

Baptism Expectations
Luke 3:1-9, 15-22
January 9, 2022
Baptism of the Lord, Installation of Elders
First Presbyterian, Luling

A friend who lives in Canada is planning out her garden already. She and her husband and their 9 year old daughter grow a lot of fruits and veggies during the short Canadian growing season. My own “garden” is haphazard at best, but their garden is well planned, laid out thoughtfully, where some veggies shade the ones that need shade, and others grow up the fence, and there are sunflowers both for seeds and because they are fun. Onions, garlic, pumpkins, tomatoes, cherry trees. So many things they’re sketching out and searching for seeds. And it will likely be months before they can even see the dirt in the backyard, because it is covered in snow and will remain that way. Yet there they are, expecting that they’ll plant and nurture and grow and enjoy the fruits of their labors.

Humans need to be able to expect something. Need to be able to hope for something. When you’re expecting your Amazon package on Monday, and it doesn’t show up till Wednesday, well, then, your expectations are disappointed, and have to get adjusted. And we’ve been doing a lot of expectation adjustments the past couple of years.

The people as a whole, in Jesus’s day, had expectations that they carried as a group. They expected a Messiah. John the Baptist was part of these expectations—he had been preaching to the people to prepare the way of the Lord. He had been calling them to repentance in the strongest terms. John had heightened their sense of expectation, even as he told them several times he wasn’t the one they were waiting for.

The baptism of Jesus occurs in all four gospels, but Luke is the only one to tell us that the people were “filled with expectation” (verse 15). They were all “questioning in their hearts if John was the Messiah.” Their expectations were just about overflowing, and they were so expecting the Messiah any day, that they had almost convinced themselves that John was the one they were expecting.

Other places in Luke, that “expecting” word gets translated as “waiting,” but it seems to mean a little bit of a combination of the two. A few chapters later (7:19), John’s disciples come to Jesus to ask if he is the one they’ve been waiting for, if he’s the one they’ve been expecting. Apparently it still hasn’t been settled

in their minds, despite what John had taught, and despite the beginnings of Jesus's ministry. They're in the process of adjusting their expectations.

They'd been expecting a Messiah to show up and fix things. They didn't know exactly what they meant by that, but surely the Messiah would know what to do and how to do it. It sounds pretty appealing when we put it that way, huh? Just come and fix things and get us out of the mess we're in. A rescuer.

Instead, they get Jesus. He is not who they were expecting, not who they thought they were waiting for. John has told them to repent. John has told them to prepare. Their expectations blind them to what is actually happening.

Jesus's baptism in Luke seems to be kind of a private thing. Just Jesus, the voice from heaven, and the Spirit coming as a dove. Maybe the crowds are there, maybe they aren't. Luke doesn't say, but it doesn't seem like a public spectacle. So the people don't get the benefit that we do, of hearing God say Jesus is the beloved son, of knowing the Spirit's presence in bodily form. But they had the significant benefit of watching Jesus in action, as he shatters their expectations.

I don't know about you, but when I get an expectation in my head of how something is supposed to be, or when something is supposed to happen, or how exactly someone else is supposed to act, I'm reluctant to let that expectation go. I'm sympathetic in that with John's disciples and who knows how many other folks in the crowds around Jesus.

But God is not bound by our expectations, which are really limitations. God's presence and activity is not required to fit into our timeline or our qualifications or our respectable activities.

Our kids tell me that they had to have a meeting this week to discuss "dress code expectations," which is really just another way to say "dress code rules." Our expectations can't become rules for how or when or through whom God will act.

God chooses to come to us in ways that cause us to adjust our expectations. Nobody was expecting a voice from heaven or a descending dove or a Messiah that didn't fix everything magically. But that's what they got. God breaks our expectations, and we can be thankful for that.