

## Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev. Geoff Read on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2018

Luke 2:15-18, 21-22

*“Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed.”* Alexander Pope, 18th English poet and satirist

I am not sure if our attitude to expectations is an optimism/pessimism, seeing a glass half full or empty thing

It may be more about our experience and how we feel ourselves to have been treated by circumstances and people

*“Look. I have a strategy. Why expect anything? If you don’t expect anything, you don’t get disappointed.”* Patricia McCormick, Cut, novel for young adults

*“I find my life is a lot easier the lower I keep my expectations.”* Bill Watterson, cartoonist of Calvin & Hobbes

*“Treat a man as he is and he will remain as he is. Treat a man as he can and should be and he will become as he can and should be.”* **Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People***

The figure of 350 on the side of a red bus, the promise trade deals with the EU as “the easiest in human history”, of taking back control and having cake and eating it did much to create and to raise the expectations that have led the UK to a referendum decision and the profound impasse in the UK Parliament called Brexit

Expectations are what we believe and hope about our present and our future

They are shaped by our wishes and understandings

Our ability to rely on our expectations, to see them come to fulfilment, the What, is based on the credibility of information we choose to draw and to some degree circumstances, but also on and the trustworthiness of those who work to bring about what we expect to happen – the Who

Our gospel reading today begins with these words: READ Lk 2:15

That’s an expectation that had been growing throughout the history of the Jewish people: the What is that they will be delivered and saved

And the Who that will bring this about is God

This expectation had become focused upon the coming of the Messiah, One who would come into the midst of their history and would restore the fortunes of Israel, a particularly acute expectation after years of Roman rule

And people are wondering if its John

They sense something new in this strange figure – heeding his call to prepare the way of the Lord crowds have come out to the wilderness, asking in specific, concrete terms – soldiers, tax collectors - what should we do?

They stand in the running water of the Jordan to embrace baptism – and as they do so Jesus stands in line alongside them

Baptism is not a peculiarly Christian ritual. And maybe we need to just suspend our understanding of it to get what is going on here

Right from the earliest Levitical laws there was the call for ritual washing and cleansing in the Jewish faith

As the second Temple was built and the houses around it, archaeologists today have discovered that both contained Mikvehs, ritual baths for ritual washing in preparation for entry to the Temple for worship. More were found at Qumran, the community associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls

John's brand of washing has a particular twist (READ 2:3), but dig a bit deeper into this ritual and what do you find?

The original Hebrew word for Jewish ritual washing - Mikveh - has common roots in two other words - Tikvah and kav

Together they combine a sense of

- hope, something waited for
- and alignment, binding something together

So, we have waiting in hope, aligning ourselves with God: in other words expectation

But not an expectation rooted in just our wishes and desires

But expectation rooted in the Purposes of God

The fulfilment of these purposes in turn arises out the Person of God – what He is like - His faithfulness, love

Another word for expectation is Faith, the sort we affirm Sunday by Sunday when, as we recite the Creed, we say that we believe and trust in Him

Belief and trust are two sides of expectation – the What and the Who

And both the What and the Who come together in Jesus

READ 2:21

It's as the crowds are baptised – realign and wait for God

As Jesus himself is baptised and is expectantly praying

So the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus and the voice of God speaks

Now you have to realise that in the life of Israel the voice of God has been deafeningly silent for four centuries in what we called the intertestamental period

God Spirit and God's Word announce a new thing beginning

Turn the page of your Bible to Lk 4 and you find Person and Purpose aligned as Jesus reading from the scroll of Isaiah at the start of his ministry: READ 4:18

And then: READ v21

What's your approach to expectations? Of life in general, certain people or circumstances in particular ...

What has shaped your approach to expectations?

What in your family of origin, maybe your culture of origin?

What about the environment in which you work or live?

Maybe you have trusted and expected much and you have been badly failed and deeply hurt

Perhaps you are unsure what ought to now shape those expectations and your responsibility in bringing them about

Are you up there with Alexander Pope? “Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed”

It’s a safe place to be. But is it the best? God’s best?

What difference being a disciple, a follower of Jesus, should and could make to our expectations?

Indeed, what do we expect of Jesus?

When we come here Sunday by Sunday, do we expect to encounter the living Jesus in Word, in Sacrament, in worship, not only in our thoughts but also our emotions and experience?

This passage suggests that as we wait in hope, as we align ourselves with God He comes, He speaks, He acts

What is true of our own personal lives is true of our life together

What do we expect of God in our life together as a Church?

That’s the question the Church Council is asking for us as a Church as we engage in a process called Mission Action Planning

In the appointment process the Council did a great job of gathering people’s expectations of our Church and the sort of minister you wanted to appoint

The next steps is to ask what happens when we “baptise” our expectations, our wishes, our personal preferences, our desires

Like those people in the Jordan what happens when we come, willing to align ourselves with Jesus’ will, His purposes for us in our life together, our worship, our mission in the international community and beyond?

They asked: What then must we do? – and in response to their expectation God comes, God speaks

And as we ask that question, let’s ask Jesus for the grace to dare to expect that the Spirit will come and the Father will speak