challenge or encourage you?
- What are some ways our culture's commercialization of Christmas can distract us from the true meaning? How can we guard against this in our own lives and families?
- Jesus came in humility to identify with the outcast and brokenhearted. How should this truth shape:
 - How we celebrate Christmas?
 - Who we celebrate with?
 - What we prioritize during the season?
- Pastor Brad emphasized that Jesus came to make "the impossible possible"—freedom from sin. How does remembering this truth change your perspective on Christmas challenges?

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