

Nov 29 - Advent 1 morning worship 10.45am St. Marc's, Grenoble

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7; Matthew 2:1-8

Intro me – you've already heard some. Science, academic (pain), then Pfizer (pharma), church plant, ALM, ordained late, ret 4yr ago.

Series – the (un)expected Christmas.
Today the (un)expected promise

The promise – someone who will reign with justice, righteousness, great, Counsellor – someone to right wrongs, to whom we turn for counsel, advice, help...

That's what the Israelites expected. Not just from this passage in Isaiah, but so many others.

They expected someone who – at the time Jesus was born – would set up a new kingdom, God's kingdom, where his chosen people could live in peace and harmony, without the travesty of Roman occupation and control. They were expecting a new King Judge Leader Priest, all rolled into one – and they expected this to be in the material, physical realm – so they were also expecting political & military power to be in evidence: Qumran scrolls on Isaiah 10 “the coming Messiah, called the ‘Branch of David,’ will destroy Israel's enemies, the Romans” – someone whose arrival signals the end of the world.

That's who they were expecting. That's who the Magi expected to find – a political king, from their reading of the Hebrew texts and the sky. That's why they went to Jerusalem, to Herod.

And what did they find? Nothing like that at all. A baby born in poverty, of an ordinary woman with a questionable story of the baby's conception.

The (un)-expected promise.

not freedom from Rome's power

but freedom from the power of sin to destroy us

freedom to find God in our lives, freedom to be part of God's kingdom project

not destruction of enemies

but enemies loved and prayed for

not rebuilding the physical temple

but a new kind of temple being built, the Church of God, where he dwells when we come together – 1 Cor 3:16,17, 1

Peter 2:

“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives among you? you together are that temple.”

not struggling to keep to an impossible written law

but people with a new heart, with the desire to follow Jesus the Messiah written on our hearts, a new kind of people with a heart for God, our world, our community

This Jesus, **this** Messiah, brings the beginning of a kingdom whose ideals are quite different. Service to others, humility, love, the beatitudes,

And for us?

What do we expect from Jesus, our wonderful counsellor?

Are our expectations awry, just as the expectations of the Israelites were awry?

Have we been taken in by easy answers and find ourselves dissatisfied with our lives in Christ?

perhaps we expect to be free from struggling with sin, empowered to live blameless lives.

but that's not our experience, is it? We have to fight, constantly, and if you're anything like me, you lose/give in/struggle.

Or we're taken in by prosperity gospel, or the idea that Jesus is returning, so we don't need to worry about justice for the poor...

perhaps we expect to be healthy

perhaps we expect our prayers always to be answered

perhaps we expect to live trouble-free lives

This is not the promise.

The promise is someone who comes among us and lives with us in our messy, broken, disunited, diseased world. Someone who – because he's experienced the hurt, pain, brokenness of the world himself – can be totally trusted with our difficulties. And someone who looks at the world with a broken heart, who says “join me in my kingdom-project to bring hope, life, beauty to a world that is desperately in need.”

The amazing thing about this promised Jesus, though, is that he gives us **hope**. The hope of a life lived with him, both now and in eternity. The hope that he will use us and mould us, all that we are into something more closely showing the true image of God that is

in us (we are made in his image). Book by Tom Wright – “Surprised by hope.” I’m re-reading it. It’s wonderful.

He gives us hope for now. He works in us to bring his peace and love to the world.

What he asks for is honesty. What he asks for is for people not to pretend that everything’s fine but people who will walk in his company and talk with him about the issues surrounding us – disunity, anger, hurt, pain, illness, prayers not answered how we expected or wanted....

The unexpected promise is the promise of hope. As we progress through advent, let’s go on a journey of discovery together, finding this unexpected promised Messiah working in our lives day by day.

May I challenge each one of us – me too? Try to find time each day this week to spend just a few minutes in silence, waiting on this Jesus to open our eyes, ears, hearts, to a name or situation. Do something as a result. Call them. Ask how they are. Listen hard. Offer to pray for them. If it seems right, pray over the phone with them. A simple prayer: “Lord Jesus, you know this person’s needs. Please bring your solution to this situation. Amen”

Questions? Feel free. Email me.
Prayer.